MARKETING MIX AND BRANDING: COMPETITIVE HYPERMARKET STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Super-centers and hypermarkets are increasing in the retail markets. To determine customer-based brand equity (CBBE), a proportionate market share and a gender-balance hypermarket shopper sample was collected. Using t-Tests for gender to the marketing mix and CBBE, female shoppers consistently have higher mean scores. However, only distribution intensity, brand association and total brand equity were significantly higher than males. But men feel that their hypermarkets were higher priced than women were. Retail marketing mix elements and CBBE dimensions were further analyzed for similarities between genders. As well, each hypermarket results are presented. This study concludes with the marketing implications, study limitations and future research opportunities.

KEYWORDS: Customer-based brand equity, marketing mix, market share

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INTRODUCTION

Retailers, as well as consumer product manufacturers, have continued to be confronted with increasing competitive markets. As a result, these manufacturers are adding product categories, e.g., Procter & Gamble acquiring Gillette, and retailers expanding, e.g., Wal-Mart acquiring ASDA (in the United Kingdom). At the same time, other manufacturers are refocusing and narrowing product categories, e.g., Unilever reducing more than 1,600 brands to about 500, and retailers consolidating, e.g., K-Mart and Sears, Roebuck and Company merger. These are major strategy changes for some of the largest global companies and best-known products. Regardless of the approach, these companies and products will be successful if they stay true to being differentiators, low cost leaders or nichers (Porter, 1980) in serving markets.

Strategies that are successful identify and achieve an unserved or underserved position in the marketplace. Positioning or repositioning may occur with products or retail stores (Kerin, Hartley, Berkowitz and Rudelius, 2006). Branding, also, plays a major role in positioning. Position strength includes well developed value propositions, e.g., identifying a broad yet specific value proposition, and well developed brand, e.g., brand name, strong brand associations and promises, and managing customers' brand contacts (Kotler, 1999). Specific to marketing, strategies are based on segmenting, targeting and positioning (Kotler and Keller, 2006).

For decades, segmentation has been a marketing tool. Marketing activities require "precise utilization of both product differentiation and market segmentation as components of marketing strategy" (Smith, 1956, p. 7) in which the segment must be large enough to be profitable. Furthermore, markets may be segmented on the bases of geographic, demographic, psychographic and behavioral methods (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). Targeting is merely the selection of specific segment(s), e.g., gender or age, or males or females in a demographic segment. Consumer product manufacturers and retailers "must decide on a value proposition – on how it will create differentiated value for targeted segments and what position it wants to occupy in those segments" (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008, p. 203). Jack Trout reminds marketers of Walter Landor's statement that "(p)roducts are created in the factory, but brands are created in the

mind" (2005, p. 28). Brands, therefore, are created by having the appropriate marketing mix – product, price, place, promotions (McCarthy, 1960) – to support (connected with) the positioning strategy in the minds of the target market in comparison to competing brands (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008).

Since Smith's (1956) market segmentation and McCarthy's (1960) marketing mix concepts appeared, consumer markets have changed significantly for product manufacturers and retailers. Consumer trends and their expectations have included the (1) acceleration of socio-economic change, (2) increase of mass distribution, and (3) rise in their influence on retail change (McNair and May, 1978). For example, during this timeframe Wal-Mart has evolved from a small variety store in Rogers, Arkansas in 1962 to the world largest retailer with revenues of $344 billion, with 6,500 stores and 1.9 million employees in 15 international countries by 2007. Much of Wal-Mart's success is the strategy of "understanding of what consumers want from a retailer" (Wal-Mart, 2008), which is reflective by Wal-Mart's growth and success. Wal-Mart, as a general merchandise retailer, clearly offers convenience or one-stop shopping (mass distribution) and competitive pricing or everyday low prices (consumer influence), adapting to a changing consumer market.

Moreover, socio-economic factors influence consumers shopping and preference. For such changes and its impact on consumer marketing, Penn identifies microtrends as "an intense identity group, that is growing, which has needs and wants unmet by the current crop of companies, markets, policymakers, and others who would influence society's behavior" (2007, p. xx). Consumer drivers influencing these microtrends have been a result of: (1) Both spouses work and have their own careers, some even geographically apart from the other; (2) Husbands shop for food and clothing while wives purchase durable goods, automobiles and other major (high priced) products; (3) Single parenting has greatly increased; (4) Households have more non-married couples with shared living arrangements with the opposite or same gender; and (5) Men and women are waiting longer to marry, or not marrying at all. Furthermore, people have many interests that are more varied and activities in addition to work that lead to busy, hectic schedules that has created a dynamic consumer market. Socio-economic factors continue to influence who and where consumers shop and what consumers purchase.

The purpose of this research is to determine the marketing mix and branding relationship as perceived by each gender. The objective is to identify and analyze the comparative links between gender (male, female), the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotions) and retail brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association). This study is to determine: Are there significant differences between genders' perceptions of retail stores' marketing mix that contributes to greater brand equity? This article reviews the marketing mix and branding theoretical and empirical literature, data and methodology, and the study's findings, implications and conclusion.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Prior to the marketing mix model, marketing managers were confronted with many different marketing activities to manage independently and separately (Alderson, 1957). Actually Neil Border may have been the first (in the late 1940s) to advance the marketing mix concept in his teaching and business consulting. Not until the mid-1960s did Borden publish his model in which he identified the marketing mix elements and the market forces. First, the elements included product planning, pricing, branding, channels of distribution, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, displays, servicing, physical handling, and fact-finding and analysis. Second, the market forces were consumers' buying behavior, the trade behavior, competitors' position and behavior, and government behavior – controls over marketing (Borden, 1965). However, McCarthy (1960) gets the credit for the marketing mix model – product, price, place (channels of distribution), promotion – that remains widely used by practitioners and scholars today.

