

**On the Frontlines of Fashion:
Measuring Employee-Consumer Integrated
Retailer Brand Equity**

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Marketing and Reputation

Janice L. Rudkowski, BAA, MBA, MSc BMR

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Supervisor: Professor Douglas Hyatt, Professor of Economic Analysis and Policy, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto

Supervisor: Dr. Irute Karanicholas, Associate Professor and Director of Studies, Marketing and Reputation, Henley Business School, University of Reading

Internal Examiner: Professor Adrian Palmer, Professor of Marketing & Head of the Department of Marketing and Reputation, Henley Business School, University of Reading

External Examiner: Dr. Yousra Asaad, Brunel University Business School, Brunel University

Declaration

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Name: Janice L. Rudkowski

Date: December 14, 2020

Signature:

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When I was growing up, my Aunt Trudy completed her PhD in adult education while in her 40's. This was my first exposure to the idea of lifelong learning. Little did I know how this would play out in my own life. I am now in my 40's and completing a Doctor of Business Administration. Education has always played an important role in my personal and professional goals and achievements. After high school, my goal was to move from Alberta to Toronto to attend Ryerson's School of Fashion, the only fashion degree program in Canada, at the time. This proved a pivotal time in my life, as it introduced me to Dr. Donna Smith, who was not only my professor at Ryerson, but over the past 30 years has become a mentor, role model, colleague, research collaborator, confidante and good friend. It was Donna who reached out to me after my undergrad and connected me with other Ryerson Fashion Alumni. It was Donna who wrote reference letters for each of my degrees. Donna introduced me to Dr. Kathy Newton, and they both encouraged me to enrol in Henley's MSc/DBA programme in 2014.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the retail worker who was drawn to their employer because they loved shopping there. I applaud all frontline retail employees who work evenings and weekends at minimum wage to deliver their retailer's brand promise and who ultimately represent the heart and soul of every retail organization.

Abstract

The aim of this research is to develop a measure of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity through the theoretical lens of a dual stakeholder (i.e. employee-consumer). This research draws on marketing (consumer-based brand equity, retailer brand equity) and organizational behaviour (internal brand management, employee-based brand equity, employee patronage) literatures. Frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity are examined from internal (i.e., as employees) and external (i.e., as consumers) perspectives. Key factors that influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity are conceptualized. Employees are segmented into two groups, patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs) and non-patronizing frontline retail employees' (non-PFREs), based on self-reported shopping frequency, and compared. The model is tested using a quantitative online survey design with a sample of 313 frontline fashion retail employees across Canada. PLS-SEM and SmartPLS 3 are used to analyse the data, specify and assess the structural and measurement models, and conduct mediator and multi-group analyses.

The findings validate an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model with four consumer-based dimensions (service quality, product quality, price/value, store image) and seven employee-based dimensions (brand allegiance, skills development, brand consistent behaviour, resume power, brand endorsement, internal advancement, work demands). Both PFREs and non-PFREs value all four consumer-based retailer brand equity factors. However, PFREs place the highest value on the employee-based factors of brand allegiance, skills development and brand consistent behaviour, and non-PFREs place the highest value on brand allegiance, resume power and brand consistent behaviour.

This research makes several contributions to knowledge. First, it draws on existing consumer-based and employee-based brand equity measures, which were previously differentiated phenomena, and integrates them into one new model. Second, it advances the PLS-SEM methodology and the application of evaluation criteria and its interpretation on HCMs and introduces a 3rd order HCM model within the retailer brand equity domain. Third, it further develops the multi-step structure, whereby integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty are partially mediated by retailer trust. Fourth, it highlights the frontline employee, and illuminates how retailers can leverage employee segmentation strategies to enhance their retailer brand. If implemented, the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand

equity measure would provide retailers with practical insights and direction regarding how to measure the true value of retailer brand equity, what factors their marketing and human resources departments should prioritize and encourage their collaboration when building brand strategies. The proposed measure would also allow retailers to benchmark progress over time and make the appropriate adjustments, which could improve their frontline employees' perceptions of their retailer brand equity and support a more holistic approach to measuring and capturing the retailer's true value creation.

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List of Abbreviations

BA	Brand Allegiance
BC	Brand Consistent Behaviour
BE	Brand Endorsement
BM	Brand Management
CB-RBE	Consumer-Based Retailer Brand Equity
CB-SEM	Covariance Based – Structural Equation Modelling
EBBE	Employee-Based Brand Equity
EBE	Employee Brand Equity
EB-RBE	Employee-Based Retailer Brand Equity
HOC	Higher-Order Construct
HCM	Hierarchical Component Model
IA	Internal Advancement
IBM	Internal Brand Management
IRBE	Integrated Retailer Brand Equity
LOC	Lower Order Construct
LV	Latent Variable
Non-PRFE	Non-Patronizing Frontline Retail Employee
PFRE	Patronizing Frontline Retail Employee
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modelling
PQ	Product Quality
PV	Price/Value
RP	Resume Power
RT	Retailer Trust
RL	Retailer Loyalty
SI	Store Image

SQ	Service Quality
SD	Skills Development
W	Work Demands

1 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Forward

My interest in frontline employees and retailer brand equity as a topic of research was inspired by my Retail Management students at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada. During our conversations I would ask them, “when you graduate, where do you want to work?” Typical responses were: “I love ‘retailer x’, I shop there all the time. It would be so cool to work there” or “I like what ‘retailer x’ stands for, and it’s a great place to shop. I think working there would be a great experience.” But I also received responses such as, “I started working at ‘retailer x’ as a sales associate because I loved shopping there. Then I realized they treat their employees terribly. No one in head office listens to us. I don’t want to work there after I graduate.” *This made me think, do our external views of retailers as consumers and our internal views of retailers as employees influence how we perceive a retailer’s brand equity?*

During my 20+ years’ industry experience managing consumer product brands such as Barbie®, Dove® and One-A-Day® Multi-Vitamins, I became fascinated with how brands build their brand equity (i.e., intangible assets). While managing these brands I led extensive market research projects to better understand consumers and what motivated their purchase intentions. Yet, when I began teaching retail marketing courses to undergraduate students, I realized that *retailer brands* appear to be more complex than *product brands*. Product brands focus on performance, functional and/or emotional benefits. However, building a retailer brand poses additional challenges due to the multi-sensory (i.e., sights, scents and sounds) and experiential nature of the retail environment and the complexity of stakeholders involved in brand building efforts. My students’ internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) perceptions of retailer brands, their desire to work for strong retailer brands, and my experience managing brands sparked my interest in this research and inspired me to examine retailer brand equity from a frontline employee lens in fashion retailing.

1.2 Introduction

This chapter starts with an overview of the research and then articulates the business problem and why this area of inquiry is worthy of exploration. It explains the background to the research problem, calls for research from the academic literature and the process that was undertaken to develop the research questions. Next, it examines the philosophical assumptions of the researcher and the research. Then, it provides a high-level overview of the research design and methodology. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the conceptual, methodological, empirical and theoretical contributions of the research, the managerial implications and sets out the structure of the thesis.

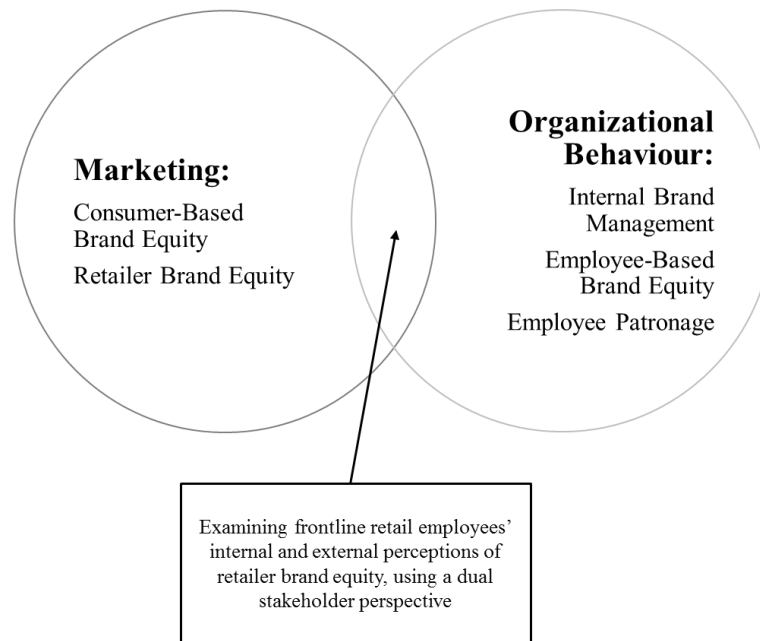
1.3 Overview of Research

This thesis examines frontline retail employees' internal (i.e., as employees) and external (i.e., as consumers) perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing and identifies and compares perceptions of two types of frontline retail employees: patronizing frontline retail employees (i.e., individuals who work at the retailer and 'very frequently' or 'frequently' shop there) and non-patronizing frontline retail employees (i.e., individuals who work at the retailer and 'occasionally', 'rarely', 'very rarely' or 'never' shop there). The aim of this research is to develop a measure of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity using a dual stakeholder approach. This is accomplished by conceptualizing, developing and testing a model to examine the internal and external factors that influence frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity and its outcomes. This model draws on existing consumer-based, employee-based and retailer brand equity frameworks from the literature. Unlike previous studies, it views frontline employees as dual stakeholders, thus, leveraging their internal and external perceptions of the retailer's brand and integrating them into one model. This novel approach to measuring and managing employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity advances brand equity (i.e., consumer, employee and retailer) and employee patronage literatures.

This thesis draws on two key areas of scholarship: 1) *marketing*: including consumer-based brand equity and retailer brand equity literatures; and 2) *organizational behaviour*: including internal brand management, employee-based brand equity and employee patronage literatures. This study also operationalizes stakeholder theory as an organizing framework by

viewing retailer brand equity through a dual stakeholder lens. An important contribution of this thesis is its topic of inquiry, which is situated at the intersection of marketing and organizational behaviour, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Areas of Research



This research was conducted in Canada with a focus on frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing. The retail industry is the largest private sector employer in Canada and contributed \$615 billion (Statistics Canada, 2019) to the economy in 2019 across 145,274 bricks and mortar stores and paid \$76.1 billion in total annual compensation to its workers (Retail Council of Canada, 2020). Although 51.0% of Canadians made an online purchase in 2019 (Cira, 2019), they continue to primarily shop in bricks in mortar stores, with only 4.0% of total retail sales coming from retail e-commerce (Statista, 2020). Of Canada's 2,057,645 retail employees, who represent 10.8% of the total workforce, approximately half are working in the frontlines (i.e., the retail selling floor) (Retail Council of Canada, 2020). Indeed, according to the latest National Household Survey, 'sales associate', also known as the frontline employee, is the most common occupation for males and females in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011; Krishnan,

2014). Furthermore, clothing and clothing accessories stores (i.e., the fashion sector) experienced 3.0% revenue growth from 2018 to 2019, outpacing total retail trade which experienced only 2.4% growth during the same time period (Statistics Canada, 2020a). According to Deloitte's Global Powers of Retailing 2020 report, the apparel and accessories product sector continues to be the most profitable sector globally (compared to fast-moving consumer goods, hardlines and leisure goods and diversified) while also delivering the highest return on assets (Deloitte, 2020). The fashion retail sector is gaining power and global brand influence. This is evidenced by Interbrand's 2019 Best Global Brands, where fourteen of the top one hundred brands are fashion-based retailers (Interbrand, 2019). Top fashion retailer brands range from fast fashion apparel companies such as ZARA and H&M to luxury fashion retailer brands such as Louis Vuitton and Chanel, which all have retail locations in Canada. Leading fashion apparel and cosmetics retailers have replaced the classic 'sales associate' job titles for more empowering ones such as Sephora's 'Consultants' and 'Skincare Advisors', Lululemon's 'Educators', Nike's 'Part Time Athletes' or Aritzia's 'Style Advisors'. Indeed, with the growing empowerment and influence of frontline retail employees comes the need for retail practitioners to better understand this valuable stakeholder, and this research addresses this need by closely examining frontline fashion retail employees' perceptions of the retailer brand where they work as employees, and shop, as consumers.

1.4 Business Problem

Fashion retailers are growing in power and influence (Interbrand, 2019), however, they struggle to find new ways to competitively differentiate their brands and understand what drives value for different stakeholders (Deloitte, 2019). One strategy that retailers have employed to differentiate their brands is to transition from a product-centric to a consumer-centric organization (Peppers and Rogers, 2017) thus focusing the organization on one key stakeholder, the consumer. Indeed, fashion retailers such as Glossier and Sephora are known for their consumer-centricity, whereby they leverage consumer data insights to offer extremely personalized experiences and as a result benefit from growth, increased revenue and strong company culture (Morgan, 2019). Yet, retailers rely on their frontline employees, an important yet often overlooked stakeholder, to ultimately deliver these brand experiences and the brand promise to their consumers (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). Frontline

employees are a unique stakeholder in that they can offer internal (i.e. as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) views of the organization. Many frontline employees are consumers, especially due to the ubiquitous retailer benefit, employee discounts. Crittenden and Albaum (2015) refer to employee discounts as a common perk that are as “American as apple pie” (page 423). Retailers provide discounts to their employees to encourage them buy the retailer’s products, and this benefit is often extended to not only the employee themselves, but also friends and family members. Whether or not frontline employees use their employee discounts, although in fashion retail they often do (Williams and Connell, 2010), they are very involved in and knowledgeable of their retailer’s customer experience because of their direct interactions with consumers and their role in building relationships with consumers. Therefore, frontline employees offer two valuable perspectives of the retailer’s brand, one as a consumer (i.e., an external view of their retailer’s brand) and one as an employee (i.e., an internal view of their retailer’s brand). As fashion retailers’ experience growth in power and influence (Interbrand, 2019), this comes with the awareness that frontline employees influence the brand. Thus, this presents an opportunity to examine the retailer brand equity process from a frontline employee perspective. To complicate matters, retailers are internally structured so that the “marketing department” manages consumer relationships and the “human resources department” manages employee relationships. In many retail organizations, these two departments operate in silos. A study by i4cp entitled ‘Reimagining Talent Acquisition: Mastering Employer Brand’ surveyed more than 540 professionals and found that HR and marketing departments collaborate on brand strategy in fewer than one-third (27%) of companies (Lykins, 2018). Yet, high-performance organizations are six-times more likely to have their HR and marketing departments collaborating with each other, and 1.5-times more likely to share the responsibility of building and managing the employer brand together (Samdahl, 2019). Thus, the business problem which this thesis addresses is the need for fashion retailers, in particular, to find a new way to measure the true value (i.e., brand equity) they deliver with respect to a critical yet often overlooked stakeholder, the frontline employee. Understanding and leveraging their frontline employees’ perceptions of the different dimensions of the retailer brand offers retailers opportunities for marketing and human resource managers to work together to build one holistic retailer brand that is uniquely differentiated in a highly dynamic and competitive industry.

