



Article

# Trust and Loyalty in Building the Brand Relationship with the Customer: Empirical Analysis in a Retail Chain in Northern Brazil

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to analyze the relationship between a brand's trust in consumer decisions and its maintenance over time in a retail chain in northern Brazil known as Bemol. The sample consists of 210 respondents, customers of Bemol, and the methodology used is a model of structural equations. The developed model consists of 22 variables, divided into three constructs: trust, loyalty and brand. The results show the importance of trust in the consumption decision, as well as loyalty, relationship and satisfaction. Trust and loyalty lead to brand relationship, which is why managers must pay special attention to the factors to be provided to their customers so that this triad can be verified. Commercial brands marketed to the public should consider inducing strong feelings towards the brand as an important step in promoting customer satisfaction and loyalty. A brand for which that the consumer develops strong feelings will facilitate and potentiate positive behaviors in the long term. However, some behavioral characteristics, attendance and leadership, are of lesser importance to the consumer. This research presents a limitation as to its application, as the respondents were only customers of one brand, Bemol.

**Keywords:** trust; loyalty; brand; fidelity; customer



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## 1. Introduction

Currently, companies are valuing the maintenance of their customers in the medium and long term, subordinating other policies such as attracting new customers and the greater variety of products offered [1]. For this situation, there will have to be a readaptation of the company's policies, such as the management and concentration of resources in the interaction with customers, before, during and after the sale to obtain their loyalty [2]. The relationship between the customer and the company is therefore crucial for loyalty [3,4]. At the same time, the relevance of the relationship/loyalty of the consumer with the brands is verified, evidenced in several empirical studies, which elaborate constructs that confirm this relationship [5–17].

The 21st century has implied changes both in capitalism with the opening of markets and in the way people work and relate to each other through new technologies. In this sense,

the internet has changed the way consumers interact with companies, hence the purchase becomes more open and transparent for the consumer [18]. Faced with this evolution, brands had to adapt to market changes, changing the perceived value of a product. For long-term customer retention, companies must earn customer loyalty [19], by creating a constant innovative relationship with the brand in order to develop their intangible capital.

In recent years, issues of trust and loyalty have gained the attention of many academics and marketers [7,20–23]. Brands as intangible capital leverage the organization's competitiveness and offer the reduction of marketing costs and facilitate the return on investment [20,24,25]. The brand's relationship with the customer based on trust and loyalty is always based on the culture of recurrence [26] with innovative and creative principles in order to stimulate personal or group involvement. Deep, lasting relationships are built through developing the perceived value of the offering and intelligent, innovative business and marketing operations that catalyze differentiation from the competition [27,28]. Several studies highlight the importance of concepts such as trust, perceived value and loyalty for the continuity of a long-term relationship between the customer and the company [14,29,30]. Relationship success leads to loyalty, which is based on trust and commitment [19]. Thus, customer retention depends on the company's ability to fulfill its promises (a factor related to trust), which emerges from the moment one of the parties believes in the other [31].

Innovation is essential to develop strong brands [32], being simultaneously associated with improving product quality, promoting brand image and increasing customer loyalty [33,34] suggested that product development and innovation are critical assets for organizational success. Ref. [35] argue that global brand innovation leads customers to develop more powerful motives for consumption and drives purchasing attitudes and behaviors. From a conceptual point of view, brand innovation implies the addition of concepts in continuity or association in order to boost its identity, personality and cultural base [36], so that the brand can be increasingly resident in the consumer mind.

The identity characteristics of the brand stored in the consumer's memory are shaped into attitudes that may well be converted into pre-dispositions that guide purchase behavior. Therefore, it is a strategic domain to control these identity characteristics and all personality traits in order to increase the intangible value of the brand, products and organization. One of the most promising methodologies for developing brand identity and personality is the open innovation approach to competitive brand development [37]

In other words, this perspective works as a co-creation tool through the participation of various stakeholders and consumers capable of injecting new concepts and new identity values into the brands. This new trend was a way to offer new brand experiences by continuity or association, and is above all the presentation of a new relationship with the brand based on open innovation. We believe that broad, cooperative development from the consumer's point of view makes it possible to rationalize the perception of brand value and expand satisfaction, trust and loyalty with the brand.