Brand equity is "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1991, p. 15). Five dimensions of brand equity are brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and other propriety brand assets (Aaker, 1991). The importance of brand equity is (1) for financial value for merger, acquisition or divestment and (2) to improve marketing strategy and productivity (Keller, 1993). Brand equity theory (Aaker, 1991) was further developed to include a consumer's perspective (Keller, 1993). Keller defines customer-based brand equity "as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (1993, p. 2). This brand knowledge includes brand awareness (brand recall and recognition) and brand image (types, favorability, strength and uniqueness of brand associations). Keller concludes, "consumer-based brand equity occurs when the customer is aware of the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory" (1993, p. 17). Furthermore, branding and brand management are applicable to retail brands, e.g., retail and store image, perceived retail brand association, as well as to retail brand equity measurement (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004).

Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995) in an early study of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) measurement identified five constructs. These include performance, social image, value, trustworthiness and attachment. Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000) consolidated these five, and used three measures to test CBBE. The researchers measured perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand awareness/association (as one construct) in a three product (athletic shoes, camera film and television sets) study. Yoo et al. (2000) did recognize the marketing mix elements (marketing efforts) as antecedents of brand equity, and operationalized the marketing mix as (1) price, (2) advertising spending, (3) price deals, (4) store image and (5) distribution intensity.

Pappu, Quester and Cooksey (2005) challenged, and tested the combining of brand awareness and brand association. First, Pappu et al. (2005) used two products (cars and television sets), and then for retailer CBBE (Pappu and Cooksey, 2006). Both studies successfully tested CBBE. This retailer CBBE study will use the four construct measures of: (1) brand loyalty, (2) brand awareness, (3) perceived quality and (4) brand association (Pappu et al., 2006). However, unlike Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000), neither (Pappu et al., 2005; Pappu et al., 2006) study tested the marketing mix and CBBE relationship. For this study, the customer is either a male or female retail shopper that has been exposed to the marketing mix and the influence, if any, contributing to customer-based brand equity.

Keller purposes that "customer-based brand equity involves consumers' reactions to an element of the marketing mix for the brand comparison with their reactions to the same marketing mix element attributed to a fictitiously named or unnamed version of the product or service" (1993, p. 2). Research has shown the relationship of gender and the marketing mix (price, advertising spending, price deals, store image and distribution intensity). Additional research has shown the influence of gender on brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association). The following are some select studies that indicate these relationships.

Marketing Mix

Price may be defined simple as the monetary cost of a product (good or service). However, other measures can be associated with price, e.g., premiums (Sethuraman and Cole, 1999), quality (Peterson, 1970), fee method (Munnukka, 2006), loyalty (McConnell, 1968), branding (Anselmsson, Johansson, and Persson, 2007). In a grocery products study, women were more willing to pay higher price premiums than men were (Sethuraman and Cole, 1999). However, such willingness to pay higher prices is based on perceived quality that is nonlinear in which prices have high and low thresholds (Peterson, 1970). In a recent study of pricing methods, males were willing to pay on a usage fee based method while females on a fixed fee based method (Munnukka, 2006). Furthermore, price serves as a cue of product quality and

the brand loyalty strength (McConnell, 1968). A recent study identified specific criteria based on price premiums that contribute to brand equity. The brand equity dimensions (with some findings) were loyalty (purchase frequency, first choice in category), awareness (first mentioned in category, knows brand, logo and name), perceived quality (taste, performance, durability), and association (health and environmental factors, organizational innovativeness and success, social image) (Anselmsson, Johansson, and Persson, 2007).

Advertising is "any paid form of nonpersonal communication about an organization, product, service or idea by an identified sponsor" (Belch and Belch, 2007, p. 17). Advertising spending contributes positively to brand equity (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, and Donthu, 1995) that provides important extrinsic cues for consumers (Milgrom and Roberts, 1986). Messages have been successful, not only in the level of spending, but also when targeting an audience's gender group in which the exposure links to the viewer's social identity (Maldonado, Tansuhaj, and Muehling, 2003). This gender group may, or may not be the traditional male-female classification but rather advertising effectiveness may be better targeted as nontraditional masculine-feminine grouping for greater congruence (Morrison and Shaffer, 2003). In addition, self-image congruity is a predictor of consumers' brand preference (Jamal and Goode, 2001). Congruency between the advertisements and the audience has self-identified masculinity and femininity results in positive attitudes toward the advertisements (Chang, 2006). Furthermore, when advertised brands were evaluated, masculinity individuals relied more on product function beliefs (Chang, 2006), which supports the Selectivity Model (Meyers-Levy, 1989).