1.5 Background to the Problem and Calls for Research

Studies on consumers' perceptions of brand equity dominate the brand equity literature and the importance of consumers is well documented among retail scholars (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017). The majority of brand equity literature takes a cognitive consumer-based approach which provides an external or outside-in brand perspective (Poulis and Wisker, 2016). A review of retailer brand equity literature, in particular, reveals a wealth of research examining consumer-based retailer brand equity (Arnett et al., 2003; Haelsig et al., 2007; Christodoulides and De Chernatony, 2010; Gil-Saura et al., 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019), limited research examining employee-based retailer brand equity (King and Grace, 2009), and even fewer studies investigating frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). Retailer brand equity research remains fragmented and scarce (Londoño et al., 2017; Anselmsson et al., 2017) and "...the lack of clarity and consistency in the structure of retailer equity dimensions signifies the need for further research" (Anselmsson et al. 2017, p. 196). Further, few retailer brand equity studies address fashion retailing (Haelsig et al., 2007; Swoboda et al., 2016). Haelsig et al. (2007) found retailer brand equity should be studied by sector, because the dimensions from one sector (i.e., grocery) will likely not apply exactly to another (i.e., fashion). Troiville et al. (2019) also expressed the need for retailer brand equity research in other countries and across other sectors.

In retail, frontline employees play a particularly vital role to a retailer's competitive advantage and overall success (King and Grace, 2009). Service quality, as delivered by frontline employees, plays a critical role in building retailer brand equity across all retail sectors (Haelsig et al., 2007). Thus, researchers have called for brand equity research from an internal (i.e., employee) stakeholder perspective (Davicik et al., 2015). Frontline employees play an important role in creating powerful corporate brands (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) and representing the brand to outside constituents (Aurand et al., 2005). Indeed, King and Grace (2009) argue marketers should harness the untapped power of employees. Further, Henriques and Sadorsky (1999) refer to employees as the source of a company's success. Acknowledging the lack of attention paid to internal perspectives in the brand equity literature, scholars have called for more research on inside-out perspectives (Poulis and

Wisker, 2016; M'zungu et al., 2010). It is essential that retailers build relationships with a variety of stakeholders (Hult et al., 2011) to ensure both external and internal perspectives are sufficiently represented. Although there is a growing interest in employee-based brand equity (King et al., 2012; Tavassoli et al., 2014; Alshathry et al., 2017; Erkmen, 2018; Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020), the literature to date does not closely examine frontline employees specifically and their perceptions of retailer brand equity, nor does it acknowledge frontline employees' dual role as employees and consumers. Employee patronage, a separate stream of literature, explores the dual stakeholder role that employees play, as both employees and consumers (Dabholkar and Abston, 2008; Anaza and Rutherford, 2012). However, employee patronage literature has not, to the author's knowledge, extended the 'dual stakeholder perspective' into employee-based brand equity. While academics and practitioners understand the value of internal (i.e., employees) and external (i.e., consumers) stakeholders, there are limited studies that integrate both internal and external perspectives. Different internal and external stakeholders are required for successful brand building (Iglesias and Bonet, 2012; Iglesias et al., 2013). Previous studies have shown there is a relationship between companies who value their employees and competitive advantage and improved performance (Berman et al., 1999; Waddock and Graves, 1997). Thus, additional studies focusing on frontline retail employees and their dual perspective (i.e., as consumers and employees) of the retailer brand is warranted, and this research addresses this gap. This research prioritizes the frontline retail employee because of their ability to provide internal and external perceptions of the brand. Thus, they represent an important *dual stakeholder* who provides both employee and consumer brand perceptions, and influences consumer's willingness to pay (Homburg et al., 2009), consumer satisfaction (Homburg and Stock, 2004) and consumer commitment (Jones et al., 2008). Given the valuable input that both consumers' and employees' perceptions provide in retailers' brand building efforts, this research argues that viewing retailer brand equity through a singular stakeholder lens (e.g., consumer or employee) is insufficient because it ignores a potentially insightful stakeholder, the frontline retail employee.

1.6 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to develop a measure of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity using a dual stakeholder approach. This research aspires to make an original contribution to knowledge by examining frontline retail employees' internal and external perceptions of retailer brand equity, developing a novel measure of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity, identifying the factors that influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing and determining if and how patronizing frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity align and/or differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees.

1.7 Philosophical Assumptions of Research

A starting point of this research endeavour was to examine and consider the philosophical assumptions, including ontology and epistemology, of the researcher and the research itself. Being aware of these philosophical assumptions helped to clarify the research design, including how the data would be gathered and interpreted. Easterby-Smith et al. (2013) explain the importance of having an awareness of philosophical assumptions because it not only increases the quality of the research but also enhances the creativity of the researcher. The starting point in developing the research design is to determine the researcher's ontological position and then link it to the appropriate epistemology. Easterby-Smith et al. (2013) envision a continuum of four different ontologies and position them according to *truth* and *facts*. On the far left of their continuum is the *realism* position, where a single truth is assumed, and facts exist and can be revised. Further along the continuum is *internal realism* whereby it is assumed that truth exists, albeit obscure, and facts are concrete and not easily accessed. A *relativism* philosophy assumes there are many truths, and facts are interpreted through the perspective of the observer. On the far right of the continuum is *nominalism* which assumes there is no truth and facts are created by people. The researcher identifies with an internal realism ontology, with the philosophical position that reality does exist but accessing the full reality is never possible. Rather, it is possible to gather indirect evidence of that reality (Putnam, 1987).

Easterby-Smith et al. (2013) set out four epistemological viewpoints when addressing research design issues: strong positivist, positivist, constructionist and strong constructionist.

The epistemology chosen needs to align with the research study. Research goals for each epistemological viewpoint varies. While strong positivists prefer testing hypotheses, positivists start with propositions or clear research questions. Constructionists identify the focal issue and strong constructionists aim to "...explain how the research will add to the existing discussion" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 72). Given the predominantly quantitative nature of brand equity research, the quantitative approach chosen for this thesis and the author's preference for developing clear research questions as the starting point of the research, an internal realist ontological and a positivist epistemological perspective is the theoretical lens for this research.

1.8 Development of Research Questions

This research started with the following initial inquiry: *just as consumers choose to shop at retailers with strong brand equity, do employees also choose to work at retailers with strong brand equity?* This question arose after reviewing the broad brand equity literature, narrowing in on a specific topic within brand equity and speculating on the potential similarities or parallels that exist between consumers and employees as it relates to the retailer brand equity domain. Blaikie (2010) describes a deductive strategy as "...hypotheses are deduced from a theory, and concepts in a hypothesis are measured in order to test whether or not the hypothesized relationship exists" (p.123). In this sense, existing theories from consumer, employee and retailer brand equity literature were reviewed and a deductive research strategy was used to narrow in on the relationship between employees' perceptions and retailer brand equity. Although the brand equity domain provides a wealth of literature, employee patronage, internal brand management and stakeholder theory literature areas were also examined, allowing for further refinement of this study's main topic of inquiry: frontline retail employees' internal (i.e., as employees) and external (i.e., as consumers) perceptions of retailer brand equity in a bricks and mortar fashion retailing.

A critical review of the literature presented in chapter two, and an examination of the main topic of inquiry, led to the development of the following two research questions:

- 1. What internal and external factors influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?***

Retailer brand equity literature offers a variety of conceptual and empirically tested models across many retail categories and sectors. Consumer-focused studies offer insights into the factors that influence consumers' perceptions of retailer brand equity. Employee-focused studies offer insights into the factors that influence employees' perceptions of brand equity. However, this thesis integrates employees' internal and external brand perceptions of retailer brand equity into one model. This thesis thereby addresses the research question and contributes new knowledge to retailer brand equity, employee-based brand equity, employee patronage and internal brand management literatures. Retailer brand equity studies focusing on frontline employees' dual perspectives in bricks and mortar fashion retailing have not been explored to the author's knowledge. From a practical perspective, understanding what factors influence frontline employees' internal and external perceptions of retailer brand equity offers management insights on where to focus marketing and human resource investments.

The first research question is answered via a quantitative study where the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is conceptualized, developed and tested to determine what factors are statistically significant. There are three main findings. First, all four consumer-based retailer brand equity factors (product quality, store image, price/value and service quality) and all seven employee-based retailer brand equity factors (internal advancement, skills development, resume power, work demands, brand endorsement, brand allegiance, and brand consistent behaviour) are statistically significant. Second, according to frontline employees' perceptions, not all factors have equal relative importance regarding their contributions to employee-based retailer brand equity. Viewing each factor from an Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) perspective, the top two ranked factors are service quality and product quality, which are consumer-based factors. These are followed by brand allegiance, in third place, which is an employee-based factor. The next most important factors are price/value, skills development, brand consistent behaviour and resume power, respectively. The four lowest ranked factors were brand endorsement, internal advancement, store image and work demands. These rankings provide evidence that frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity are *primarily influenced from their external perspective* of the brand as a consumer and *secondarily influenced from their internal perspective* as an employee. Because all eleven factors are statistically significant, these findings emphasize the importance for retailers to view their frontline employees as multi-faceted stakeholders

who hold external (i.e., as consumers) *and* internal (i.e., as employees) perceptions of the brand and influence the development of retailer brand equity. Frontline employees do not just view their retailer as a place of work, they also view their retailer as a place to shop.

2. Do patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs') perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?

By comparing two different types of frontline retail employees, PFREs' and non-PFREs' perceptions of retailer brand equity, this study seeks to illuminate the vital role that both internal and external perspectives play in building retailer brand equity. In doing so, this research allows for outlining the differences between two types of frontline retail employees and offering practical implications for marketing and human resources managers, who typically develop separately targeted brand strategies.

A review of retailer brand equity literature indicates retailers have evolved from transactional businesses to multi-sensory organizations (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004) that build and develop their own multi-dimensional brand equity (Anselmsson et al., 2017), which is influenced by internal and external stakeholders (Biedenbach and Manzhynski, 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016) and represents key drivers of a retailer's business success (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). Retailers build and invest in their brand equity to influence and persuade consumers (Gil-Saura et al., 2016), yet they must also invest in their employer brand equity to attract the best employees (Sivertzen et al., 2013). A review of extant literature reveals a wealth of retailer brand equity research examining consumer-based retailer brand equity (Arnett et al., 2003; Christodoulides and De Chernatony, 2010; Gil-Saura et al., 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016), limited research examining employee-based retailer brand equity (Dabholkar and Abston, 2008; King and Grace, 2009) and even fewer studies investigating frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). Therefore, this research highlights the PFRE because of their unharnessed purchasing power, their pivotal role in delivering consumer service, and the paucity of employee patronage and employee-based retailer brand equity research to date. Retail scholars and practitioners would benefit from learning more theoretically and empirically about employees

with multiple organizational roles (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012), including patronizing and non-patronizing frontline employees, and their perceptions of their retailer's brand equity.

The second research question is answered via the same quantitative study whereby the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is tested for differences in perceptions between PFREs and non-PFREs, via a multi-group analysis. There are three key findings. First, patronizing frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees' perceptions, but not significantly across all relationships. Of the sixteen relationships tested, four relationships are statistically significant. PFREs positively moderate the following two relationships: consumer-based retailer brand equity → integrated retailer brand equity and work demands → employee-based retailer brand equity. Interestingly, PFREs negatively moderate the following two relationships: employee-based retailer brand equity → integrated retailer brand equity and price/value → consumer-based retailer brand equity. Second, when comparing the consumer-based retailer brand equity factors that are most relevant to PFREs vs. non-PFREs, the results show both groups value the same factors: service quality, product quality, price/value and store image. However, there are differences when comparing the employee-based retailer brand equity factors that are most relevant to PFREs vs. non-PFREs. Therefore, the third finding is that PFREs place the most value on brand allegiance, skills development and brand consistent behaviour, whereas non-PFREs place the most value on brand allegiance, resume power and brand consistent behaviour. Thus, these findings illuminate the opportunity for retailers to leverage segmentation strategies to divide their frontline employees into smaller groups and use these insights to potentially enhance their employees' perceptions of their retailer brand.

1.9 Research Design, Methodology and Activities

The research design phase included several components, as outlined in Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2013) research design template, including: background, rationale, research aims, data, sampling, access, ethics, unit of analysis, analysis, process, practicalities and theory. A summary of the research design for this thesis is in Appendix C.

In order to effectively address the two proposed research questions a quantitative approach is utilized. An employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is

conceptualized, developed and tested. Measurement items were developed for each construct, drawing upon existing brand equity frameworks, results of a pilot study and feedback from an expert panel of judges. The framework was subsequently tested using survey data and analysed using partial least squares – structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3 statistical software package. The survey was conducted with frontline employees currently working in fashion retailers located in five major metropolitan areas across Canada. PLS-SEM enabled the testing of the model and a multi-group analysis. Eight hypotheses were tested. Finally, the results were interpreted, and conclusions were drawn.

The sequence of research activities undertaken within this study are summarized below.