The aim of this study is to analyze the relationships between trust, perceived value and loyalty. The methodology used is a quantitative study with descriptive design, through a questionnaire with a sample of 210 customers from the retail chain, Bemol during the year 2020. To achieve this objective, a structural equation model is built (Partial Least Square), with twenty-two measurable variables that are broken down by the three latent variables. There are several factors that explain the relevance of this investigation. First, despite the widespread importance of trust in the relationship between consumers and the company, few studies have analyzed the behaviors and practices of companies in building consumer trust. Most empirical studies analyze the consequences of trust for loyalty and cooperation [38]. Second, there are few studies in the Brazilian market, hence filling an existing gap and the chain of commercial establishments used in the sample has never been the subject of a similar study. Third, it is relevant for companies because it allows them to identify which characteristics, they must provide to their customers so that there is loyalty and trust in the brand and thus guarantee customer loyalty in the long term. Fourth, the results obtained are an added value for both consumers and companies. Consumers now

have better conditions for offers at the time of purchase and companies have customers with greater brand loyalty, guaranteeing the company's medium and long-term financial stability.

The paper is organized as follows. In this section, the theme, objectives and relevance of the investigation are introduced and in the following section, two, a literature review is carried out, with particular emphasis on studies with a sample of the Portuguese population. Section three presents the methodology. Section four characterizes the sample used and the empirical results are presented and analyzed. Final conclusions are presented in section five.

## 2. Literature Review

Currently, it appears from the literature review that there is still no consensus on the definition of trust [39], however there are two aspects: (1) trust as a expectation regarding the behavior of a partner with whom one interacts [38] and (2) trust as a psychological state that involves acceptance and exposure to vulnerability [40].

Empirical works argue that the formation of the trust construct must be multidimensional and that several factors act as its determinants and affect perceptions of reliability. Online trust factors are experience and proficiency in using technology, perceived ease of use, information quality, graphic features, social presence, personalization, security and privacy, third-party assurance, reputation, organization size, and offline presence [41]. There are five categories on which the determinants of consumer trust are based: personality, knowledge, institution, cognition and calculation [42].

Currently, the competitive advantages of organizations are maintained by leadership in innovation, which must be fully understood by consumers. Trust and loyalty are clear signs that competitive advantages are understood and appreciated. One of the most promising approaches capable of stimulating thinking around competitive advantages is open innovation. All development in this approach has to be *sui generis* both in thought and in action, with no place for any similarity with the competitive advantages of competition [43], being also the way to maintain consumer confidence in the organization. Therefore, transparency, openness and information sharing about the open innovation process must include stakeholders and consumers [44] as the main stakeholders in the development and success of the company [45]. In fact, the open innovation approach requires mutual respect between the parties, where flexibility and freedom of the parties is possible although there is a collective commitment in the tasks of process innovation (related to the product) or experience (related to the brand).

One of the most important components in relationship marketing is customer trust. It is a reality that is so difficult to achieve, and is lost in a few seconds. We all know that brand benefits and attributes explain customer trust and loyalty [46]. Brand trust helps reduce customer uncertainty and vulnerability [20]. On the other hand, customers who do not trust the brand are neither loyal nor loyal to an organization's commercial proposals [47]. That is, loyalty and loyalty is expressed in recurring purchases, quantities purchased and willingness to pay the price [20]. In the consumer's daily life, brands are present and consumers establish a psychic and behavioral relationship with these units of meaning, from which consumers progressively build trust and loyalty with brands and organizations [48,49].

From the 1990s onwards, loyalty became another strategic factor for companies, mainly to ensure a loyal [50]. The increased interest in consumer loyalty is due to the widespread recognition that consumer satisfaction does not guarantee that they will do business with the company again [51]. For customer retention, two factors are necessary: (1) obtaining a greater number of customers and (2) the profits provided by each customer increase when they remain loyal to the company, as old customers tend to buy more than new customers [52].

Several authors, such as [53,54] find that trust is positively related to consumer loyalty. For [55] brand loyalty is one of the main factors that explains the relationship between the consumer and the brand.

The emphasis on brands has increased significantly since the early nineties, they are now considered an asset and hence their greater importance in the company [56]. The factors indicated in the literature on brand equity for consumers are: (1) they guarantee the quality and origin of the product, (2) they facilitate the interpretation and processing of information by the consumer, (3) they generate confidence in the purchase decision, (4) reduce risk in the choice process, (5) function as symbolic devices, and (6) enable satisfaction, among others [57].