Price deals are "coupons, cents-off, rebates, premiums, 'two-for-one', and other price incentives" (Mittal, 1994, p. 533). Over 35 years ago, females/housewives were more prone to use price deals (Montgomery, 1971). With an indication of the changing traditional gender shopping roles, men now have similar shopping responsibilities as women for purchasing a wide variety of products (Harmon and Hill, 2003). In a gender-price deal study, women were more likely than men to "usually/always" use coupons for department stores, fast food restaurants, food delivery, and dry cleaning purchases. However, males, rather than females, would more likely use coupons for groceries and electronics/computers (Harmon and Hill, 2003). However, price deals have a negative effect on brand equity, e.g., perceived quality (Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco, 2005), brand and store loyalty (Bawa and Shoemaker, 1987).

Store image is "the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes" (Martineau, 1958, p. 47). Functional qualities may include product assortment, price levels, store layout or retail format; psychological attributes would be the sense of belonging, feelings, excitement/atmosphere (Lindquist, 1974-1975), even the personality of the store (Martineau, 1958). Emotional (pleasantness/unpleasantness, arousal/non-arousal, dominance/submissiveness) and cognitive (quality and variety of merchandise, value of money, price spending) factors were studied for female shoppers (Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, and Nesdale, 1994). Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, and Nesdale found that female "shoppers' emotional states within the store predict actual purchase behavior – not just attitudes or intentions …. (and) …. emotional variables to store behavior is independent of cognitive variables" (1994, p. 291). Furthermore, compared to females, males rate service encounters higher (Snipes, Thomson, and Oswald, 2006). In a study of information cues, brand recognition and retail store image, Porter and Claycomb concluded that the "(u)ltimate success of a brand and a retailer is determined by how close the image of the selling organization and the product meet the expectations of the consumer" (1997, p. 385).

Distribution intensity is the breadth and depth of products offered (Kotler and Keller, 2006) with greater availability, convenience for consumers (Yoo et al., 2000). Size of assortment reduces the chance of consumers considering shopping at competing retailers. There is a direct, proportionate relationship between (increased) assortment composition and size and (increased) purchases (Koelemeijer and Oppewal, 1999). In a study of super-store shoppers, females were significantly different from males in 14

of the 22 store attributes (Williams, Absher, and Hoffman, 1997). Females rated the stores' attributes higher, "more appealing," than men for 20 of the 22 survey items did. The highest rankings by women were associated with product selections and convenience, e.g., having large, more product assortments.

The marketing mix of price, advertising spending, price deals, store image, and distribution intensity (Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000) provides measures to target a retail market segment (Smith, 1956), e.g., males, females, and to position brands in the consumers' mind as compared to competitors (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). Successful brands increase value to firms and its' customers – brand equity (Aaker, 1991) – in the consumer market (Pappu and Cooksey, 2006).

Brand Equity

Loyalty is "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). In a United Kingdom consumer product market study, product performance, customer satisfaction, price, and level of risk and involvement of the customer (Datta, 2003) influence brand loyalty. Males have been found to be more brand loyal when purchasing automobiles (Moutinho and Goode, 1995). This brand loyalty, however, may depend on product performance or the sales process. In a survey of German car manufacturer customers, males had stronger repurchase intentions based on product satisfaction (product performance). Female intentions, on the other hand, were based on personal interaction experience (service performance) (Homburg and Giering, 2001). Temporal factors may also influence brand loyalty. In a longitudinal study, men had a higher consistency over time with their satisfaction responses, an indicator of loyalty. But, women experienced higher dissatisfaction responses (Bendall-Lyon and Powers, 2002). Therefore, men may maintain consistent brand loyalty over a period, while women may in shorter time periods.

Brand awareness is the "customers' ability to recall and recognize the brand, as reflected by their ability to identify the brand under different conditions linking the brand – the brand name, logo, symbol, and so forth – to certain associations in memory" (Keller, 2003, p. 76). Recall is important to retailers when consumers are out of the retail store and relying on (internal) memory to generate information. Recognition is important to retailers when consumers are in the store with thousands of stock keeping units (SKUs) and other in-store information to remind shoppers (external memory) (Solomon, 2007). In terms of brand awareness, recognition and recall relies on information processing and retention. According to the Selectivity Model, males and females process information, e.g., brand messages, differently (Meyers-Levy, 1989). Males use selective information processing that is heuristic, schematic. On the other hand, females use more comprehensive processing that is effortful, detailed elaboration. Furthermore, Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran (1991) confirmed that females used greater detailed elaboration of information than males, but this difference disappeared when recognition versus recall tasks (condition, situation factors) and/or cue incongruity (information factors) stimulated both genders. The Selectivity Model continues to be supported in consumer research (Darley and Smith, 1995; Walsh and Mitchell, 2005).

Perceived quality is the "customer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority (that) is (1) different from objective or actual quality, (2) a higher level abstraction rather than a specific attribute of a product, (3) a global assessment that in some cases resembles attitude, and (4) a judgment usually made within a consumer's evoked set" (Zeithaml, 1988, pp. 3 and 4). Therefore, a consumer has perceived quality, and the resulting purchase decision may be influenced by "personal product (service) experiences, unique needs, and consumption situations" (Yoo et al., 2000, p. 197). Consumers use cues to determine perceived (customers' subjective judgment about) quality. Cues may be a brand name, price (Rao and Monroe, 1989), advertising (Kirmani and Wright, 1989), and more specifically extrinsic cues

for perceptions of store brand quality (Richardson, Dick, and Jain, 1994). Furthermore, cues may have greater influence, impact for females. Meyers-Levy and Sternthal found that "women often have a lower threshold for elaborating on message cues, and hence at times may have greater access to the implications of those cues at judgment" (1991, p. 93).