1. Literature Review
2. Research Questions
3. Preliminary Research Model and Propositions
4. Survey Development
5. Pilot Study
6. Model Refinement and Research Hypotheses
7. Survey Refinement
8. Expert Panel
9. Data Collection
10. Data Analysis
11. Interpreting Results and Drawing Conclusions

1.10 Overview of Contributions of the Research

The results of this thesis are anticipated to make several contributions. The main contributions are to the employee-based brand equity, retailer brand equity, and employee patronage literature areas. High-level overviews of the conceptual, methodological, empirical and theoretical contributions are discussed, and the section concludes with highlights of the

key managerial implications (the research contributions and managerial implications are discussed in detail in Chapter Six).

1.10.1 Conceptual Contributions

This study makes two conceptual contributions. First, in reference to MacInnis' (2011) typology of conceptual contributions, this research takes an integrative view of retailer brand equity. This is accomplished by drawing upon existing consumer-based retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity measures, which were previously viewed as disparate but related research streams and integrating them into one new model (i.e., integrative framework). The proposed model takes an original approach by combining internal and external perceptions of frontline employees (i.e., dual stakeholder). This research illuminates how frontline employees' internal and external perceptions of a brand can be integrated into one model, allowing retail scholars and practitioners to examine these stakeholders' perceptions more closely and how they may influence and shape retailer brands. This research also demonstrates that the conceptualization of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity is much more complex than previously suggested.

Second, this thesis makes an advocating contribution. As per MacInnis' (2011) typology of conceptual contributions, MacInnis (2011) defines advocating as speaking in support of a particular view. Given the lack of research on the frontline retail employee in relation to their dual-stakeholder role as employee and consumer and their contribution to retailer brand equity, this research advances the retailer brand equity, employee-based brand equity and employee patronage literature areas and advocates for more research in these areas. Given the growing power and influence of retailer brands (Interbrand, 2019), a scholarly understanding of retailer brand equity across stakeholders, especially frontline employees, is essential to advance the retailer brand equity literature.

1.10.2 Methodological Contributions

This study makes three methodological contributions. First, the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is specified and empirically validated as a type II reflective-formative higher-order construct (also referred to as hierarchical component model HCM) using PLS-SEM. Despite their advantages, there are few PLS-SEM studies in the

retailing literature that utilize hierarchical component models (HCMs). Therefore, this study further develops the PLS-SEM methodology and the application of the latest evaluation criteria through the introduction of an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity HCM, opening the door to other employee-based retailer brand equity models that require higher levels of abstraction and constructs who may not contribute equally. Second, this study follows the most recent methods for assessing the model's out-of-sample predictive power using PLS-Predict (Sarstedt et al., 2019; Shmueli et al., 2019). Thus, this research contributes to the PLS-SEM literature via the additional analyses whose results allow for drawing conclusions that affect business practices and have managerial implications.

Conceptualizations of retailer brand equity typically involve first order structural equation models with parallel structures. With parallel structures, the model assumes each construct contributes equally to the overall retailer brand equity. Further, first order models do not allow for higher levels of abstraction. The third contribution involves the use of the embedded two stage approach, which is a technique to specify and estimate HCMs. Few retailer brand equity studies fully explain and describe the deployment of the embedded two-stage approach. Therefore, by doing so here, this study can support other researchers on a similar endeavour and facilitate scholars and/or retailers who may wish to replicate this study.

1.10.3 Empirical Contributions

This study makes three empirical contributions. First, this research validates an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model and identifies eleven integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) dimensions (four consumer-based and seven employee-based) and a multi-step structure whereby retailer trust partially mediates the relationship between integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty. Second, this is the first employee-based retailer brand equity model, to the author's knowledge, that focuses on frontline employees and integrates their internal (e.g., as employees) and external (i.e., as consumers) perceptions of the brand into one model. Third, this is the first retailer brand equity model, to the author's knowledge, to compare different employee characteristics. This study compares patronizing frontline employees with non-patronizing frontline employees by examining the moderating effect of patronizing frontline retail employees on the following relationships: consumer-based retailer brand equity and integrated retailer brand equity, employee-based retailer brand

equity and integrated retailer brand equity, integrated retailer brand equity and retailer trust and retailer trust and retailer loyalty in Canadian bricks and mortar fashion retailing.

1.10.4 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three theoretical contributions. First, this study extends and links employee patronage, retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity theories by introducing and operationalizing the dual stakeholder perspective. This research advances brand equity theory with the validation of an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model. This research is the first, to the author's knowledge, to bring together retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity streams through the theoretical lens of a dual stakeholder (i.e., employee-consumer), to identify and examine the factors that contribute to frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity. Second, theoretically this research provides a deeper understanding of the frontline fashion retail employee, an employee-consumer stakeholder whose perceptions of their retailer's brand equity offer valuable insights into an organization's internal and external brand building strategies and activities. Finally, this study introduces the variable of retailer trust into the dual stakeholder retailer brand equity model to extend our understanding of its mediating impact on the relationship between integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty.

1.10.5 Managerial Implications

This research acknowledges that in today's highly competitive marketplace, retailers now more than ever must prioritize measuring and monitoring their own brand equity as well as their competitors. Further, it was relatively recently White et al. (2013) determined that consumers do indeed perceive retailers as brands, which demonstrates brand equity research has not kept pace with industry practices. Thus, the findings from this study will assist managers in three ways.

First, retailers could benefit from adding this employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measurement into their portfolio of retailer metrics, to support a new way to periodically calculate and measure the retailer's true value creation.

Traditional retail metrics such as year-over-year growth and profitability are no longer relevant in today's complex retail environment (Deloitte, 2019). Therefore, retailers need to

understand what drives value for different stakeholders by taking a holistic, more comprehensive and inclusive approach to measuring performance (Deloitte, 2019). Troiville et al. (2019) found the measurement of retailer brand equity requires nuanced and retailer-specific dimensions. Thus, a more realistic approach to retailer brand equity measurement is to consider a variety of appropriate brand equity measures across different stakeholders (e.g., consumers, employees, suppliers) and retail contexts (e.g., price points, channels, product categories, sectors) (Davicik et al., 2015). The employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model proposed in this thesis could assist managers in measuring, monitoring and managing their frontline employees' perceptions of their brand equity over time, which goes beyond the traditional revenue and profitability metrics. Retailers can leverage these measures to benchmark progress (i.e., across territories, stores), make the appropriate adjustments and determine the financial value of goodwill, to support a more holistic approach to measuring and capturing the retailer's true value creation.

Second, adopting an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measure could encourage and enable marketing and human resources managers to work together to build a cohesive brand.

A study by i4cp entitled 'Reimagining Talent Acquisition: Mastering Employer Brand' surveyed more than 540 professionals and found that human resources and marketing departments collaborate on brand strategy in fewer than one-third (27.0%) of companies (Lykins, 2018). Yet, high-performance organizations are six-times more likely to have their human resources and marketing departments collaborating with each other, and 1.5-times more likely to share the responsibility of building and managing the employer brand together (Samdahl, 2019). While marketing managers may be more interested in the consumer-based brand equity dimensions and human resource managers may be more interested in the employee-based brand equity dimensions, management must acknowledge that all dimensions contribute to their retailer brand equity. Therefore, adopting the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measure could enable marketing and human resources managers to collaborate and positively contribute to the achievement of common organizational goals. Thus, the employee-consumer integrated brand equity model, when operationalized as a measurement tool can enable and encourage two previously disparate

and/or siloed departments, human resources and marketing, to work together and develop common brand building goals.

Third, the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model can guide and inform the allocation and prioritization of internal and external brand investments and activities.

It's more important than ever for retailers to have tools that guide and inform the allocation and prioritization of internal and external brand investments and activities. Through a hierarchy of importance this thesis identifies the key drivers that frontline employees perceive as key in building employee-based retailer brand equity. The findings are helpful to retailers in determining what marketing and human resources activities and investments should be prioritized with different stakeholders. Frontline employees of the fashion retailers in this study ranked the dimensions of retailer brand equity in the following order (most to least important): 1) service quality, 2) product quality, 3) brand allegiance, 4) price/value, 5) skills development, 6) brand consistent behaviour, 7) resume power, 8) brand endorsement, 9) internal advancement, 10) store image, and 11) work demands. The use of importance rankings on the various brand equity dimensions, tracked and managed over time, could help managers to pinpoint exactly where resources and investments need to be allocated across the brand.

1.11 Thesis Structure

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature. First, it defines the frontline retail employee in the context of fashion retail, and its place within a niche but relevant area of literature, employee patronage. It then examines internal brand management, which includes internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding literatures. The review of internal brand management concludes with a review of studies focusing on frontline retail employees in retailing. Brand equity is reviewed in depth, covering consumer-based, employee-based and retailer brand equity studies. It also examines the variables of retailer trust and retailer loyalty in the context of retailer brand equity. This is followed by an examination of operationalizing stakeholder theory, and its relevance to this study. The chapter closes with a summary of conclusions from the literature review, including calls for research, that helped to inform the hypotheses and conceptual framework for this thesis.

Chapter Three connects the research questions to the proposed conceptual framework, discussed the theoretical foundation, the development of the conceptual model and the subsequent hypotheses.

Chapter Four explains the research methodology and design. It opens with the author's philosophical assumptions that underpin this study, followed by a description of the research design and methodological choices made in this study. This is followed by the research method, including approach and context. The process taken to design and develop the research instrument is described including survey design, initial item pool, measurement and expert panel session. The sample, testing process, limitations of the research method and data collection process are then discussed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis plan and rationale for the chosen analysis method (PLS-SEM) and a description of the advanced data analyses (multi-group analysis) that will be conducted in this study.

Chapter Five explains how the quantitative data are organized and analysed and presents the results. This includes results from each of Hair et al.'s (2014) eight stage systematic procedure for applying PLS-SEM, including assessing the measurement and structural models. The chapter concludes with a summary of key findings.

Chapter Six presents the contributions to knowledge, including conceptual, methodological, empirical and theoretical contributions. This is followed by managerial implications, limitations of the research, opportunities for future research and concluding remarks.

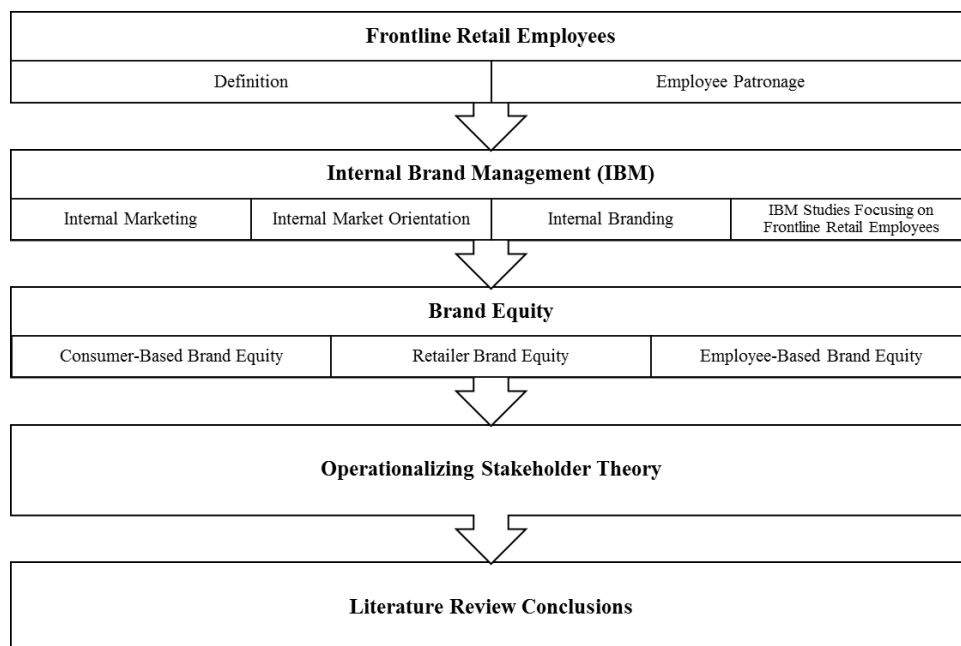
2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of the relevant literature that establishes the theoretical background of this thesis. As explained in chapter one, this thesis is situated at the intersection of two areas of scholarship: 1) marketing; and 2) organizational behaviour. The thesis draws on marketing literature including consumer-based brand equity and retailer brand equity, whereby the consumer is the key stakeholder. This thesis draws on organizational behaviour literature including internal brand management (internal marketing, internal market orientation, internal branding), employee-based brand equity and employee patronage, whereby the employee is the key stakeholder. This study operationalizes stakeholder theory as an organizing framework, as it focuses on a critical but often overlooked stakeholder, the frontline retail employee who offers a dual stakeholder perspective.

Through this literature review, the key constructs are identified, and relevant literature is drawn upon to develop an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity conceptual framework, the respective research questions and hypotheses that form the basis of this thesis. Figure 2 outlines the steps taken to review the literature.

Figure 2: Literature Review Process



The chapter opens with a definition of the frontline retail employee and their evolving role in the retailing industry. Next the frontline retail employee is examined within a scant but relevant area of literature, employee patronage. This is followed by an examination of internal brand management (IBM) literature, which is an overarching term used to encompass internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding literatures. Next, key IBM studies are compared that focus on frontline retail employees. Existing brand equity models are then reviewed, including key consumer-based, retailer-based brand equity (including retailer trust and retailer loyalty variables), and employee-based brand equity studies, including the key constructs relevant to this study. This is followed by an examination of how stakeholder theory is operationalized, which reinforces the importance of viewing organizations through more than a singular lens. The chapter closes with a summary of conclusions from the literature review that helped to inform the research questions, hypotheses and conceptual framework for this thesis.