Ref. [58] proposes a conceptual model that relates perceived price, perceived quality and perceived value. The value perceived by customers depends on the usefulness of the service, which is based on the perception of what is received and given in the transaction and the characteristics of the product. Ref. [59] propose an extension of Aaker's conceptual model, since for them the marketing carried out by the company has an effect on the brand's value. Ref. [58] analyzed the concepts of price, quality and value from the customer's perspective and concluded that customers act based on the expectation of value, preferring the company that, in their perception, offers the highest value. Perceived value is thus a positive function of what is received and a negative function of what is sacrificed. In this perspective [60] defends the paradigm shift, companies go from privileging a satisfied consumer to a loyal consumer, as companies find that the financial benefits of these latter consumers are greater. Ref. [61] found that consumer loyalty contributed to the sustainable development of a competitive advantage for companies. Hence, currently, there are several brands that implement loyalty programs in order to retain consumers, encouraging them above all to buy. The success of this policy depends on the rewards that companies grant to consumers [62].

Ref. [63] argue that loyalty is expressed by the number of consumers who rationally purchase a brand repeatedly because they recognize its superior qualities. [64] claims that loyalty can be defined as the consumer's intention or predisposition to buy something from the same company, resulting from the conviction that the value received from that source is greater than the value available in other alternatives. Loyalty is also a feeling of attachment or affection for a company's people, products, or services [65,66].

Ref. [67] argue that the brand capable of providing a unique and distinct experience builds brand loyalty and even generates evangelization, that is, the consumer spreads the word to others and is a way to attract new consumers [68].

The results of the study developed by [7] reveal that brand heritage has a significant positive direct effect on purchase intentions of turkish airline services. This relationship between brand heritage and corporate identity reinforces consumers' attitudes and emotions toward brands (stability, reliability, brand image) that contribute to the development and maintenance of brand trust.

In line with these results, Ref. [17] report that the social-media-marketing activities (Facebook) affect brand loyalty, brand trust, and revisit intention for coffee shops in Northern Cyprus

Ref. [23] conclude that satisfaction increased brand loyalty, and customers satisfied with Robot Barista Coffe shop are more likely to revisit, recommend, and use word-of-mouth. Brand love also improved brand loyalty. Customers who intended to keep a long-term relationship with the store were more likely to return, recommend, and employ word-of-mouth.

The results of the study by [15] concluded that trust and attitude towards Islamic banks act as mediators between religious obligation and customer satisfaction in relation to customer loyalty. Thus, satisfaction contributes to trust and loyalty with the bank, with religious obligation being a determinant of loyalty.

According [13] the mixed reality characteristics promoted by "Cultural Heritage Attractions" in Seoul, Korea, influence the affective aspects of visitor experiences, con-

tribute to satisfaction, as well as positively affect brand recognition, brand associations and brand loyalty.

A study on the factors that influence the purchase of mobile phones by young adults in Pakistan [69], identified that the price, attractiveness and technological innovation of the equipment are determinants in the purchase decision process. However, the authors recognize that after-sales service (warranty, technical assistance, repair, exchange) has a lesser influence on young adults. Young people easily switch service providers looking for better benefits among competitors.

According the study developed by [70] about the customer engagement and brand experience in the banking sector highlights its importance in building a dynamic relationship between the bank and its customers in order to create a sustained base of loyal customers over time.

In turn, Ref. [69] argue that ethical marketing practices of retail organizations in Pakistan, which affect the loyalty in interactions between companies and consumers, influence the value-adding product sustainability, as well customer-value brand relationship sustainability, thereby potentially achieving sustainable brand loyalty.

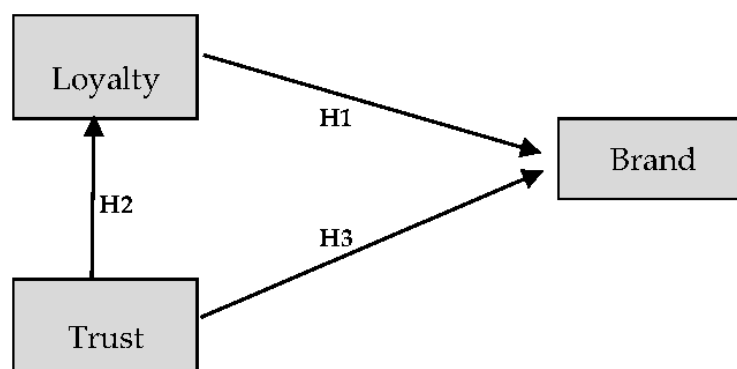
Trust is an essential requirement for forming a relationship with the brand [71]. Trust is related to the consumer's predisposition to feel safe with the purchase of the brand's products and in the information that the store transmits to him, in order to correspond to his expectations.