Brand association "consists of all brand-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, attitudes," (Kotler and Keller, 2006, p. 188) and "is anything 'linked' in memory to a brand" (Aaker, 1991, p. 109). Such associations may include (brand) personality (Aaker, 1997) and relationships (Fournier, 1998) with inference to gender. Brand personality influences consumers' brand association, preference (Aaker, 1997), performance (Moss, 2007), and extensions (Diamantopoulos, Smith, and Grime, 2005). In developing the Brand Personality Scale, Aaker (1997) findings indicate that brand personality information uses heuristic cues and may need systematic processing. Based on the Selectivity Model (Meyers-Levy, 1989), males (having heuristic, schematic information processing) will have greater brand association. However, brand relationships find differently. Relationships, as applicable to branding, is not a product or marketing transaction but rather an active, contributing dyad based on quality, depth and strength of the consumer-brand relationship. Fournier observes, "(s)ince women in relationships feel empowered, they emerge as key agents of social change through their dealings in the ordinary world of brand consumption" (1998, p. 367).

The brand equity dimensions of brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand association has been related to and shown to be increased by males or females. Generally, males appear to have higher brand loyalty. However, females appear to may have greater brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand association. From the marketing mix and brand equity literature, particular findings are more apparent, while other aspects remain unclear.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Retail markets are highly competitive that range from small, specialty boutique stores to large, mass appeal supper-centers/hypermarkets. These large stores have a broad target market that may not have uniqueness (product offering depth, or specialty) but do offer utility. Hypermarket stores have more than 225,000 square feet of floor space and over 45,000 stockkeeping units (SKUs) (Price and Ferrell, 2007). Therefore, a successful hypermarket position strength may included well developed retail value propositions, e.g., identifying a broad yet specific value proposition, and well developed retail brand, e.g., brand name, strong brand associations and promises, and managing customers' brand contacts (Kotler, 1999). Specific to retail marketing and this study, these strategies are measured by segmenting (demographics), targeting (male and female hypermarket shoppers), positioning (marketing mix) (Kotler and Keller, 2006), and value (customer-based brand equity) (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

The four major hypermarkets in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, the second largest city in the country, were the study setting. The sampling frame was an estimated proportion to the respective market share (35% for Carrefour, 30% for R-T Mart, 25% for Costco, 10% for Géant) of weekday and weekend shoppers who were at least 18 years old. The questionnaire included the researcher-developed 9-question shopper demographic profile and shopping characteristics section. Second, a 15-item retail marketing mix instrument developed by Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000) that was used in their product branding study. The retail marketing mix elements (price, advertising spending, price deals, store image, and distribution intensity) were measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Third, a 23-item instrument developed by Pappu and Quester (2006) that was used in their customer-based brand equity (CBBE) study of specialty and department stores. The CBBE section items were measured by a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree). Based on this criterion, the sample includes 435 participants having the proportional respondents. Table 1 presents the participant profiles and shopping characteristics.

Table 1: Hypermarket Shopper Profile by Gender

Shopper Characteristics	Male Shopper		Female Shopper		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	219	50.3	216	49.7	435	100.0
Age						
18-24	25	11.4	19	8.8	44	10.1
25-34	73	33.4	101	46.7	174	40.1
35-44	69	31.5	63	29.2	132	30.3
45-54	30	13.7	21	9.7	51	11.7
55 and Older	22	10.0	12	5.6	34	7.8
Marital Status						
Not Married	87	39.7	85	39.4	172	39.5
Married	132	60.3	131	60.6	263	60.5
Educational Level						
College Graduate Degree	10	4.6	16	7.4	26	6.0
College Undergraduate Degree	72	32.9	92	42.6	164	37.7
Attended College (No Degree)	22	10.0	15	6.9	37	8.5
High School Graduate	91	41.6	75	34.7	166	38.1
Less Than High School Graduate	24	10.9	18	8.4	42	9.7
Occupation						
Corporate Executive & Manager	10	4.6	22	10.2	32	7.4
Administrative Personnel	19	8.7	11	5.1	30	6.9
Sales, Technician, Clerical	124	56.5	82	38.0	206	47.3
Skilled Labor	17	7.8	70	32.3	87	20.0
Unskilled Labor	49	22.4	31	14.4	80	18.4
Income (Monthly)*						
US$640 or Less	53	24.2	19	8.8	72	16.6
US$641-$1,120	83	37.9	40	18.5	123	28.3
US$1,121-$1,600	38	17.4	103	47.6	141	32.4
US$1,601-$2,080	13	5.9	32	14.8	45	10.3
US$2,081-$2,560	17	7.8	12	5.6	29	6.7
US$2,561 or More	15	6.8	10	4.7	25	5.7
Avg. Purchase Amount (Per Visit)*						
US$16.00 or Less	31	14.2	25	11.6	56	12.9
US$16.01-$48.00	76	34.6	80	37.0	156	35.8
US$48.01-$80.00	60	27.4	48	22.2	108	24.8
US$80.01-$112.00	24	11.0	28	13.0	52	12.0
US$112.01-$144.00	17	7.8	22	10.2	39	9.0
US$144.01 or More	11	5.0	13	6.0	24	5.5
Purchase Experience						
Not Purchased at This Hypermarket	22	10.0	18	8.3	40	9.2
Purchased at This Hypermarket	197	90.0	198	91.7	395	90.8
Hypermarket Shopping Frequency						
Less Than Once Per Week	138	63.0	159	73.6	297	68.3
1 to 3 Times Per Week	67	30.6	43	19.9	110	25.3
4 or More Times Per week	14	6.4	14	6.5	28	6.4
Shopper By Hypermarket						
Carrefour	80	36.5	75	34.8	155	35.6
RT-Mart	57	26.0	69	31.9	126	29.0
Costco	56	25.6	53	24.5	109	25.1
Géant	26	11.9	19	8.8	45	10.3