2.2 Frontline Retail Employees

Frontline employees are defined in a variety of ways: according to their skill levels; in relation to the work they perform; and, in relation to the brand they work for. One type of frontline employee is a less skilled individual; someone who simply interfaces directly with consumers (e.g., cashier) (Schepers et al., 2012). Another type of frontline employee is a more skilled individual; someone who is strategic and has specific work to perform along with performance objectives (e.g., professional salesperson) (Plouffe et al., 2016). Gelb and Rangarajan (2014) define a third type of frontline employee; someone who works in retail and is an integral ‘element’ of the brand (i.e., when they interact with consumers via touchpoints) and an ‘ambassador’ of the brand (i.e., when they represent the brand to consumers). Gelb and Rangarajan’s (2014) elevated definition positions frontline employees in relation to *the brand they work for*, rather than in relation to *the work they perform*. Further, Ackfeldt and Coote (2005) describe frontline retail employees as young and inexperienced workers who must span boundaries and fulfil multiple roles while achieving productivity expectations. Drawing on Gelb and Rangarajan’s (2014) and Ackfeldt and Coote’s (2005) definitions, frontline retail employees represent critical stakeholders who support their employers in achieving their strategic brand and performance objectives. Therefore, for the purposes of

this thesis, the frontline employee is defined in relation to the work that they perform (i.e., employed by a retailer and is engaged in selling activities), in relation to the retailer brand they represent (i.e., responsible for delivering the retailer's brand promise) and the expectations they are given (i.e., expected to contribute to the achievement of the retailer's strategic brand and performance objectives).

Although its origins are not clear, the popular phrase, "the customer is always right" is often attributed to Harry Selfridge or Marshall Field in the early 1900's, both founders of famous eponymous department stores based in London and Chicago, respectively (The Phrase Finder, n.d.). More than one hundred years later, many retailers still abide by this motto. Along the same vein, marketing research of the past thirty years has mostly focused on consumer-centric studies, driven by marketing exchange theory (Kotler, 1972; Bagozzi, 1975) whereby the consumer's power is acknowledged since they make the final purchase decision. It is not surprising retailers have been so focused on the consumer. Consumers' purchases represent a main source of revenue for retailers. According to Canadian Industry Statistics (2017), clothing stores' sales (i.e., consumers' purchases of products and services) represented 99.2% of clothing retailers' total operating revenues, while other sources accounted for only 0.8%. However, the consumers who purchase these products and services are not all externally facing individuals. Employees can also be consumers and contribute to their organization's revenue by purchasing their products and services. Thus, the tides have recently shifted, in practice and in theory. Retailers and academics are realizing the value of another critical stakeholder, the frontline employee.

Retailers are taking actions to acknowledge the importance of frontline employees. A recent survey by Grail Research/Mindtree found that 43.0% of shoppers who interact with frontline employees are more likely to make a purchase, and these shoppers were 12.0% more likely to visit the store again if the interactions with the frontline employees were positive (Petro, 2019). In today's competitive retail environment retailers recognize their frontline employees are no longer just 'cashiers' or 'sales associates', they are 'shopper concierges' (Petro, 2019). As a result, retailers are creating new, and seemingly empowered job titles to better align with their responsibilities. The typical retail worker of the past has been elevated to Starbuck's 'baristas', Sephora's 'make-up artists', Apple's 'geniuses', Aritzia's 'brand ambassadors' or Abercrombie and Fitch's 'models.' This trend is particularly salient in the

retail fashion industry. Lululemon, a successful Canadian fashion retailer who brought yoga wear into the mainstream, is an exemplar of this trend. Their employees not only perform traditional retail functions such as selling merchandise, stocking inventory and providing customer service, they are also product knowledge experts, and they educate, encourage and inspire their consumers to live active and healthy lifestyles. Lululemon refers to their frontline employees as ‘educators.’ In a recent job posting, they describe the role as follows:

“Educators at lululemon athletica do just that! They educate! Their main role is to effectively educate our guests on the fabrics, features, fit and function of our product, our culture and the communities we belong to. Our goal is to have guests leave our stores having learned something, rather than having purchased something. By educating guests we empower them to make decisions for themselves based on the facts that we offer them. The guesswork is taken out of shopping for customers, and a ‘Wow! It’s You!’ guest experience is created, leaving customers with the knowledge to educate others on behalf of lululemon athletica. Authentic conversations are key to delivering the ultimate guest experience by relaying your experiences with lululemon products to the guest. This is truly the most important role in our company, and we rely on our educators to authentically share our culture and brand with their community” (lululemon, 2019).

Lululemon also dedicates a section of their website to ‘community’ where 1,270 of their global ‘store ambassadors’ are profiled, allowing consumers to “vote for their favourite home-town heroes and support their personal athletic endeavours” (lululemon, 2019). The fashion retailer does not include information on hourly rates in the job description, although it does indicate a completion of high school education is preferred, and “everyone must work one weekend day” (lululemon, 2019), which infers the job pays approximately minimum wage.

Today, frontline retail employees are feeling more empowered (Gill-Simmen et al., 2018) due to their new job titles and responsibilities, therefore it’s important to understand what motivates them to seek retail jobs that are notorious for low pay and poor working conditions (Williams and Connell, 2010). One such motivating factor is being part of what the frontline employee perceives to be a ‘cool’, desirable or aspirational brand (DelVecchio et

al., 2007; Williams and Connell, 2010). The perception of ‘cool’ is cultivated from the consumer’s experience with the brand and their perceptions of the brand’s value and reputation; as a shopper who experiences the retailer’s products, services, store atmosphere and customer service. Wanting to be part of that ‘cool’ brand may result in a consumer seeking employment with the retailer where they shop. It is common practice in North America for fashion retailers to recruit potential employees from their most loyal consumers (i.e., the people who are already buying and wearing their products) (Williams and Connell, 2010) and there is scholarly evidence that many consumers want to become frontline employees of their preferred retailers (Wang et al., 2017).

Retailers are increasingly acknowledging the importance of understanding the link between *employee* satisfaction and *customer* satisfaction. This is because, in retail’s ultra-competitive landscape and multi-channel environment, the lines between consumers and employees are increasingly blurred. Just as consumers use social media platforms and other online forums to review retailers’ products and services, frontline employees now also publicly review the strengths and weaknesses of their employers via websites such as glassdoor.com and indeed.com. A recent study of several large employers and industries (including retail), commissioned by Glassdoor (2019), found a strong connection between employee satisfaction (via online reviews on Glassdoor) and customer satisfaction (via the American Customer Satisfaction Index), where a 1-star improvement in an employer’s rating (out of 5) is associated with a 1.3-point increase in customer satisfaction (out of 100) (Zhao and Chamberlain, 2019). The study also found that “...maintaining a satisfied workforce – particularly among customer-facing roles – should be considered a key prerequisite to delivering great customer service” (Zhao and Chamberlain, 2019, p. 3). The two employee review exemplars below demonstrate and illuminate the blurred lines between consumer and frontline retail employee, in the case of employees reviewing two well established fashion retailers, Nordstrom and Nike, respectively:

*“For a student working at Nordstrom this would be ideal:
flexible hours, decent pay and you get to see the latest fashions.
The people and discount are bonuses too!” (Indeed.com, 2018a).*

“(Working there) can sometimes be fun, not worth the money.

You get to be part of the NIKE brand which is cool.” (Indeed.com, 2018b)

In these examples, the employees directly mention their perceptions of the *retailer as an employer* (e.g., “flexible hours, decent pay”, “sometimes...fun, not worth the money”) as well as their perceptions of the *retailer as a brand* or as a *place to shop* (e.g., “get to see the latest fashions...discounts are bonuses too”, “you get to be part of the NIKE brand which is cool”). Thus, these two examples help to also illustrate the dual role of frontline employees as both retail workers and consumers.

As retail practitioners begin to understand and appreciate the unleashed value of their frontline employees, academic studies exploring frontline employees have also gained momentum, particularly with top rated marketing journals (Plouffe et al., 2016). The literature on frontline employees in retailing, however, is disparate and does not reside within one research area. Rather, it spans a broad spectrum of business literature including services marketing, retailing, banking, leadership, organizational behaviour, corporate social responsibility, hospitality and tourism management, marketing, sales management and human resource management research areas. The literature on frontline employees also covers many topics of inquiry including: sales performance (Dwyer et al., 1987; Evans et al., 2012), employee citizenship behaviours (King and Grace, 2010; Luu Trong, 2018), frontline employee engagement (Qi et al., 2018), frontline employee patronage (Fram and McCarthy, 2003; Fram and McCarthy, 2004; Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; DeMotta and Sen, 2017), impact of uncivil managers on employees (Choi, 2008; Stoverink et al., 2014; Tepper et al., 2008); impact of uncivil shoppers’ behaviour on frontline employees and retailers (Gaucher and Chebat, 2019); frontline employees and corporate social responsibility (Park and Levy, 2014; Edinger-Schons et al., 2019) and the influence of frontline employees on consumers (McFarland et al., 2006; Plouffe et al., 2014; Plouffe et al., 2016).

For the purposes of this research one area of frontline employee literature is explored in depth, employee patronage. Employee patronage is critical to this thesis, as this area of literature lays the groundwork for understanding the concept of employees as consumers and presents an opportunity to make a critical distinction between two under-explored types of

frontline employees: patronizing frontline retail employees (PFREs) and non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs). Section 2.3 takes a chronological approach to critically reviewing the extant employee patronage literature.

2.3 Employee Patronage

Berry (1981) proposed the idea that employees can also be consumers. The concept of *employees as consumers* acknowledges employees as multi-dimensional individuals; they view their organizations with an internal lens (i.e., as employees), and purchase products from their employer, thus also viewing their organizations with an external lens (i.e., as consumers). This phenomenon is particularly salient when applied to a fashion retail organization since the offering of discounts as part of an employee's total compensation or the mandate to wear company clothing may motivate employees to purchase the company's products. Berry (1981) spurred other researchers to further explore the idea of *employees as consumers*.

In 1996, Lusch, Boyt and Schuler coined the phrase *employee patronage* to describe the phenomenon of employees as consumers. In their seminal empirical study, they investigated this concept by examining the role of social controls and employee socialization in developing patronage in a comprehensive health care services setting. Their study found that social controls (i.e., informal work norms and behaviours) can lead to increased employee socialization (i.e., organizational image), which in turn can lead to increased employee patronage (Lusch et al., 1996). Although the health care industry is markedly different than retail, they do have elements in common. For example, all employees within each industry have the potential to become consumers of the company where they work. In healthcare, the employee has the potential to purchase health care services. While in the retail industry the employee has the potential to purchase the organization's products and/or services. Lusch et al.'s (1996) study illuminated the need to further research in this area, more specifically to examine employees as both internal consumers and external consumers.

Fram and McCarthy's (2003) trade article entitled 'From Employee to Brand Champion', which cited Lusch et al. (1996), conducted a study of 1,110 individuals who were employed at organizations across a variety of industries including household appliances, bakery, snack food, meats and seafood, cleaning aids and health and beauty. They found that

internal marketing efforts led to increased employee purchases, ‘brand champion’ behaviours and company profits (Fram and McCarthy, 2003; Fram and McCarthy, 2004). They also examined the relationship between employee brand loyalty (typically a factor in measuring brand equity, as discussed in Section 2.5) and the employee becoming a brand champion. Although their study was not exclusively frontline employees, they also found employee discount programs do not alone lead to improved employee brand loyalty. More importantly, their research elevated the concept of employee patronage to an even greater height, by opening the door for organizations to think about their employees as *brand champions* who not only demonstrate brand-loyal purchase behaviour to their employer’s products but also influence and champion others to buy their employer’s products, which ultimately becomes a signal of an organization’s success. In the same year, Babin and Boles (1996) pointed out that frontline retail employees are critical to a retailer’s success. They acknowledged the need for more scholarly research in this area, especially a closer examination of the dual role (i.e., as employees and consumers) of frontline employees.

Dabholkar and Abston (2008) set out to address this substantial gap in the employee patronage literature and were the first to investigate the dual role of customer contact employees as a source of competitive advantage. In their conceptual paper, they defined employee patronage as “purchases made by employees from their organization on a consistent or significant basis” (Dabholker and Abston, 2008, p.961). They proposed a conceptual framework that focused on the consumer contact employee’s dual role of employee and consumer and drawing upon internal brand management (Berry, 1981) for enhancing competitive advantage. They proposed that firm-controlled aspects (i.e., organizational factors, financial internal marketing, non-financial internal marketing) contribute to employee aspects (i.e., job satisfaction, employee patronage, job performance) which enhance consumer outcomes (i.e., perceived service quality, customer satisfaction) and directly and indirectly lead to organizational outcomes (i.e., long-term relationships with employees, profits, long-term relationships with consumers) (Dabholkar and Abston, 2008). Although they did not empirically test the model, they provided a starting point for further examination of employee patronage, an area “...in dire need of further research... (and one where) tremendous opportunities for future research exist” (Dabholkar and Abston, 2008, p. 965).

Up until this point, scholarly studies on employee patronage have taken a quantitative or conceptual approach and are located primarily within the marketing management domain. Williams and Connell (2010), both sociologists, used a qualitative approach and examined the ‘worker-consumer’ within the phenomenon of luxury retailers hiring class-privileged workers for low pay and few benefits. They conducted interviews with frontline employees of upscale fashion retailers and drawing on Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of habitus, uncovered deep rooted labour practices and social consequences of aesthetic labour. Their interviews revealed four key strategies used by retailers to ensure their frontline employees possess the personality, style and ‘aesthetic sensibilities’ that match those of the retailer’s brand: 1) vetting for creative talents (i.e., style, imagination), 2) hiring loyal consumers, 3) offering merchandise discounts in lieu of higher wages, and 4) elongating the application and interview process, and once hired, providing random schedules (William and Connell, 2010). Talking directly to the frontline workers themselves and identifying retailers’ strategies to recruit frontline employees with the ‘right look’, provided an alternate and raw view of employee patronage through a sociologist’s lens.