Several studies have proven that trust has a direct and positive relationship with consumer loyalty, as it leads to an increase in the value of purchases and an increase in repurchase intentions. Likewise, the study developed by [14] demonstrated that purchasing brand trust is important in consumer decisions and has a favorable impact on customer loyalty.

Thus, studies empirically confirm that trust positively influences customer commitment to the relationship and consumer loyalty. Trust creates benefits for consumers, such as efficiency in the relationship, as it reduces transaction costs, which in turn foster relationship commitment and loyalty [14,19].

The previous empirical study disclosed that brand trust had a positive impact on brand preference. Other scholars stated that brand trust was an essential predictor of brand loyalty [72]. It also proclaimed in the branding literature that when clients increased trust in the particular brand, repurchasing was possible to happen, pointing to brand preference [10,73]. Some recent empirical researches revealed that brand trust had a positive impact on brand loyalty [7,10,12–14,17,73,74].

The literature review shows that there is a causality between the trinomial perceived brand value, loyalty and trust. Figure 1 presents the relationships defined for the three variables under analysis.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual model.

The following hypotheses were developed based on the findings of prior studies.



**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Brand loyalty influences consumer loyalty.*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Brand trust influences customer loyalty to the brand.*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Brand trust influences brand loyalty.*

### 3. Methodology

The literature review highlights the evolution of the concepts of trust, loyalty and brand and the characteristics and approaches that establish the customer as a central actor. It appears that there is a causality between the trinomial brand/loyalty/trust.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the relationship between brand trust and loyalty in consumer decisions in view of the perceived value of the brand.

The methodology used is divided into several stages: (1) review of the literature on the factors that are relevant to the long-term maintenance of the consumer, (2) elaboration of the questionnaire, definition of the sample, sending and receiving of the questionnaire and (3) statistical treatment and analysis of results based on the structural equation model to obtain the final conclusions.

In the analysis of the research hypotheses, a model of structural equations is defined, consisting of two models, based on the literature review. The structural model consists of three latent variables, as shown in Figure 1, which make up the three analyzed constructs: brand (BRAND), trust (TRUST) and loyalty (LOYAL). The TRUST construct is related to the customer's relationship with the brand and includes honesty, comfort, quality and tradition. The attributes of the LOYAL construct are service, environment, sales, comparison with other commercial establishments and transversal aspects such as quality. The BRAND construct includes attributes related to the customer, emotion, loyalty, referrals, integrity, satisfaction and purchase options. The measurement model consists of 22 observable variables, divided into the three constructs intended for measurement (Table 1). The scales used were validated in previous empirical studies. The scales used are validated in previous empirical studies. Brand loyalty by [75,76], brand trust by [53] and loyalty/satisfaction on the brand by [67,77].

**Table 1.** Observable and latent variables.

Construct	Observable Variable	Code
Loyalty (LOYAL)	Bemol is different from other stores because it offers a wide variety of products at a fair price and in a great physical environment.	Loyal_Stor
	I associate Bemol with quality and tradition.	Loyal_Quali
	Bemol employees are happy to provide good service.	Loyal_Service
	The atmosphere of the Bemol stores and the display of products are pleasing and provide comfort.	Loyal_Comf
	I always have the support of a seller to help with my choices.	Loyal_Seller
	Bemol is always one of my first purchase options.	Loyal_Option1
	I feel that I am treated better at Bemol compared to other stores.	Loyal_Treat
Trust (TRUST)	I am proud to be a customer of Bemol.	Trust_Proud
	I can trust Bemol.	Trust_Trust
	I feel secure in buying at Bemol because they act with honesty towards customers.	Trust_Hon
	I am confident that the products offered by Bemol are good quality.	Trust_Quali
	If there is a problem with the purchase, Bemol is concerned with solving and/or compensating.	Trust_Solv
	The tradition of the Bemol brand conveys security to the customer.	Trust_Trad

Table 1. Cont.