*This table shows the study's participants profile in terms of demographic and shopping characteristics. * indicates 1 NT (Taiwan Dollar) is equal to US$.032 at time of survey.*

Males (n=219) and females (n=216) are equally represented with 60% being married and about 70% between 25 and 44 years old. Of the participants, more females (n=92) than males (n=72) were college graduates while more men (n=91) than women (n=75) were high school graduates. Almost 50% of the shoppers were sales, technicians, and clerical workers with many more males (n=124) than females (n=82) in these occupations. However, 60% of the participants earned between US$641 and US$1,600 monthly with females having higher income, e.g., 103 women and only 38 men earning between US$1,121 and US$1,600. Shopping purchases were generally balanced among men and women with 65% spending between US$16.00 and US$80.00 per visit. The vast majority (over 90%) had previously

shopped at the hypermarket. But females (n=159) as compared to males (n=138) shopped less often than once a week.

Varimax rotations with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1.0) were used to examine construct validity and to extract items for the retail marketing mix and customer-based brand equity instruments. Of the 15-item marketing mix instrument, there were 3 items for each of the 5 retail elements (Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000). Only one item was regrouped – from distribution intensity to advertising spending. Hence, price includes 3 items, advertising spending 4 items, price deals 3 items, store image 3 items, and distribution intensity 2 items. The 23-item brand equity instrument included 4 brand loyalty items, 4 brand awareness, 5 perceived quality, and 10 brand association (Pappu and Quester, 2006). Two brand awareness items were regrouped to brand loyalty. One brand awareness item became brand association. Lastly, three brand association items were regrouped as brand awareness. Therefore, brand loyalty includes 6 items, brand awareness 4 items, brand association 8 items, and the 5 original perceived quality items remain unchanged. These constructs were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha scores and all easily exceeded the minimum of 0.70 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998) with a range for retail marketing mix elements from 0.751 to 0.912 and for customer-based brand equity dimensions from 0.843 to 0.942.

FINDINGS

In this male-female comparative study of perceived hypermarket marketing mix and customer-based brand equity (CBBE), several revealing results were found. The study design was for three purposes. First was to determine overall as to which gender, if either one, was influenced more by the marketing mix and thus, contributed to (resulted in) more brand equity. Second was to determine according to market share by gender perception of each hypermarket's marketing mix elements that may be linked to its level of brand equity. The sampling frame has proportionate respondents to each hypermarket's estimated market share – Carrefour (35%), R-T Mart (30%), Costco (25%), Géant (10%). Third was by gender to determine item significances for each marketing mix element and consumer-based brand equity dimension.

To test these three purposes, t-Tests were performed for gender (males, females) and compared to the marketing mix (price, advertising spending, price deals, store image, and distribution intensity) as well as total marketing mix (all five elements) and to customer-based brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association) as well as total brand equity (all four dimensions). In addition, given the nature of the super-store and hypermarket characteristics, e.g., mass appeal (both genders), we use significantly different ($p < 0.05$) and similarity ($p > 0.70$) criterion.

For the sample (n=435), females shoppers (n=216) have higher mean scores for four of the five marketing mix elements and for total marketing mix. Women feel that their hypermarket has higher advertising spending, more price deals, better store image, and offer significantly ($p < 0.05$) more products than males. However, advertising spending was very similar ($p > 0.70$) between genders. On the other hand, male shoppers (n=219) think that their hypermarket has significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher prices than females. The CBBE mean scores for females are higher than males for all four dimensions and total brand equity. Women have significantly ($p < 0.01$) more brand association and significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher total brand equity for their hypermarket than men do. The complete results are reported in Table 2.

The male and female shopper representation is balanced for each hypermarket – Carrefour (men = 80, women = 75), R-T Mart (men = 57, women = 69), Costco (men = 56, women = 53), Géant (men = 26, women = 19). Carrefour, the market leader, has several male and female similarities ($p > 0.70$) for its marketing mix – price, store image, and total marketing mix. Although not significant (differences or similarities), men perceive higher advertising spending and more price deals than women do.