Fifteen years after Lusch et al.’s (1996) call for more research on employee patronage, Abston and Kupritz (2011) acknowledged the dual role of retail employees as consumers and examined the antecedents and consequences of employee patronage. Their study included frontline employees of a national big box retailer and they examined three variables: service climate, organizational culture and internal marketing. They extended Fram and McCarthy’s (2003) work by adding turnover intentions as an outcome of employee patronage. Whereas Dobholkar and Abston (2008) conceptualized a link between employee patronage and long-term relationships, Abston and Kupritz (2011) extended their work by empirically confirming employee patronage as an antecedent of employee turnover intentions. In summary, Abston and Kupritz (2011) found empirical evidence to support service climate as an antecedent of employee patronage and turnover intention as a consequence of employee patronage. Their results offered valuable insights for retail scholars and practitioners and laid new groundwork for scholars to examine the causes and effects of employee patronage, in retailing and other industries.

Anaza and Rutherford (2012) observed “...a preponderance of evidence from practitioners continues to invoke the need for academic researchers to study frontline

employees in multifaceted roles as they relate to the level of employee patronage” (p. 341). Building on Dabholkar and Abston’s (2008) and Fram and McCarthy’s (2003) research, Anaza and Rutherford (2012) drew upon exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to explain the interrelationships between firm level factors (i.e., internal marketing) and employee level factors (i.e., employee patronage). The results of their empirical study of 319 frontline employees showed strong support for these relationships; internal marketing is a predictor of employee patronage, job satisfaction is a predictor of employee patronage, employee patronage significantly and positively affects employee engagement and job satisfaction is a predictor of employee engagement (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012). These findings are important for three reasons: first, they advanced the overall knowledge within the employee patronage literature; second, they validated the interrelationships between internal marketing, job satisfaction, employee patronage and employee engagement; and, third, they operationalized internal marketing as a multi-dimensional construct with five dimensions including empowerment, recognition, remuneration, internal communication and training and development.

In summary, employee patronage has been studied from a variety of perspectives, from boosting sales and profits and creating a competitive advantage to enhancing the organization’s brand, improving job satisfaction, reducing turnover intention and increasing employee loyalty and engagement. At the turn of the 21st century, as practitioners began to re-strategize their marketing efforts to include internal stakeholders (Mitchell, 2002) scholarly research on employee patronage also gained momentum. Despite calls for future research from 1996-2012 and empirical evidence showing strong support for the interrelationships between internal marketing and employee’s propensity to purchase its company’s products and/or services, there has been a dearth of employee patronage scholarly research since then. Although previous researchers’ calls for more research to examine employee patronage more deeply went unheeded, an interest in the frontline employee and employee patronage remains (DeMotta and Sen, 2017). Recent research on frontline employees has shifted towards an emphasis on new conceptualizations of internal marketing, employee engagement, employee endorsements, brand ambassadorship and organizational commitment. These are all areas worthy of scholarly inquiry, however the retail literature continues to lack a comprehensive understanding of employee patronage (i.e., employees’ roles as consumers). It is, however,

encouraging to see a stronger emphasis on scholarly articles that focus on the frontline employee, a valuable stakeholder for retail organizations. This is most often manifested in the topic of internal brand management. Thus, a critical review of the key literature within internal brand management is conducted in the next section.

2.4 Internal Brand Management

Internal brand management (IBM) has emerged as an integral part of an organization's overall brand management strategy (King and Grace, 2009), and is situated within the organizational behaviour area of scholarship. IBM's roots can be traced to Adams' (1963) management-based equity theory, which explains employees' perceptions of fairness within the employee-organization relationship in terms of inputs and outputs. According to equity theory, employees evaluate their contributions or work effort (i.e., inputs) against what they receive from the organization in the form of rewards (i.e., outputs). If there is balance (i.e., equity) employees will feel a sense of job satisfaction (Huseman and Hatfield, 1990). If there is imbalance (i.e., inequity), employees will feel a sense of dissonance and/or job dissatisfaction (Pritchard, 1969). Accordingly, equity theory draws on exchange (Blau, 1964), dissonance and social comparison theories (Huseman et al., 1987) as well as distributive justice (fairness) theory (Huppertz et al., 1978).

While many scholars and managers believe *the brand* primarily represents the relationship that it has with its consumers, Jacobs (2003) acknowledges the importance both consumers and employees play in brand management strategy. In this sense, the brand should represent the relationship an organization has with its consumers *and* employees (Jacobs, 2003; King and Grace, 2009). In Porricelli et al.'s, (2014) study on the antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour in retailing, they concluded *internal brand management* is fundamental to a retailer's brand building efforts.

Simply defined, internal brand management (IBM) is managing the brand with a focus on its internal stakeholders (i.e., employees) (Piehler et al., 2018). This contrasts with the practice of brand management, whereby organizations manage their brand with a focus on external stakeholders (i.e., consumers). Thus, the goal of IBM "...is to influence employee behaviour to deliver the organization's brand promise, however, to do this successfully, more effort is required on behalf of marketers than simply giving the employee brand related

information” (King and Grace, 2009, p. 140). In Piehler et al.’s (2018) introduction to the Journal of Brand Management’s special issue on internal brand management they differentiate external brand management from internal brand management; the former represents an outside-in perspective or external (i.e., market or consumer) orientation and the latter represents an inside-out perspective or internal (i.e., employee) orientation. They note despite management’s interest and investment in building strong internal brands, there remains an overall lack of conceptual and empirical literature in this area, especially when compared to the vast amount of research available on externally focused or consumer-centric brand management studies (Piehler et al., 2018). Although there is a lack of literature on IBM per se, there are parallel research areas that encompass a variety of overlapping terminology and research streams, including: internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding. These overlapping research streams have much in common as they each examine the management of an organization’s brand in the context of internal stakeholders (i.e., employees). Thus, internal brand management, including internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding are important and relevant literature areas for this study.

This thesis demarcates internal brand management as the broad or umbrella research area that encompasses internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding (see Figure 3). As such, this section of the literature review is structured to reflect the internal brand management domain.

Figure 3: Internal Brand Management Literature Structure



Together these highly overlapping research areas cover a variety of industries from manufacturing, banking and retailing to hospitality (i.e., hotels), insurance, and healthcare. Brand identity is also a central theme that binds these concepts together. Brand identity is

defined as "...the concept that the image of a brand established in the mind of the customer is determined by the identity of the brand from which the brand image emanates" (Burmam et al., 2009a). To manage the scope of this study, this section of the literature review will explore the roots of IBM and define it through brief discussions on internal marketing (IM), internal market orientation (IMO) and internal branding (IB). Then, a selection of seminal IBM studies that focus on *frontline employees* within the *retailing industry* are examined in depth. These IBM studies are compared, critiqued and contrasted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the key dimensions of internal brand management and frontline employees' influence in building an organization's brand, which provides the appropriate background for the subsequent literature review on employee-based brand equity (Section 2.5.3).

2.4.1 Internal Marketing

More than a decade after Adams (1963), the concept of internal marketing (IM) was introduced by Berry et al. (1976), a behavioural-instrumental approach to marketing strategy which acknowledges the importance of internal stakeholders (i.e., employees) to brand building efforts. Early conceptualizations of IM advocated that companies deliver clear communications to their frontline employees as a way of satisfying their needs (Sasser and Arbeit, 1976), and enhancing and motivating them to deliver superior customer service (Berry et al., 1976; Berry, 1981, 1987). IM continued to evolve throughout the next decade and was highly influenced by well-established external brand management practices, which were the norm at the time. This led to the service-value chain approach which focuses on managing internal relationships between co-workers (Gummesson, 1987). In the 1990's Berry and Parasuraman (1991) defined IM as, "...attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining qualified employees through job-products that satisfy their needs. Internal marketing is the philosophy of treating employees as customers..." (p. 151). Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) define internal marketing as a "planned effort using a marketing-like approach...through a process of creating motivated and customer-oriented employees" (p. 454). Instead of focusing all marketing efforts on external stakeholders (i.e., consumers), these scholars advocated organizations to include internal stakeholders (i.e., employees) in their marketing efforts whereby benefits such as job satisfaction and customer satisfaction would result. Gounaris (2006) conducted a thorough review of IM literature and noted a small proportion of the

studies from the 1970-2005 were empirical. The work is mostly normative and applied to a small number of companies (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000). These observations about the nature of the literature provide support to why IM scholars to date have been unable to establish a unanimous definition of IM (Gounaris, 2006).

2.4.2 Internal Market Orientation

The concept of IM paved the way for the introduction of internal market orientation (IMO). Contrary to IMO, market-orientation (MO) emphasizes a consumer-centric approach to marketing and branding strategies and assumes the consumer is the most influential stakeholder (Narver and Slater, 1990). IMO scholars, however, do not assume the employee (vs. the consumer) is the most influential stakeholder. Rather, IMO allows for symmetry of orientation (Piercy, 1995), thereby including internal stakeholders into the marketing mix to enhance the organization's ability to consistently satisfy external stakeholders' (i.e., consumers') needs and deliver against sales and profit objectives (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). Thus, IMO practices take the conventional marketing mix and apply them inwardly to internal stakeholders, redefining employees' roles and improving organizational effectiveness (Varey, 1995). Lings and Greenley (2005) suggest that having an IMO results in positive consequences for the firm and its employees, just as MO has positive consequences for the firm and its external consumers. They explain that, "IMO crosses marketing and HRM functional boundaries and aims to create a balance between employees' perceptions of what they put into the job and their perceptions of what they get out of the job" (Lings and Greenley, 2005, p. 291). Lings and Greenley (2005) validated the first multi-dimensional construct of IMO, based on a sample of 3500 UK retail managers, including supermarkets, department stores, clothing retailers, and health and beauty retailers. Their measure is comprised of five dimensions (formal face-to-face information generation, formal written information generation, responsiveness, informal information generation, information dissemination) and it resulted in positive consequences towards customer satisfaction, relative competitive position, staff attitudes, staff retention and staff compliance. Despite the scholarly and practical interest in IM and IMO, most IMO studies to date are conceptual in nature (Wieseke et al., 2009; Anaza and Rutherford, 2012) and lack empirical validation (Gounaris, 2006).

2.4.3 Internal Branding

The internal branding concept, first introduced by Keller (1999) and Thomson et al. (1999), was modernized and conceptualized by Burmann and Zeplin (2005) as brand-centred human resources activities, brand communications and brand leadership. It is considered a sub-set of internal marketing (Du Preez et al., 2017). The definitions of internal branding vary from it being *a process* to align employees' behaviours and communications with the corporate brand's identity (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006), *a behaviour* that employees must adopt that is consistent with the corporate brand (Henkel et al., 2007), to a *set of activities* performed by a company to ensure "intellectual and emotional staff buy-in" (Thomson et al., 1999, p. 55). Punjaisri and Wilson, (2007) refer to internal branding as a means to develop a strong corporate brand. The definition of internal branding continues to evolve. Saleem and Iglesias's (2016) systematic review of the internal branding literature from 1997-2015 acknowledged the fragmented nature of this field and the lack of a widely accepted or comprehensive definition, which has hindered the development of scholarly research on internal branding. They acknowledge the complexity of the brand management process and the evolution of the brand from consumer-centric to its co-creation by multiple stakeholders (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). Through their comprehensive review of the literature they identified five key components of the internal branding process, including: brand ideologies (i.e., vision, mission, values); brand leadership (i.e., leaders demonstrating the brand values); brand-centred human resources management (i.e., recruitment and training); internal brand communication (i.e., seamless communication across all stakeholders); and internal brand communities (i.e., platforms to foster sharing of brand values and ideas) (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). This led to the development of their proposed updated definition of internal branding, "...the process through which organizations make a company-wide effort within a supportive culture to integrate brand ideologies, leadership, HRM, internal brand communications and internal brand communities as a strategy to enable employees to consistently co-create brand value with multiple stakeholders" (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016, p. 50). In Schmidt, Nicholas and Iglesias' (2020) call for papers in the Journal of Product and Brand Management's special issue "Internal Branding: In Search of a New Paradigm", they suggest that despite the importance of the field and its increasing theoretical robustness, knowledge on internal branding remains fragmented (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016).

2.4.4 IBM Studies with Frontline Employees in Retailing

While studies on internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding laid the foundation for an understanding of how organizations in general enable their employees to co-create brand value with multiple stakeholders, for the purposes of this thesis it is critical to understand how frontline employees working at retailers play a key role in building their retailer's brand. A wide range of more recent scholarly studies have investigated the effect of IMO on frontline employees in various sectors including financial services (Bouranta et al., 2005; Farzad et al., 2008), business-to-business service firms (Lindsey Hall et al., 2016) and professional service firms (Schulz, Martin and Meyer, 2017). Lings and Greenley (2005) study focused on retail managers. Studies that investigate retail frontline employees are relevant to this thesis, thus, three contemporary empirical IBM studies focusing on *frontline employees* within the context of the *retailing industry* are now compared, critiqued and contrasted. By doing so, the key dimensions of internal brand management are identified and the role that frontline employees' play in building their retailer's brand can be more clearly understood. This, in turn, provides an appropriate backdrop for the proceeding literature review on employee-based brand equity in Section 2.5.3.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

A summary of these three contemporary empirical IBM studies focusing on *frontline employees* within the context of the *retailing industry* are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of IBM Studies Focusing on Frontline Employees in Retailing

Authors	Focus of Study	Country	Perspective	Retail Sector	Empirical	Antecedents	Key Variables	Mediators	Moderators	Dependent Variable
Matanda and Ndubisi (2013)	Moderating role of employee-perceived goal congruence on the link between internal branding, internal customer orientation and employee attitudes and behavioural intention	Australia	Frontline Employees	Housewares and gifts	Yes	N/A	Internal customer orientation, internal branding	Person-organization fit	Employee-perceived goal congruence	Employee intention to stay
Porricelli et al. (2014)	Antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour in retailing	USA	Frontline Employees	Grocery	Yes	Internal brand management (Brand identity, Brand leadership, Brand communication), Brand commitment, Job satisfaction	N/A	N/A	N/A	Brand citizenship behaviour (Brand acceptance, Brand development, Brand proselytization)
Du Preez et al. (2017)	Outcomes of internal brand management	South Africa, USA	Frontline Employees	Financial Services, Telecommunications, Grocery Retail		N/A	Internal brand management (Brand identity, Brand communication, Brand leadership)	Job satisfaction, Brand commitment	N/A	Intention to Stay, Brand citizenship behaviour

Matanda and Ndubisi (2013) investigated the moderating role of employee-perceived goal congruence and the link between internal branding, internal consumer orientation (i.e., how employees uphold organizational brand values (de Chernatony et al., 2006)), and person-organization fit on employees' intentions to stay with the retailer. They tested their model with 182 full-time frontline employees of an Australian housewares and gifts retailer. Their results provided theoretical and empirical evidence where internal branding and internal communication had significant positive effects on frontline employees' intentions to stay with the organization. Their research also determined person-organization fit had a partial mediation effect on the relationship between internal consumer orientation, internal branding and employee intention to stay. Finally, the study demonstrated the moderating effects of perceived goal congruence on the relationship of internal branding and internal consumer orientation with person-organization fit (Matanda and Ndubisi, 2013). Their study addresses a gap in the literature and reinforces the importance for retailers to operationalize internal brand management strategies into their business practices, because by doing so they have the opportunity to potentially enhance their frontline employees' brand attitudes and behaviours towards the organization's brand and their retention and commitment to the organization (Matanda and Ndubisi, 2013). Their research also substantiates the need for marketing/brand managers (who typically manage the external brand management process) and human resources managers (who typically manage the internal brand management process) to collaborate and ensure their frontline employees' (who have direct contact with consumers) are treated with the same respect as external consumers, thus enhancing the alignment of frontline employee and organization goals and the employees' commitment to the retailer.