Construct	Observable Variable	Code
Brand (BRAND)	I like the interactions that Bemol carries out with customers, through the Bemol card, sending SMS, the service portal, the APP, social networks, etc.	Brand_Interact
	Bemol stores have a pleasant environment (WiFi in stores, air conditioning, parking, etc.) for better customer service.	Brand_Envirnrm
	The Bemol brand provides positive emotions.	Brand_Emot
	Bemol makes every effort to guarantee my satisfaction.	Brand_Satisf
	The contacts that Bemol makes with customers (in the store or other service channels) are based on sincerity and integrity.	Brand_Integ
	I recommend Bemol to family and friends.	Brand_Recom
	I'm loyal to Bemol.	Brand_Loyal
	Bemol is my first purchase option	Brand_Option1
	I intend to continue to be a customer of Bemol.	Brand_Custm

**Source:** Own elaboration. **Note:** The table shows the variables of the model under analysis, composed of two modules: structure and measurement. The structural module is made up of three constructs or latent variables, and the measurement module is made up of 22 observable or measurement variables, distributed among the constructs and intended for their measurement. The three constructs are LOYAL—Loyalty, TRUST—Trust, and BRAND—Brand, consisting, respectively, of seven, six, and nine observed variables.

A self-administered survey was distributed to collect and examine the conceptual research model. A convenience sample method was employed to collect data from Bemol store customers. Multi-items were measured with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to estimate the study variables. All measures were adapted from literature and modified to suit the study context.

The survey was built on “google forms” and after carrying out a pre-test [78] with 17 customers, it was made available online between January 2021 and March 2021. The final survey was sent to 2900 customers of the retail network, of which 210 returned, being validated for the composition of the database to be used by the SmartPLS® 3.0 tool.

In assessing the psychometric properties of the scales, [79] was followed to ensure that the variables are reliable, valid and unidimensional. When analyzing the quality of the model, the measurement model is first evaluated, and after the adjustments, the structural model is evaluated [80,81]. In the measurement model, the following indicators are analyzed: convergent validity, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), composite reliability (Dillon's p-rho) and discriminant validity (cross-load analysis and [82] criterion. indicators are analyzed: Person's determination coefficient (R<sup>2</sup>), correlation and regression significance test (resampling technique), predictive validity (Q<sup>2</sup>), Cohen's indicator (f<sup>2</sup>). Finally, the path coefficients are interpreted. The level of statistical significance used is 5%.

#### 4. Empirical Results

Prior to the analysis of the explanatory power of the proposed model for writing the final conclusions, the sample under analysis was characterized. The sample consisted of 210 respondents who were customers/consumers of Bemol stores, of which 72.9% were female. This value is not surprising, as this type of commercial establishment is mostly used by this target audience, who are responsible for the purchases of their household. The vast majority of respondents (84.3%) were between 16 and 45 years old, and 65.2% were married. In terms of schooling, 28.1% completed higher education, and 35.7% completed secondary education.

Table 2 presents the indicators to evaluate the quality of the measurement model, with the exception of the factor loadings of each observable variable in relation to each of the three latent variables, which are shown in Table 3. Table 3 also presents the evaluate results of the statistical significance of each observed variable, with 500 resamplings.

**Table 2.** Measurement model indicators.

Measurement Model Indicators						
	Discriminating Validity Correlation Coefficients			Convergent Validity	Internal Consistency	Composite Reliability
	TRUST	LOYAL	BRAND	AVE	Alpha	Dillon
TRUST	0.814			0.663	0.898	0.904
LOYAL	0.724	0.849		0.561	0.868	0.875
BRAND	0.798	0.749	0.887	0.619	0.923	0.927

**Source:** Survey data, generated by SmartPLS® 3.0. **Note:** The table presents some of the indicators used to assess the quality of the measurement model, consisting of three constructs: TRUST—Trust, LOYAL—Loyalty, and BRAND—Brand, with 6, 7, and 9 observed variables, respectively. The indicators to assess the quality of the measurement model are (1) in the discriminant validity, the correlation coefficient between the constructs, (2) in the convergent validity, the Average Variances Extracted (AVEs), (3) in the internal consistency, the Cronbach's Alpha and (4) in the composite reliability, the Dillon indicator.

The average variances extracted (AVE) present values greater than 0.50 [82], verifying the convergent validity of each construct and the model converges to a satisfactory result. All Cronbach's alpha and Dillon's p-rho values exceed the threshold values of, respectively, 0.6–0.7 and 7–0.9 according to [83]. Discriminant validity analyzes whether the constructs are independent [83], through the analysis of two indicators, correlations between the constructs and analysis of cross loads. From Table 3, it can be seen that the factor loadings of each variable are always higher in the construct to which it belongs than in the others, hence, according to [84], the model has discriminant validity. The same conclusion can be drawn when analyzing the procedure suggested by [82] (Table 2), the correlations between the latent variables are always lower than the values of the diagonals (variance of the AVE). The measurement model in question thus has discriminant validity.