Table 2 : Marketing Mix and Customer-Based Brand Equity Results

Elements/Dimensions	Mean For Male Shopper	Mean For Female Shopper	Mean Differences
Marketing Mix Elements[1]			
Price	2.92	2.79	0.13*
Advertising Spending	2.94	2.97	0.03***
Price Deal	3.22	3.30	0.08
Store Image	3.17	3.23	0.06
Distribution Intensity	3.21	3.35	0.14*
Total Marketing Mix	2.99	3.04	0.05
Brand Equity Dimensions[2]			
Brand Loyalty	3.94	4.10	0.16
Brand Awareness	4.92	5.09	0.17
Perceived Quality	4.23	4.34	0.11
Brand Association	4.52	4.82	0.30**
Total Brand Equity	4.37	4.58	0.21*

*This table presents the t-Test results of male and female comparative mean scores by each marketing mix element and brand equity dimension. [1] and [2] indicate marketing mix elements measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale and brand equity dimensions measured by a 7-point Likert-type scale respectively. *, **, and *** indicate significances of < 0.05, < 0.01 (differences), and > 0.70 (similarities) levels respectively.*

Women perceive the store having more product offerings than men do. On the other hand, CBBE results also show similarities ($p > 0.70$) for brand loyalty, perceived quality, and total brand equity. While men have slightly higher brand awareness, women have greater brand association.

R-T Mart, the second market share leader, consistently has higher female perceived marketing mix and customer-based brand equity ratings. For the marketing mix, only male shoppers had a higher mean score for price. No marketing mix results were significant (differences or similarities). Women shoppers had higher results for all CBBE dimensions and the total but brand loyalty and perceived quality were similar ($p > 0.70$) to men.

Costco has no significance (differences or similarities) for its marketing mix or customer-based brand equity results. Male shoppers perceive higher prices and more advertising spending than females. For the remaining marketing mix elements and all of the CBBE dimensions, female shoppers' mean scores were higher than males. Finally, Géant, the last of the four market share leaders, also has female shoppers with higher mean scores for the majority of its marketing mix and customer-based brand equity. The only exception (marketing mix) is that males perceive higher price than females. Advertising spending was viewed similarly ($p > 0.70$) between men and women. However, female shoppers had significantly higher brand association ($p < 0.05$) than males. The detailed results by hypermarket are shown in Table 3.

To further analyze the comparative relationships between gender to the marketing mix and customer-based brand equity, each item was evaluated by t-Tests. The findings are reported in the Appendix. For the marketing mix, male shoppers feel that their hypermarket had significantly higher price ($p < 0.05$) than females (Table 2). Of the three price items, one was significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) for males and the other two means were split between male and female shoppers having higher means but not significant (no differences or similarities) (Appendix). Advertising spending was found similar ($p > 0.70$) between genders (Table 2). Of the four advertising spending items, one was similar ($p > 0.70$). The other three items were split, one with higher male mean score and two with higher female means, but none at significant levels (no differences or similarities) (Appendix).

All of the remaining price deal, store image, and distribution intensity items had higher female means. One of the three price deal and one of the three store image items had similarities ($p > 0.70$) (Appendix). Neither marketing mix element showed any significance (differences or similarities) (Table 2).

Table 3 : Marketing Mix and Customer-Based Brand Equity Results for Hypermarkets

Elements/Dimensions	Mean For Male Shopper	Mean For Female Shopper	Mean Differences
Carrefour			
Marketing Mix Elements[1]			
Price	2.80	2.80	0.00**
Advertising Spending	3.75	3.69	0.06
Price Deal	3.40	3.30	0.10
Store Image	3.13	3.13	0.00**
Distribution Intensity	3.44	3.59	0.15
Total Marketing Mix	3.10	3.10	0.00**
Brand Equity Dimensions[2]			
Brand Loyalty	4.04	4.09	0.05**
Brand Awareness	5.28	5.16	0.12
Perceived Quality	4.10	4.10	0.00**
Brand Association	4.76	4.85	0.09
Total Brand Equity	4.52	4.54	0.02**
R-T Mart			
Marketing Mix Elements[1]			
Price	2.78	2.70	0.08
Advertising Spending	2.62	2.86	0.24
Price Deal	3.23	3.30	0.07
Store Image	3.01	3.07	0.06
Distribution Intensity	3.11	3.20	0.09
Total Marketing Mix	2.95	3.04	0.09
Brand Equity Dimensions[2]			
Brand Loyalty	3.87	3.95	0.08**
Brand Awareness	4.79	5.03	0.24
Perceived Quality	4.13	4.18	0.05**
Brand Association	4.38	4.73	0.35
Total Brand Equity	4.26	4.46	0.20
Costco			
Marketing Mix Elements[1]			
Price	3.16	2.91	0.25
Advertising Spending	2.24	2.19	0.05
Price Deal	3.13	3.28	0.15
Store Image	3.57	3.64	0.07
Distribution Intensity	3.22	3.41	0.19
Total Marketing Mix	2.96	3.00	0.04
Brand Equity Dimensions[2]			
Brand Loyalty	4.21	4.47	0.26
Brand Awareness	4.97	5.27	0.30
Perceived Quality	4.71	4.98	0.27
Brand Association	4.66	5.02	0.36
Total Brand Equity	4.61	4.91	0.30
Géant			
Marketing Mix Elements[1]			
Price	3.04	2.68	0.36
Advertising Spending	2.63	2.66	0.03**
Price Deal	2.83	3.33	0.50
Store Image	2.76	3.05	0.29
Distribution Intensity	2.67	2.76	0.09
Total Marketing Mix	2.78	2.94	0.16
Brand Equity Dimensions[2]			
Brand Loyalty	3.18	3.68	0.50
Brand Awareness	3.95	4.50	0.55
Perceived Quality	3.81	4.09	0.28
Brand Association	3.79	4.51	0.72*
Total Brand Equity	3.66	4.20	0.54

*This table shows the t-Test results of male and female comparative mean scores by each hypermarket's marketing mix element and brand equity dimension. [1] and [2] indicate marketing mix elements measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale and brand equity dimensions measured by a 7-point Likert-type scale respectively. * and ** indicate significances of < 0.05 (differences) and > 0.70 (similarities) levels respectively.*

Also, neither distribution intensity items showed any significance (Appendix) but the element showed significantly higher distribution intensity ($p < 0.05$) by females (Table 2).