Building on Matanda and Ndubisi's (2013) insights into employee attitudes and behaviours (i.e., person-organization fit), Porricelli et al. (2014) investigated the antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour in a retailing environment. Brand citizenship behaviour is exemplified in the concepts of 'brand ambassadors' (Vallaster and de Chernotony, 2006) and 'brand champions' (Fram and McCarthy, 2003), as previously discussed in Section 2.3. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) describe brand citizenship behaviours as employees 'living the brand'. Brand citizenship behaviour is based on the theory of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), a term coined by Bateman and Organ (1983) that refers to employees'

'supra-role' behaviours that are not prescribed; these behaviours go beyond the roles and duties outlined in employees' job descriptions and are valued by their supervisors.

Podsakoff et al. (2000), in their review of the literature, identified seven types of organizational citizenship behaviours: helping behaviour, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue and self-development. Thus, as an extension of OCB, brand citizenship behaviour is an important area of study, but it has largely been ignored in retailing. Porricelli et al. (2014) developed a theoretical model that proposed two employee characteristics (brand commitment, job satisfaction) and one leadership value (internal brand management, through brand commitment) are antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour. Their model also tested Burmann et al.'s (2009b) three component model of brand citizenship behaviour that is conceptualized as brand acceptance, brand development and brand proselytization. Porricelli et al. (2014) tested their theoretical model for the antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour on 241 frontline retail employees (including associates and managers) of a well-known USA-based grocery chain. Their results confirm brand commitment, job satisfaction and internal brand management are antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour, which also aligns with the work of Arnett et al., (2002). However, contrary to Burmann et al. (2009b), Porricelli et al. (2014) found that brand acceptance and brand development, but not brand proselytization, are components of brand citizenship behaviour. Since Porricelli et al.'s (2014) model was tested in grocery retailing, these results cannot be generalized across all retail categories. Their study also found that if retailers increase their internal brand management efforts, frontline employees' brand citizenship behaviours will increase, thus, confirming internal brand management practices are fundamental to a retailer's brand building efforts (Porricelli et al., 2014). Similar to Matanda and Ndubisi's (2013) study, Porricelli et al.'s (2014) results also illuminates the need for marketing, human resources and store management leaders to work together and deliver aligned communications. Finally, this study was the first to examine internal brand management and brand citizenship behaviours across different types of frontline retail employees (e.g., part-time vs. full-time; associate vs. manager). Their study found full-time frontline employees and managers demonstrated higher levels of job satisfaction, brand commitment, brand communication and brand citizenship behaviours, compared to part-time frontline employees and non-managers. Not surprisingly, managers had higher levels of

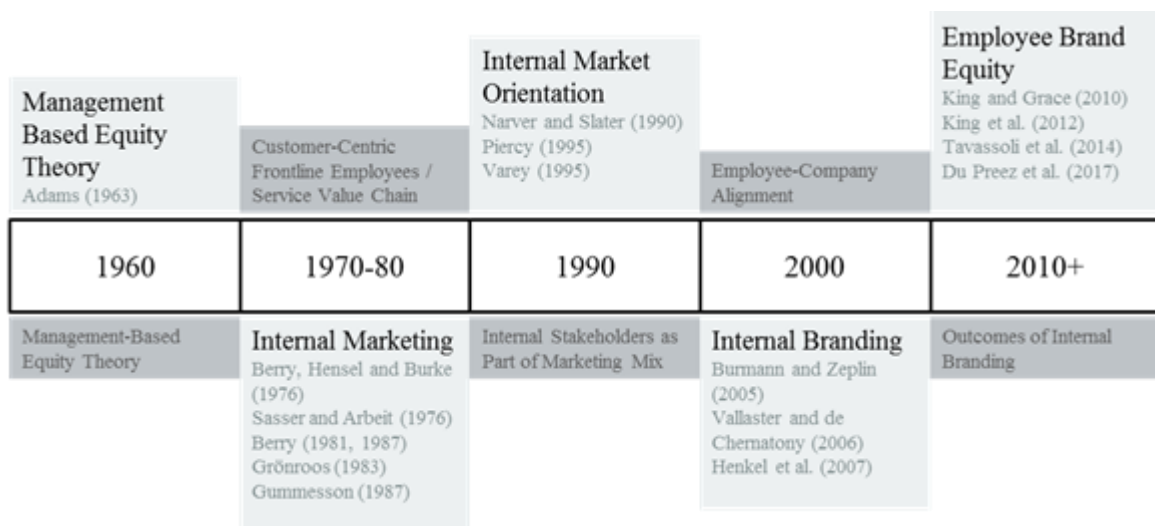
brand identity and brand leadership. Interestingly, frontline employees who interacted with consumers more frequently had higher levels of brand leadership, compared to frontline employees with infrequent consumer interaction (Porricelli et al., 2014). This novel approach of comparing different types of frontline employees inspired the decision to compare patronizing frontline retail employees and non-patronizing frontline retail employees within this thesis.

The Du Preez et al. (2017) study examines the impact of internal brand management on employees' intention to stay and brand citizenship behaviours through brand commitment and job satisfaction, drawing on previous internal brand management research conducted by Porricelli et al. (2014) and Du Preez and Bendixen (2015). Du Preez et al. (2017) used a case method sampling approach, including three case studies: a financial services firm in South Africa, a telecommunications firm in South Africa and a grocery retailer in the United States. Their findings across three diverse industries were quite consistent overall. The following relationships were shown to be positive and statistically significant (by case): internal brand management and job satisfaction (financial services, telecommunications, grocery); internal brand management and brand commitment (financial services, telecommunications, grocery); internal brand management and brand citizenship behaviour (financial services, telecommunications, grocery); job satisfaction and brand commitment (financial services and grocery); job satisfaction and intention to stay (telecommunications and grocery); job satisfaction and brand citizenship behaviour (financial services and grocery); brand commitment and intention to stay (financial services, telecommunications, grocery); and brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour (financial services and grocery). Their study provides further empirical evidence that internal brand management is a major driver of brand commitment (Du Preez et al., 2017). However, the relationship between internal brand management and intention to stay was not statistically significant. This finding implies that internal brand management strategies and plans alone do not necessarily directly influence frontline employees' intentions to stay working at the retailer. Further, their results aligned with Porricelli et al.'s (2014), but contrasted with Burmann et al. (2009b), in that brand proselytization was not a component of brand citizenship behaviour. The authors acknowledge the unique and often universal characteristics of frontline employees that may accentuate their lack of enthusiasm for their retailer's brand; for example, their already low

wages may mean they are not willing to take on extra work or tasks without additional compensation (Du Preez et al., 2017). However, as a result of their findings, their implications for management called for the need for marketing and human resources managers to work together to develop internal brand management plans (Du Preez et al., 2017). This echoed Punjaisri and Wilson’s (2007) suggestions for the need for coordination of marketing and human resources activities and brand plans.

To conclude the literature review on internal brand management, a common theme runs through the three internal brand management studies that were reviewed: marketing/brand managers and human resources managers need to collaborate on internal brand management plans and processes. These three studies provide evidence to support the imperative for retailers to increase their internal brand management efforts to in turn increase brand citizenship behaviours and employees’ commitment to their organization. While the roots of internal brand management can be traced back to Adam’s (1963) management-based equity theory, this section of the literature review identified important subsequent developments in and contributions to internal brand management research, encompassing internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Evolution of Internal Brand Management



The concept and definition of internal branding continues to evolve and has paved the way for the conceptualization of employee brand equity (EBE) (discussed in Section 2.5.3), which measures the outcomes of internal branding efforts (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016).

The literature review thus far has established the critical role frontline employees play in a retailer's brand building efforts. Therefore, the focus now turns to brand equity, one of the three key foundational theories underpinning this research. This domain is reviewed in depth across consumer-based brand equity, retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity research areas.

2.5 Brand Equity

Simply defined, "a brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (American Marketing Association, 2020). A brand can also be defined as an amalgam of functional and emotional benefits (De Chernatony, 2001). Functional benefits (e.g., 'this product works the way it is supposed to') refer to the actual product or service; these types of benefits are easily replicated and not typically a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Porter, 1990). Emotional benefits (e.g., 'this product makes me feel attractive') are communicated through advertising or interactions with frontline employees. While a brand's advertising or content can be replicated, the emotional benefits espoused by employees are less easy to replicate. Thus, a brand's emotional benefits may provide the required differentiation for an organization's achievement of sustainable competitive advantage (Papasolomou and Vrontis, 2006). Simply stated, brand equity is the added 'value' a brand offers, thus enhancing it beyond its functional purpose (Farquhar, 1989). Keller (1993) defines brand equity as the marketing effects that occur as a result of the product's or services' brand name; it is "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on customer response to brand marketing activity" (p. 1). The advertising industry introduced the term *brand equity* in the 1980's, which coincided with new business accounting and reporting rules that recognized an organization owned tangible assets (i.e., cash, inventory, buildings) as well as intangible assets (i.e., intellectual property, human resources, reputation, brand equity). Brand equity concerns a firm's intangible assets, which compared to tangible assets, are less easily

replicated by competitors. Along this vein, Aaker (1991) defined brand equity as “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” (p.15).

The scholarly interest in brand equity gained momentum with Kevin Lane Keller’s seminal article in the *Journal of Marketing*, “Conceptualizing, Measuring and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity” (Keller, 1993), which is one of the most widely cited articles in the field with over 20,000 citations on Google Scholar to date (Google Scholar, 2020). There is a wealth of scholarly and industry research dedicated to the topic of brand equity and its measurement and management. Interbrand’s popular Brand Valuation Methodology measures brand equity via a proprietary combination of inputs including financial analysis (i.e., economic profit), demand analysis (i.e., Role of Brand Index) and competitive analysis (i.e., Brand Strength Score) (Rocha, 2014). Their valuation methodology “...builds a rich understanding of how a brand performs-and should perform-to create economic value” (Rocha, 2014, p. 4) combining financial data, consumer good data and text analytics and social listening data towards a robust brand valuation. Marketing practitioners across the globe anxiously await the annual unveiling of their Top 100 Best Global Brands Report. In today’s competitive marketplace, brands matter. Scholars have identified brand equity as an instrumental factor in a firm’s realization of its financial goals and achievement of sustainable competitive advantage (Aaker, 1996; Yoo et al., 2000; Broyles et al., 2009). Therefore, it is imperative that organizations measure and manage their brand equity to understand their brand’s strengths and weaknesses and build a sustainable competitive advantage.

Despite four decades of brand equity research, one widely agreed upon definition of brand equity or its dimensionality remains elusive (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010; Christodoulides et al., 2015). Ailawadi and Keller (2004) lament the lack of brand equity measurement, “...(it) has been one of the most challenging and important issues for both academics and managers...a single measure that offers rich insights...yet is easy to compute...still evades us” (p. 339). Eleven years on, Davcik et al. (2015) analysed 146 brand equity studies and determined “...despite growing literature on the subject...a unique and straightforward answer on the creation and management of brand equity has not been forthcoming” (p. 4). Though some scholars have called for a universal brand equity measure, this may not be practical given the variety of stakeholders, industries and contexts in which

brand equity can and should be measured. This thesis supports efforts to develop brand equity measures that address the most critical stakeholders while recognizing the differences among industries, which may necessitate a variety of brand equity models and measures. An understanding of brand equity and its key constructs are central to this thesis and serve as the prime theoretical foundation for the conceptualization of an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model. The key areas of the brand equity literature relevant to this study are consumer-based brand equity, employee-based brand equity and retailer brand equity. Therefore, key literature on brand equity will be closely examined including consumer-based brand equity, retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity.