The indicators to assess the quality of the structural model are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

The adjusted coefficient of determination (R2) indicates the proportion that the variances of the endogenous variables are explained by the structural model. For [80] the values of R2 indicate a substantial explanation of the variable LOYAL and BRAND and a moderate one for the variable TRUST. In all cases, the null hypothesis is rejected so that the correlations and regressions are equal to zero. To finalize the quality of the adjustment of the structural model, the model's prediction quality and the size of the effect or utility of each construct are analyzed, through the Stone-Geiser (Q2) and Cohen (F2) indicators, respectively. Both indicators reveal that the model has an explanatory capacity or adherence to reality, as well as the proposed constructs are relevant to the model.

From the analysis performed, it can be concluded that the proposed model fits the reality and presents predictive capacity. It should be noted that the values of the reliability and internal consistency test are high for the three constructs as they are close to unity, the sample under analysis is free of bias. According to [82] in the discriminant validity it was not necessary to eliminate any observed variable, so the proposed variables adequately measure the analyzed constructs.

All the latent variables proposed are explanatory for the understanding of trust in the brand, as they present factor loadings above 0.5 (Table 3).

In the structural effect (Table 4) it is confirmed that trust plays a role in forming loyalty (0.824) due to the ability to create value for the customer [85,86]. There is also a high effect of trust on brand loyalty (0.619). The smallest effect is obtained on loyalty and brand (0.339).



**Table 3.** Discriminant validity and factor loads of the observed variables.

Variable	Model Indicators						
	Measurement Model			Structural Model			
	Discriminating Validity			Resampling			
	Trust	Loyal	Brand	Factor Loadings	Standard Deviation	Sample T	<i>p</i> -Value
Trust_Trust	0.867	0.717	0.796	0.867	0.025	34.355	0.000
Trust_Hon	0.851	0.700	0.748	0.851	0.029	29.515	0.000
Trust_Proud	0.820	0.742	0.785	0.820	0.026	31.199	0.000
Trust_Quali	0.716	0.548	0.529	0.716	0.056	12.866	0.000
Trust_Solv	0.797	0.646	0.749	0.797	0.036	21.942	0.000
Trust_Trad	0.824	0.649	0.740	0.824	0.036	22.869	0.000
Loyal_Stor	0.647	0.812	0.667	0.812	0.028	29.257	0.000
Loyal_Service	0.665	0.818	0.642	0.818	0.031	26.656	0.000
Loyal_Treat	0.702	0.825	0.757	0.825	0.023	35.106	0.000
Loyal_Comf	0.551	0.652	0.575	0.652	0.058	11.209	0.000
Loyal_Option1	0.583	0.725	0.684	0.725	0.039	18.633	0.000
Loyal_Quali	0.657	0.680	0.592	0.680	0.057	11.830	0.000
Loyal_Seller	0.471	0.713	0.483	0.713	0.046	15.545	0.000
Brand_Interact	0.493	0.477	0.661	0.661	0.047	13.931	0.000
Brand_Custm	0.694	0.649	0.807	0.807	0.032	25.591	0.000
Brand_Emot	0.749	0.706	0.802	0.802	0.036	22.284	0.000
Brand_Envirnm	0.662	0.580	0.757	0.757	0.051	14.955	0.000
Brand_Loyal	0.702	0.736	0.826	0.826	0.020	40.640	0.000
Brand_Recom	0.783	0.694	0.839	0.839	0.024	34.350	0.000
Brand_Integ	0.758	0.649	0.790	0.790	0.038	20.573	0.000
Brand_Option1	0.684	0.739	0.784	0.784	0.037	21.368	0.000
Brand_Satisf	0.778	0.731	0.799	0.799	0.042	18.914	0.000

**Source:** Survey data, generated by SmartPLS® 3.0. **Note:** The table presents some of the indicators to assess the quality of the model under analysis, consisting of the measurement and structural model. The measurement model analyzed is made up of three constructs: TRUST—Trust, LOYAL—Loyalty, and BRAND—Brand, which consist of 6, 7, and 9 observed variables, respectively. Discriminant validity is one of the quality indicators of the measurement model; it aims to assess whether an observed variable of a construct is independent of another construct. In the evaluation of the quality of the structural model, the values resulting from the 500 resamplings for the factor loadings, standard deviation, t-statistic and the *p*-value associated with each observed variable are presented. The *p*-value corresponds to the statistical test of the null hypothesis; the observed variable is equal to zero.