For customer-based brand equity, the mean scores for every item are higher for female shoppers than males. Brand association results revealed significant differences for four of the eight items. Females were more likely ($p < 0.001$) than males to recognize that hypermarket from all others. Furthermore, females more likely believed than males that hypermarket offered (1) more value for money spent ($p < 0.01$), (2) very good variety of products ($p < 0.01$), and (3) very good after sale service ($p < 0.05$). While not significant, females did rate that hypermarket higher than males for the other brand association items, e.g., conveniently located, good store atmosphere, convenient facilities, in-store customer service (Appendix). As a result, female shoppers have a significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher brand association (Table 2). No other item for the remaining three brand equity dimensions shows a significant difference. However, perceived quality findings are of interest to this study. The perceived consistent products quality is very similar ($p > 0.70$) between male and female shoppers. Yet none of the other items, e.g., good quality products, products durability, products reliability and products features, shows any significance (differences or similarities) (Appendix) or for the perceived quality dimension (Table 2). As well, brand loyalty and brand awareness were not significant. However, female shoppers' total brand equity was significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher than males (Table 2).

IMPLICATIONS

Several findings have revealed specific relationships between the marketing mix and customer-based brand equity (CBBE) between male and female hypermarket shoppers. First, women do not believe their hypermarket is expensive (price $p < 0.05$) (Table 2). From the female perspective, their stores offer better value, e.g., product assortment (distribution intensity $p < 0.05$) as well as greater communications (advertising spending), more price deals, better store image (all with higher mean scores), lower prices as compared to male shoppers. An increased assortment does increase purchases (Koelemeijer and Oppewal, 1999) which is important to female shoppers (Williams, Absher, and Hoffman, 1997). Furthermore, women are more willing to pay higher price premiums (Sethuraman and Cole, 1999) within certain price points (Peterson, 1970).

Second, women in this study have higher mean scores for all CBBE dimensions. Specific to price, female shoppers had higher perceived quality opinions of their store than males. Therefore, a value proposition (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008) appear to have been established by the hypermarket (the marketing mix) and accepted by its female shoppers (CBBE). The (brand) relationship (brand association) was effective with "brand consumption" (Fournier, 1998). As well, the selectivity model (Meyer-Levy, 1989) assists in explaining the implications of higher female CBBE findings. Female shoppers were more "aware" (brand awareness) and were able to benefit from more comprehensive (effortful, detailed elaboration) information processing of cues from the marketing mix, e.g., advertising spending (Kirmani and Wright, 1989), brand name and price (Rao and Monroe, 1989), store (brand) image (Richardson, Dick, and Jain, 1994). Female shoppers "often have a lower threshold for elaborating on message cues, and hence at times may have greater access to the implications of those cues at judgment" (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991, p. 93). The hypermarkets were effective in targeting female shoppers (higher female total marketing mix mean scores) that resulted in significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher female total customer-based brand equity than males.

Third, the hypermarket results (Table 3) provide insight as to effective and ineffective marketing strategies. Only Carrefour, the market leader, shows any total marketing mix significance ($p > 0.70$) with similarities between male and female shoppers. The total marketing mix score was lower for Costco (0.04), at third market share position, than R-T Mart (0.09), second market position, but neither at significant levels (differences or similarities). If this is a criterion for market share, then R-T Mart should focus on maintaining the female target and increase efforts toward male shoppers. Géant has the highest mean score difference. However, the total marketing mix scores for both male and female shoppers were more consistent with market share – Carrefour, R-T Mart, Costco, Géant.

Fourth, the total customer-based brand equity results are somewhat more consistent with market share. Carrefour has similar (p > 0.70) CBBE between male and female shoppers. This is followed, but not significant (differences or similarities), by R-T Mart (0.20), Costco (0.30), and Géant (0.54). However, based on average mean scores for both male and female shoppers the findings are greatly different. Costco has the highest (male and female) average total CBBE score (4.76), followed by Carrefour (4.53), R-T Mart (4.03), and Géant (4.05). Therefore, Costco has market opportunities. For example, if Costco, with 25% market share, increases its marketing mix strategies effectiveness, it would, based on current CBBE scores, be a driver to further increase CBBE and to become the market leader, e.g., gaining 6% share – 5% from Carrefour and 1% from R-T Mart. Another opportunity alternative is retailer consolidation, e.g., K-Mart and Sears, Roebuck and Company merger, with Géant, the fourth market share retailer. This would be an effective strategy to gain market size (Porter, 1980) and to have three, e.g., Rule of Three (Sheth and Sisodia, 2002), primary hypermarkets.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FURTURE RESEARCH

Consumer product manufacturers and retailers face greater competition in the 21st century than at any other time in history. These challenges are not only from other local, national, and global businesses but also from consumers. Consumers' expectations and demands have heightened with more access to information, greater financial ability and willingness to purchase, and evolving demographic trends, e.g., gender shopping roles and responsibilities. This study has linked some relationships between gender (males, females), retailers' marketing mix (price, store image, distribution intensity, price deals, advertising spending), and customer-based brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association). Having similar perceptions of the marketing mix and for customer-based brand equity between male and female shoppers is a contributing factor to market share. Environmental factors have been (McNair and May, 1978), and are (Penn, 2007) changing as to who and where consumers shop and what consumers purchase. CBBE provides a measure of success for these challenges.