2.5.1 Consumer-Based Brand Equity

Just as the name implies, consumer-based brand equity models focus on consumers' perceptions of different dimensions of brand equity. An examination of brand equity must begin with a review of the consumer-based brand equity models developed by the two seminal brand equity scholars, David Aaker (1991, 1996) and Kevin Lane Keller (1993, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2013, 2019). Aaker's (1991, 1996) simple parallel structure and Keller's (2001) complex multi-step approach to consumer-based brand equity laid the foundation for the development and conceptualization of other consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) models (Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Christodoulides et al., 2006; Nam et al., 2011; Christodoulides et al., 2015). Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller's (1993, 2001) CBBE models are based on cognitive psychology theory of associative networks focusing on memory structure (Rossolatos, 2013; Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010), whereby consumer's perceptions (i.e., memories) of their experiences with the brand are the means to measure brand equity. Rather than assessing brand equity from a macro or financially-oriented perspective (Erdem and Swait, 1998), Aaker (1991) and Keller's (1993) consumer-based brand equity models assess brands' intangible assets (i.e., measured vis-à-vis consumers' perceptions) and take a micro, or consumer-focused view of brand equity. Aaker's (1991) consumer-based brand equity framework includes four parallel constructs: loyalty (made up of price premium and satisfaction/loyalty), awareness, perceived quality and associations (made up of perceived value, brand personality and organizational associations). He pioneered the idea that brands are valuable intangible assets and each of the brand equity constructs act as "...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 consumers" (Aaker, 1991, p.15). Keller (1993) defined brand equity as the willingness of the consumer to pay premium prices or make trade-offs. He suggested that brand knowledge was the key component of brand equity and conceptualized it in terms of three key intangible dimensions: brand awareness, made up of recognition and recall; brand knowledge; and brand image, defined as a set of brand associations. A side by side comparison of the key CBBE dimensions conceptualized in Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) influential consumer-based brand equity models, which dominate the brand equity literature, is presented in Table 2.

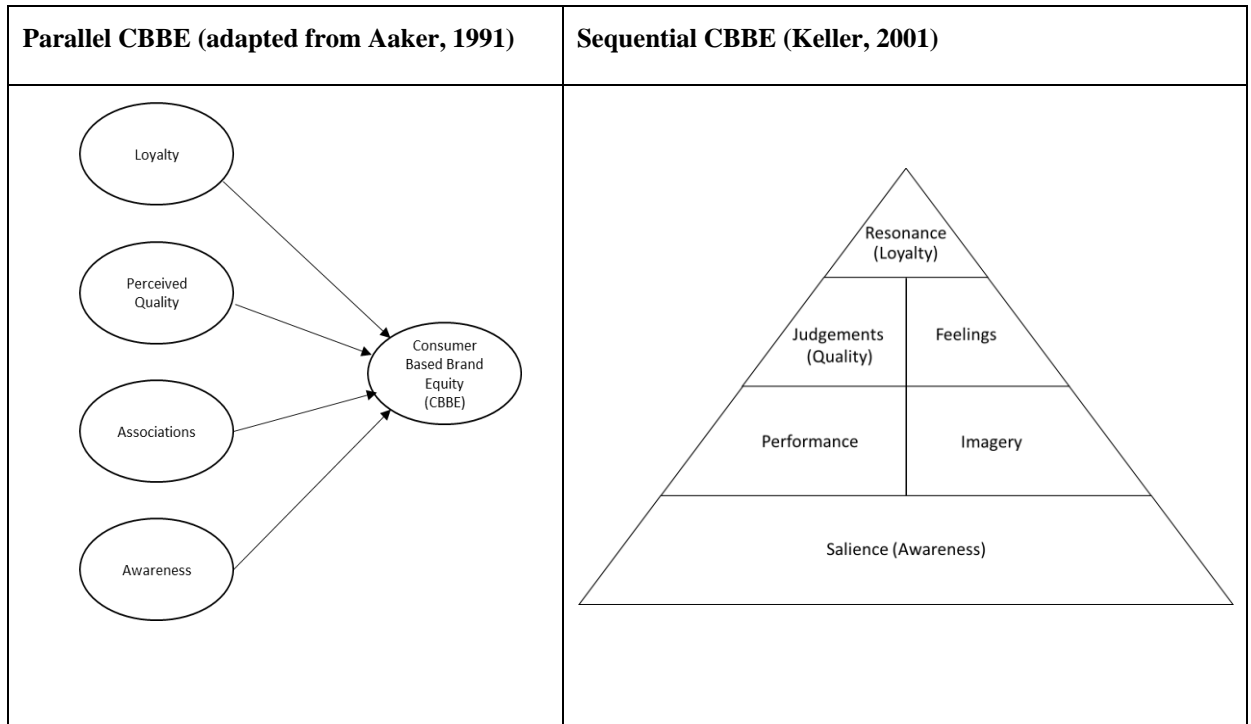
Table 2: Summary of Key CBBE Dimensions

Authors	Number of Dimensions	Brand Knowledge	Brand Awareness	Brand Image	Associations	Perceived Quality	Loyalty
Aaker (1991)	4		✓		✓	✓	✓
Keller (1993)	4	✓	✓	✓	✓		

Source: Author's compilation

According to Keller's (1993) early CBBE work, brand awareness and brand image are two key components of brand knowledge. Brand associations, which are stored in consumers' minds and memories as brand knowledge, have powerful effects on brands because they contain the true meaning of the brand, and this multi-step process ultimately leads to the creation of brand equity. His multi-step process of investing into the brand, creating an image of the brand in the consumers' minds, building brand strength and subsequently creating brand value has been recently described as the brand equity chain (Anselmsson et al., 2016). Keller (2001, 2003) later conceptualized CBBE as a brand resonance pyramid, which views building a brand as a sequence of six steps or brand building blocks. Aaker's (1991; 1996) parallel CBBE structure and Keller's (2001) sequential CBBE structures are visually contrasted in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Comparison of Parallel and Sequential CBBE Structures



Aaker’s (1991) CBBE structure assumes all dimensions (loyalty, perceived quality, associations, awareness) operate in parallel, thus all dimensions occur simultaneously. In contrast, Keller’s (2001) brand resonance pyramid takes a building block approach where the first step (salience) must be met before progressing to the next steps (performance and imagery, judgements and feelings). The final step of the model is resonance which represents the ultimate relationship between consumer and the brand. Keller (2003) explains resonance is represented as consumer loyalty to the brand, which also manifests as attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement with the brand. Thus, Aaker (1991) believed loyalty was a component of consumer-based brand equity, whereas Keller (2003) believed loyalty (i.e., resonance) was an outcome variable.

Understanding the key constructs of consumer-based brand equity is an essential starting point to understanding retailer brand equity, and employee-based brand equity. Since this thesis focuses on developing an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model, the next sections of the literature review critiques and compares the relevant retailer

brand equity models, followed by a review of the relevant employee-based brand equity models.

2.5.2 Retailer Brand Equity

Retailers are experiencing a shift in power, and increasingly taking this newly earned power from manufacturers (Rashmi and Dangi, 2016). Retailers' growing brand power is evident in their presence in top brands lists and in their financial contributions to the economy. According to the Brand Finance Global 500 Report (2018), nine of the fifty most valuable brands in the world are pure retailers (e.g., Amazon, Walmart, Home Depot), and almost half of the top brands rely on retail operations to run their businesses (e.g., Apple, Verizon, BMW, Bank of America). In the United States, the retail sector is the largest private employer, and provides \$1.6 trillion in labour income and contributes \$2.6 trillion annually to US Total GDP (PwC, 2014). Interest in the *retailer as a brand* has contributed to a growing body of scholarly research (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Pappu and Quester, 2008; Burt and Davies, 2010; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; White et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2016; Londoño et al., 2016). The extant retail literature covers a broad range of topics including: retailer brand equity measurement models, (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019), retail private/store brand studies (Jara and Cliquet, 2012), store image and equity (Chowdhury et al., 1998; Hartman and Spiro, 2005), retailer branding (Anselmsson et al., 2016;), store types and comparisons (Pappu and Quester, 2006b, 2008); brand citizenship behaviour in retailing (Porricelli et al., 2014) and multi-channel retailing (Swoboda et al., 2016; White et al., 2013; Londoño et al., 2016). Although vast, the retailing literature is fragmented and often lacks combined knowledge and understanding. Despite the recent momentum of retailer brand equity research Anselmsson et al. (2017, p.202) lament, "...the fragmented nature of retailer brand equity literature and the need for future research." Troiville et al. (2019) note the predominance of brand equity studies focus on products and services, with few studies focusing on retailer brand equity.

Retailer brand equity research is based largely on market orientation theory (Narver and Slater, 1990), with heavy emphasis placed on consumer perceptions of the brand. Organizations with a market orientation are committed to delivering consumer value, learning about their consumers' needs and leveraging this learning to produce strong business results

(Slater and Narver, 2000). It is well argued that consumers play a vital role in building retailer brand equity, and what consumers think and do precedes and contributes to brand equity (Keller, 1993; Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Netemeyer et al., 2004, Anselmsson et al., 2017). The importance of market orientation and its relationship with brand performance is exemplified in Keller and Lehmann's (2003) Brand Value Chain (BVC). The BVC model acknowledges a variety of individuals within an organization who affect brand equity, including marketing managers, chief marketing officers, CEO's and investors. However, BVC assumes the ultimate value of a brand resides solely with consumers (Keller and Lehmann, 2003). Despite its merit, market orientation assumes consumers influence retailer brand equity more than any other individual within an organization. In retailing, a typical characterization of the consumer is an individual external to the organization; someone who interacts with the retailer mainly to purchase goods and/or services (Surprenant and Solomon, 1987). This characterization, although restrictive, may be appropriate when assessing the brand equity of a branded consumer product (e.g., Crest Toothpaste), which is arguably and inherently different than a retailer brand. Retailers, compared to products, are highly complex service-based organizations that are "...more multi-sensory in nature than product brands and can rely on rich consumer experiences to impact their equity" (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004, p.332). The scholarly interest in retailer brand equity illustrates that retailer brands are sufficiently different from product brands to warrant a unique brand equity measurement approach (White et al., 2013; Rashmi and Dangi, 2016). Thus, considering the rise of the retailer as a brand (Rios and Riquelme, 2008; Burt and Davies, 2010; Rashmi and Dangi, 2016) retail scholars and practitioners face new and unique challenges in conceptualizing and measuring retailer brand equity. It is limiting to focus primarily on consumers' views, when there are other stakeholders, such as frontline employees, who may offer valuable contributions to retailer brand equity. Therefore, market orientation may be central to measuring *product brand equity* but is arguably insufficient when measuring *retailer brand equity*.

The process for reviewing the retailer brand equity literature included compiling an inventory of retailer brand equity articles using a combination of the following search terms: 'retailer brand equity', 'retailer', 'retail', 'brand equity', 'retail brand', 'retailer equity', 'store equity'. Thus, studies that focused solely on adjacent topics such as retailer image, retail

brands or store brands (i.e., private label products), service quality, store image or product brands were excluded from the literature review as these domains are much larger than retailer brand equity and are not directly related to this study. A chronological literature review was chosen to show the evolution and conceptualization of retailer brand equity (RBE) over time. The table presented in Appendix A summarizes the empirical studies that have investigated the concept of RBE throughout the past 17 years.

Scholarly interest in RBE spans a variety of countries including, USA, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Austria, China, India, France, Spain, Scotland, Turkey, Sweden, Romania and Canada. Perhaps it is due to its global appeal that there is a lack of consistency in its nomenclature; some authors refer to the concept as retailer equity, retail brand equity or store equity, and the most contemporary studies (Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019) refer to the concept as *retailer brand equity*. Different sectors of the retail industry have been examined, from department and specialty stores to fashion, grocery and DIY (do-it-yourself) stores. Several studies take a cross-sectoral approach (Swoboda et al., 2007; Swoboda et al., 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Dabija et al., 2014; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017) and compare two or more sectors of the retail industry using the same RBE dimensions. Of the 24 RBE studies reviewed, 29 unique RBE dimensions are identified. All studies, except five, conceptualize retailer brand equity as a multi-dimensional construct comprised of two to nine RBE dimensions. Swoboda et al. (2013a, 2013b) conceptualized RBE as a one-dimensional construct and used Verhoef et al.'s (2007) retail brand equity scale (strong, well-known, favourable, unique). Samu et al. (2012) and Dabija et al. (2014), like Swoboda et al. (2013a, 2013b), took a direct approach to measuring retailer brand equity but developed their own items. White et al., (2013) adopted Yoo and Donthu's (2001) unidimensional scale to measure retailer brand equity.

Several studies adopt Aaker's (1991) four CBBE dimensions (awareness, associations, perceived quality, loyalty) to develop a measure of RBE (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Pappu and Quester, 2006b; Baldauf et al., 2009; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Das et al., 2012; Choi and Huddleston, 2014; Das, 2015; Londoño et al., 2016), with awareness applied in 11 studies, associations in 8, perceived quality and loyalty applied in 10 studies. The studies that only adopted Aaker's (1991) four CBBE dimensions did not adapt their models to reflect the retailing context (Troiville et al., 2019). Furthermore, merely

applying CBBE frameworks to “...measure retailer brand equity may lead researchers into the downward spiral of a poor and inadequate conceptualization” (Troiville et al., 2019, p. 74). Thus, the studies that incorporated other retailer-specific dimensions are aligned with a more contemporary definition of retailer brand equity that considers store attributes (Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019), specific and essential retail dimensions such as access and employees (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Swoboda et al., 2007; Troiville et al., 2019), and private brands (Troiville et al., 2019). Other commonly used dimensions are price/value, service quality, product quality, store/brand image, trust and assortment, which are used in 7, 5, 4, 3, 3 and 3 studies respectively. The studies that incorporated brand/store image as an RBE dimension (DeCarlo, 2007; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017) draw on Keller’s (2001) brand resonance framework. Overall, the differences in country of study, nomenclature, retail sector, number and type of dimensions contribute to the domain’s fragmentation and lack of unity.