**Table 4.** Structural model indicators.

Variable	Structural Model Indicators				
	R <sup>2</sup> Pearson	Q <sup>2</sup> Stone-Geisser	F <sup>2</sup> Cohen	Relationship	Effect
TRUST	0.231	0.102	0.124	Loyal → Brand	0.339
LOYAL	0.679	0.312	0.367	Trust → Brand	0.619
BRAND	0.843	0.379	0.398	Trust → Loyal	0.824

**Source:** Survey data, generated by SmartPLS® 3.0. **Note:** The table presents indicators to assess the quality of the structural model. The analyzed model is made up of three constructs: TRUST—Trust, LOYAL—Loyalty, and BRAND—Brand, and each of these consists of 6, 7, and 9 observed variables, respectively. The indicators presented for each of the three constructs are the adjusted or Pearson's coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>), the Stone-Geisser indicator (Q<sup>2</sup>) and the Cohen indicator (F<sup>2</sup>). From the resampling, the effects on the interrelationships between the constructs were estimated.

In the trust construct, the variables that have the highest factor loading, that is, that are the most relevant competencies that consumers associate with brand trust, are the consumer can trust the brand (Trust\_Trust) and the consumer feels secure in buying from the brand as they act honestly (Trust\_Hon), with 0.867 and 0.851, respectively. Conversely, for consumers, the quality of the products offered (Trust\_Quali) is less relevant in terms of trust in the brand, with a lower factor loading of 0.716 in this construct.

For consumers, there are some essential requirements for brand loyalty, such as feeling that store employees want to provide good service (Loyal\_Service) and are being treated better in that commercial establishment compared to others (Loyal\_Treat), and that a diversity of products is offered at a fair price and in a good physical environment (Loyal\_Stor), with factor loadings of 0.818, 0.825, and 0.812 respectively. The store environment and product display (Loyal\_Comf) is the least important requirement for consumer loyalty.

In terms of customer loyalty to the brand, the most relevant aspect is recommending the brand to family and friends (Brand\_Recom) and being faithful to the brand (Brand\_Loyal), with factor loadings of 0.839 and 0.826, respectively. Conversely, the least relevant aspect is the interaction that the brand has with customers (Brand\_Interact).

Of the three hypotheses initially formulated, two were confirmed and one was rejected. In fact, Hypotheses 2 (Brand trust influences customer loyalty to the brand) and 3 (Brand trust influences brand loyalty) were confirmed, while Hypothesis 1 (Brand loyalty influences consumer brand loyalty) was not confirmed.

The confirmation of hypothesis 2 and 3 are consistent with previous studies identified in the literature [7,17,21,22,75,76,87] while the non-confirmation of hypothesis 1 contradicts the evidence identified in the literature [14,53,67,69,74,77].

In the literature, it can be seen that brand loyalty contributes to the relationship of trust with it [7,14,17,23,55,74,85,86,88]. According to [88], the trust construct plays a role in forming loyalty, with value being a mediating variable in the trust-loyalty relationship. So, trust contributes to the formation of loyalty through its ability to create value for the customer, and, consequently, loyalty.

The calculated effects of the structural module point to the relationship between Trust–Loyalty–Brand, and it is possible to infer a strong correlation between these latent variables, but above all confirm the evidence in the literature regarding the aspects of causality between these dimensions [88].

According to the study, Brand trust is critical in fostering consumer loyalty. The key conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of the research is that consumer trust in a store brand, have a direct impact on consumer loyalty. All efforts to improve perceived product quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction yield concrete dividends by boosting consumer loyalty or raising the likelihood of such an increase. Consumer behavior can be efficiently diagnosed, predicted, and even shaped using the existing body of information and study findings.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Findings and Practical Implications

One of the main factors to be taken into account by the consumer at the time of purchase is the brand, facilitating decision making [85]. For [89] the brand influences the perceived quality, fair price and consumer loyalty, thus changing the perceived value of a product. At the same time, for the financial stability and/or growth of a company, it is increasingly important to maintain its customers in the long term, and companies need to understand which factors are crucial to customers in the purchase process [90,91].

According to [88] trust is the crucial factor for consumer loyalty. Brand loyalty is one of the main factors that helps to understand the relationship that is established between the consumer and the brand [55]. Empirical studies on this topic show that there is a causality between the trinomial perceived brand value, loyalty and trust.