This study has limitations. For example, while the study was conducted in the second largest city in Taiwan, Kaohsiung city, the findings cannot be generalized to other Asian or international markets. Hypermarkets are just one classification, general merchandise stores, of "big box" stores. Findings, therefore, are limited to this retail format.

The study findings lead to further identified research areas. Is Carrefour market leadership the result of customer-based brand equity? Or, is customer-based brand equity the result of market share? Would the same results be found for hypermarkets in different Asian markets? Or in the North American (or European) market? Would the results be similar with other mega-retailers and "category killers," e.g., Staples, Office Depot, Office Max? What has caused Costco to have high mean scores from both male and female shoppers but not significantly contributing to customer-based brand equity or market position?

If in fact Penn is correct, and we feel that he is, that microtrends, "an intense identity group, that is growing, which has needs and wants unmet by the current crop of companies, markets, policymakers, and others who would influence society's behavior" (2007, p. xx), is occurring, then branding approaches must be adjusted accordingly, further brand strategy changes, e.g., marketing mix, cues, media outlets. Specifically, branding strategies must be more accurately, appropriately targeted (Kotler and Keller, 2006) to increase brand equity (Keller, 1993; Kotler, 1999). Gender shopping and purchasing roles have, and are quickly changing.

APPENDIX

Appendix: Marketing Mix and Customer-Based Brand Equity Question Results

Elements/Dimensions	Mean For Male Shopper	Mean For Female Shopper	Mean Differences
Marketing Mix Elements[1]			
Price			
Price in (hypermarket) is high	2.93	2.78	0.15*
Price of (hypermarket) is low	3.06	3.18	0.12
(Hypermarket) is expensive	2.88	2.75	0.13
Advertising Spending			
(Hypermarket) intensively advertised	2.97	2.94	0.03****
The ad campaigns for (hypermarket) seem expensive	2.87	2.96	0.09
The ad campaigns for (hypermarket) seen frequently	2.93	2.83	0.10
(Hypermarket) has more locations than competing stores	3.00	3.14	0.14
Price Deal			
Price deals for (hypermarket) are frequently offered	3.41	3.50	0.09
Too many price deals for (hypermarket) are presented	3.33	3.46	0.13
Price deals by (hypermarket) emphasized more than reasonable	2.92	2.94	0.02****
Store Image			
(Hypermarket) carries products of high quality	3.07	3.10	0.03****
(Hypermarket) high quality	3.11	3.23	0.12
(Hypermarket) has known brands	3.31	3.35	0.04
Distribution Intensity			
(Hypermarket) sells more goods than competing stores	3.20	3.33	0.13
(Hypermarket) provides more goods than competing stores	3.22	3.36	0.14
Total Marketing Mix	44.81	45.61	0.80
Brand Equity Dimensions[2]			
Brand Loyalty			
Preferred choice	4.10	4.29	0.19
Loyal to (hypermarket) stores	3.98	4.05	0.07
Will not buy products from other	3.67	3.86	0.19
My first choice	3.73	3.87	0.14
Character. come to mind quickly	4.13	4.31	0.18
Aware of (hypermarket) stores	4.00	4.23	0.23
Brand Awareness			
Have shopped at (hypermarket)	5.51	5.66	0.15
Like (hypermarket) stores	4.75	4.92	0.17
Feel proud to shop at stores	4.72	4.93	0.21
Trust (hypermarket) for products	4.70	4.83	0.13
Perceived Quality			
Offer very good quality	4.40	4.52	0.12
Offer consistent quality products	4.35	4.39	0.04****
Offer very durable products	4.11	4.28	0.17
Offer very reliable products	4.26	4.33	0.07
Offer prod with excellent features	4.03	4.19	0.16
Brand Association			
Stores are conveniently located	4.53	4.76	0.23
Offers value for money	4.28	4.61	0.33**
Offers very good atmosphere	4.53	4.75	0.22
Offer very convenient facilities	4.57	4.76	0.19
Offer very good customer service	4.52	4.74	0.22
Offer very good variety of prods.	4.61	4.93	0.32**
Offer very good after sales service	4.46	4.77	0.31*
Recognize among other stores	4.67	5.26	0.59***
Total Brand Equity	100.60	105.25	4.65*

This table shows the t-Test results of male and female comparative mean scores by each marketing mix element item and brand equity dimension item. [1] and [2] indicate marketing mix elements measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale and brand equity dimensions measured by a 7-point Likert-type scale respectively. *, **, ***, and **** indicate significances of < 0.05, < 0.01, < 0.001 (differences), and > 0.70 (similarities) levels respectively.

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