The objective of the present study was to analyze the construction of trust from the brand experience and to determine its influence on the loyalty process. In pursuit of this objective, a sample of 210 customers of the Bemol chain of stores was used.

The literature review allowed the selection of three constructs—trust, loyalty and brand—as well as the 22 variables observed, distributed by the three constructs, for which a model of structural equations was elaborated. The methodology used was the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software.

In assessing the quality of adjustment, several statistical indicators were analyzed. In the measurement model, convergent validity, discriminant validity, internal consistency and composite reliability were analyzed. In the structural model, Pearson's coefficient of determination, bootstrapping, relevance or predictive validity, effect size and significance tests of the model's correlations and regressions were analyzed.

The results obtained in this investigation, based on the sample used, allow us to state several conclusions:

The analyzed statistical indicators make it possible to assess the quality and adherence to the reality of the proposed model.

The main skills that consumers attach importance to in creating brand loyalty are: feeling that store employees are satisfied in providing good service (Loyal\_Service), being treated better in that commercial establishment compared to others (Loyal\_Treat) and the diversity of products offered at a fair price and in a good physical environment (Loyal\_Stor). The requirements for consumer trust are: believe/trust in the brand (Trust\_Trust) and feel secure in buying from the brand because the company acts honestly (Trust\_Hon). If the customer is loyal to the brand, they will recommend it to family and friends (Brand\_Recom).

The environment of the commercial establishment and the exposure of the products (Loyal\_Comf) is the factor that consumers give less importance to in creating brand loyalty. The least important factors for consumer trust and customer loyalty to the brand are the quality of the products offered (Trust\_Quali) and the interaction that the brand carries out with customers (Brand\_Interact).

The conclusions obtained in this investigation are relevant. First, this is because there are few studies in the Brazilian market; hence it fills an existing gap. The chain of commercial establishments used in the sample has never been the subject of a similar study. Second, it allows identifying the characteristics that companies must provide to their customers so that there is loyalty and trust in the brand, thus guaranteeing customer loyalty in the long term. The results obtained are an added value for the two parties involved in the purchase process: consumers and the company. Consumers now have better offers when buying, and companies have customers with greater brand loyalty, thus ensuring their financial stability in the medium and long term.

In short, there are practical implications that emerge from this investigation. Trust and loyalty lead to brand loyalty, which is why managers must pay special attention to the factors to be provided to their customers so that this triad can be verified. Commercial brands available to the public should consider inducing strong feelings towards the brand as an important step in promoting customer satisfaction and loyalty. A brand for which that the consumer nurtures strong feelings will facilitate and potentiate positive behaviors in the long term.

As Bemol seeks to improve and expand its business through the maintenance and development of its customer base, the results of this study can help the company implement a strategy that reinforces the value of the brand, creating conditions to improve customer store experience that reinforce trust and brand loyalty.

Likewise, this study is relevant for other retailers to create more attractive stores and offer conditions for customers to have a positive experience in the store, in order to increase their trust and perception of value and, consequently, brand loyalty.

In addition to the practical implications, the present study also contributed to the existing literature, as it allows us to understand how trust and loyalty can reinforce consumer loyalty to the brand.

## 5.2. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the fact that this study contributes significantly to the literature and practice, it has some limitations. Consumer trust in a brand is vital in developing consumer loyalty, but it is not the only factor that influences consumer behavior. Situational, cultural and financial considerations, as well as many other aspects not included in this study, might influence purchase decisions. This study solely looks at how trust and loyalty affect brand loyalty. As a result, future studies should concentrate on other elements, such as brand image, brand attitude, satisfaction and recommendations.

Other factors should be analyzed, in addition to the trinomial analyzed (loyalty/trust/brand), namely the existence of negative feelings that the consumer has regarding a brand [92]. The option for the sample to include only customers of one brand, Bemol, is a limitation of the analysis and the results obtained may be influenced by the specific environment of this brand. On the other hand, the current study's sample size is quite small. By increasing the sample size, the research and findings can be improved. Finally, this study focuses solely on one shop (Bemol) so that this research can be applied to other retailers as well as online retailers.

The obtained results raise additional questions for future research. In the current evolution of society, the global market and the internet age, online shopping is growing rapidly, hence the need to analyze factors related to this shopping medium. The question arises whether the existence of certain international brands with online sales still exists for the physical store. Given the countless options available to any consumer through a click, one can question whether the long-term customer is loyal to a physical store or to the brand. The new reality raises questions that deserve future investigation, thus contributing to the strategies of companies.

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