There is also a lack of alignment of RBE’s antecedents. While half of the studies (12 out of 24) focused solely on measuring RBE, the other half also examined antecedents, of which focused mostly on store attributes. The conceptualization of RBE as having antecedents (or not) highlights the theoretical debate on the structure of RBE, and whether its dimensions operate in a parallel or sequential fashion. Contemporary retailer brand equity measurement models predominantly extend Aaker’s (1991) simple parallel-structured four-dimensional consumer-based brand equity model. Though influential and often cited, Keller’s (1993) model is less preferred from a conceptualization and operationalization perspective, due to the complexity in testing the multi-step process. Arnett et al. (2003), following Aaker’s (1991) parallel structured model, empirically validated a multi-dimensional consumer-based measure of retailer brand equity. Whereas Aaker’s (1991) model was designed to measure the brand equity of a product (e.g., Coca Cola), Arnett et al. (2003) sought to measure the brand equity of an organization, specifically three mid-market, youth-oriented fashion retailers (i.e., Abercrombie and Fitch, Banana Republic and Urban Outfitters). Thus, they adapted the model to include retailer specific constructs. Arnett et al.’s (2003) retailer equity model included five constructs: awareness, loyalty, service quality, product quality and value. They adapted Aaker’s (1991) ‘associations’ construct by defining associations as product quality and perceived value and represented them as two individual

constructs. They also modified Aaker's (1991) 'perceived quality' construct and adapted it to a retailer context as 'service quality'. Their desire to develop a parsimonious retailer brand equity measure resulted in the achievement of a simple and straight forward retailer equity index. Their parsimonious retailer equity scale can be operationalized in-house quite seamlessly by researchers and/or marketing practitioners due to its short questionnaire and software (PLS) cost-effectiveness. Compared to other costly industry-based brand equity measures (e.g., BrandAsset Valuator™) Arnett et al.'s (2003) index is a practical alternative. Considered a seminal retailer brand equity paper, Arnett et al., (2003) have been cited 348 times (Google Scholar, 2020). However, this retailer index's strength (i.e., parsimony) could also be its' weakness (i.e., lack of depth). Thus, future research could consider the addition of other retailer specific dimensions such as store image and retailer trust. These retailer specific dimensions are critical since they differentiate a retailer brand (e.g., Nordstrom) from a product brand (e.g., Adidas Originals Stan Smith).

Pappu and Quester (2006a) extended Aaker's (1991) consumer-based brand equity model and tested it empirically. They retained Aaker's (1991) four key constructs, including awareness, associations, perceived quality and loyalty. Contrary to Arnett et al. (2003), Pappu and Quester (2006a) accounted for retailer specific dimensions by defining associations as 'retailer image' and defining 'perceived quality' as the retailers' total 'products and services offering'. Their results confirmed that perceived quality is a distinct dimension of retailer brand equity (Pappu and Quester, 2006a). Unlike Arnett et al. (2003), Pappu and Quester (2006a) looked specifically at the factor structure of retailer brand equity, therefore, they were able to empirically demonstrate for the first time that the structure of retailer brand equity was the same as product brand equity. One does not expect the structure of *product* brand equity to be the same a *retailer* brand equity, especially given previous researchers' warnings of the challenges in measuring retailer brand equity. For example, Ailawadi and Keller (2004) argued that measuring retailer brand equity poses a host of unique challenges related to retailer's service-based nature. Pappu and Quester (2006a) appeared to have addressed the unique challenges inherent in the measurement of retailer brand equity by including measures of awareness, associations (i.e., defined as store image / physical store), retailer loyalty and perceived quality (i.e., defined as product quality and service quality). While Pappu and Quester (2006a) advanced the literature on retailer brand equity

measurement models to include store image / physical store, their model's limitation is that it did not consider other retailer specific attributes such as price/value or retailer trust.

Gil-Saura et al.'s (2013) retailer brand equity model was the first to extend Keller's (1993) multi-step brand equity process. Their retailer brand equity model includes store image, perceived value, trust and store awareness, and consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between store equity and loyalty towards the store. Thus, their conceptualization of retail brand equity as a multi-step process differs from Arnett et al.'s (2003) and Pappu and Quester's (2006a) parallel retailer brand equity structures. The results revealed positive relationships between almost all store attributes (i.e., store image, perceived value, store awareness) and retailer brand equity, except trust. They also showed positive relationships between store equity and consumer satisfaction, along with a positive and significant influence of consumer satisfaction on loyalty. Their study was limited to three successful retailers in Spain, one of which was the fast-fashion retailer Zara, who arguably already possessed strong retailer brand equity. They also acknowledged the need to further examine the relationship between trust and retailer brand equity. This result may also suggest that trust could be an outcome of retailer brand equity, although it was not tested in this study.

Swoboda, Weindel and Hälsig (2016) empirically tested their retail brand equity model across four different retail sectors (i.e., fashion, electronics, DIY and grocery retailers). This unique approach sought to offer a more nuanced perspective of retailing and show which retail attributes are the strongest predictors of retailer brand equity across retail sectors. Their retail brand equity model built upon theories that view retail attributes as associations in consumer's memories (Grewal et al., 2009; Hartman and Spiro, 2005; Keller, 1993). Their conceptualization of retailer brand equity followed Keller (1993) and Gil-Saura et al.'s (2013) multi-step approach whereby five retail attributes (assortment, price, layout, communication, service) lead to retail brand equity, which in turn, lead to intentional loyalty (Swoboda et al., 2016). Using multi-group structural equation modelling they compared the results across the four retail sectors. Of the five retail attributes, fashion retailers focus on assortment and layout. The effects of retailer brand equity on intentional loyalty was statistically significant in all four sectors. These results, along with Gil-Saura et al.'s (2013), provide strong evidence for conceptualising loyalty as an outcome (consequence) rather than a dimension of retailer brand equity.

Çifci et al. (2016) compared the validity of Yoo and Donthu's (2001) product-based CBBE model with Nam et al.'s (2011) service-based CBBE model, and applied them to the retail industry, focusing on fashion and grocery brands and private labels. They collected data from Turkish and Spanish consumers. While Yoo and Donthu (2001) conceptualized CBBE in four dimensions (perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, associations), Nam et al., (2011) conceptualized CBBE in five dimensions to better reflect a service environment (physical quality, staff behaviour, ideal self-congruence, brand identification, lifestyle congruence). Nam et al., (2011) also identified brand satisfaction and loyalty as outcomes of service based CBBE. Çifci et al. (2016) not only compared these two models in retailing, but also extended Nam et al.'s (2011) model to include a sixth CBBE dimension, brand awareness. Of the three models, the extended Nam et al., (2011) model (with the additional brand awareness dimension) performed best. It measured brand awareness as a knowledge-based entity, drawing on Aaker (1996) and Keller's (2003) definition, rather than a merely brand recognition, and demonstrated brand awareness influences brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. Furthermore, Çifci et al. (2016) introduced a valid and reliable scale for measuring retailer brand equity; one that retailers could use to develop internal and external benchmarks, manage and track consumers' views of their brand over time and compare their brand's performance with similar brands.

Anselmsson et al. (2017), like Çifci et al. (2016), advocate for retailer brand equity models to incorporate retailer specific constructs to further differentiate the measurement of *product brand equity* from *retailer brand equity*. In this study, they examined three alternative retailer brand equity structure models. The model that tested best aligns with Keller's (2001) four-step brand resonance framework, whereby awareness is the first step in the brand building process, followed by brand associations, consumer responses and finally brand loyalty. Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) model supports awareness as an antecedent of retailer brand equity, retailer brand equity contains four constructs (i.e., customer service, product quality, pricing policy, physical store) and retailer trust mediates the relationship between retailer brand equity and loyalty. Thus, Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) four step retailer brand equity model includes seven dimensions: Step 1) awareness; Step 2) store image / physical store, value / price quality, service quality, and product quality; Step 3) retailer trust; and, Step 4) loyalty. Their study has important implications for retailer brand equity literature

as it provides support for the integration of retail-specific attributes (i.e., store image) and for further empirical research on multi-step (i.e., sequential) retailer brand equity models in other retail sectors, which has seldom been tested in the literature. Further, extending the work of Arnett et al. (2003), Anselmsson et al. (2017) developed a parsimonious retailer brand equity scale that can provide a new foundation for future retailer brand equity research.

Finally, Troiville et al.'s (2019) study represents the most recent consumer-based retailer brand equity measure to appear in the literature. They are suspicious of Arnett et al.'s (2003) assertion that *product brand equity* parallels *retailer brand equity*, noting previous work on retailer brand equity does not adequately conceptualize retailer brand equity (Troiville et al., 2019). Thus, the authors suggest a systematic approach to developing a new retailer brand equity model that includes three phases: providing an updated definition of retailer brand equity, following construct validation procedures (MacKenzie, 2003; MacKenzie et al., 2011) and selecting the appropriate data analysis methods (Hair et al., 2012). They propose advancing the idea that a retailer is not merely a *product/service brand* but one where the *retailer is viewed as a brand*. Although they do not refer to it, this idea was advocated in Burt and Davis's (2010) call to retail scholars to further explore the 'retail-er as a brand'. Troiville et al. (2019) define retailer brand equity as "...the added value with which the retailer endows its stores, and the combination of products, services and experiences that are delivered through these outlets" (p. 74). They caution retail scholars when adapting the product-based brand equity models of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) to retailer brand equity, since these models were not developed for this purpose. Thus, they also express suspicion of the validity of the retailer brand equity models proposed by Arnett et al. (2003), DeCarlo et al. (2007), Jinfeng and Zhilong (2009) and Pappa and Quester (2006a, 2006b). They, however, praise the retailer brand equity work of Ailawadi and Keller (2004), Anselmsson et al. (2017), Grewal and Levy (2009) and Swoboda et al., (2016) due to their consideration and integration of retail-specific attributes. Whereas Anselmsson et al. (2017) draws upon retailer image-based attributes and retail trust and reputation elements (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000) to further develop the measurement of retailer brand equity, Troiville et al., (2019) draws upon consumer experiences at the store level (Keaveney and Hunt, 1992) to develop a new measure of retailer brand equity. Their study takes a mixed-methods approach whereby an extended review of literature is conducted first, followed by eighteen face-to-face semi-structured

interviews to uncover consumers' shopping goals and experiences, followed by quantitative testing of the proposed model via PLS-SEM. They operationalize retailer brand equity as a 2nd order reflective-formative construct, whereby the eight dimensions (access, assortment, atmosphere, convenience, employees, product quality, product value and private brands) contribute to the retailer brand equity construct in a composite measurement model, and produces three outcome constructs (attitudes, loyalty and word-of-mouth communications). Their results reveal all relationships are meaningful (i.e., the path coefficients represent strong positive relationships) and statistically significant (i.e., different from zero in the population), they identify eight retailer brand equity dimensions (related to products and services, stores and consumers' experiences), and retailer brand equity is found to be an important and relevant predictor of Loyalty, Attitude and Word-of-Mouth communications (Troiville et al., 2019). The eight dimensions of retailer brand equity are ranked according to their contribution to retailer brand equity, from highest to lowest importance: atmosphere (0.23), product quality (0.22), product value (0.20), assortment (0.17), employees (0.17), private brands (0.16), convenience (0.15) and access (0.12). Although this study only focuses on mass merchandise retailers (i.e., Walmart, Tesco and Carrefour) within fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) who are already arguably powerful retailer brands, it makes several important contributions to the retailer brand equity literature. First, although atmosphere, product quality and product value are the clear drivers of retailer brand equity, the lower ranking dimensions also offer valuable insights into the retailer's performance. For example, the research points out that a convenience retailer would want to closely monitor access, even though it scored low in this study, because consumer's perceptions of how convenient the retailer's locations are becomes crucial to the success of this type of retailer. Second, ranking the dimensions from most to least important also proves useful to marketing managers when allocating and prioritizing investments and resources across different areas of the retailer's business according to strategic objectives. While it may be tempting to neglect the low-ranking dimensions, the authors caution against this approach and advocate a balanced approach to ensure all dimensions add value to their retailer's brand equity. This retailer brand equity model is the most comprehensive to date and incorporates retailer specific dimensions that are competitive points of differentiation for retailers to position their brands within the marketplace and monitor and track them over time.

2.5.2.1 Retailer Trust

Now more than ever, trust is essential for business success. Edelman, a public relations firm, has studied trust for 20 years. In the 2020 Trust Barometer Global Report, that studied 34,000 respondents across 28 markets, they found employers (defined by Edelman as a separate institution) are the most trusted of all institutions including NGOs, business, government and media. Furthermore, from a consumer perspective trusted companies have stronger consumption and advocates, and from an employee perspective, trust drives workplace recommendations. From an industry perspective, retail was the third most trusted, behind technology and manufacturing (Edelman, 2020). Thus, trust is an important concept when studying retailer brand equity.

Trust is also widely studied in marketing, corporate reputation and retailing literatures. Broadly defined, trust means that each party in a relationship is expected to fulfil their obligations (i.e., competence), act in a reliable manner (i.e., benevolence), and act with integrity (i.e., integrity) (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust in a brand results from an extensive cognitive evaluation process (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Lassar, Mital and Sharma (1995) found that consumers place high value in brands they trust. Keller (2003) viewed trustworthiness as a higher-order association that consumers hold for a brand. In a retail context, trust has been associated with the retailer's reputation and emerges from consumers interactions with the retail organization itself (Burt and Davies, 2010). Retail scholars have investigated the role trust plays in retailers' brand building efforts (Burt and Carralero-Encina, 2000; Haelsig et al., 2007; Swoboda et al., 2009; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Lee and Lee, 2018). However, trust is overall an under researched area within retailer brand equity. Of the 24 RBE studies reviewed for this literature review, 29 unique RBE dimensions are identified; however, trust is investigated in only six studies. In the context of retailer brand equity literature, trust has been defined in terms of risk reduction (Haelsig et al, 2007), reliability and integrity (Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2009), brand associations (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009), reputation (Burt Carralero-Encina, 2000; Lee and Lee, 2018) and consumers' confidence in the retailer (Anselmsson et al., 2017). When a consumer trusts the retailer brand, they expect the retailer to deliver on their promise of product and service quality. Haelsig et al. (2007) believe retailers should place

greater emphasis on trustworthiness because of the importance of experience and credence criteria in evaluating service.

While trust plays a role in retailer brand equity, there is no consensus among retail scholars as to where it resides or the relationship it has to other variables in the model. Whether trust precedes retailer brand equity, contributes to it, or is an outcome of retailer brand equity has not been resolved in the retailer brand equity literature to date. The review of retailer brand equity literature reveals ‘retailer trust’ has been conceptualized as either a dimension of retailer brand equity (Burt and Carralero-Encina, 2000; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Haelsig et al., 2007; Swoboda et al., 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Lee and Lee, 2018) or an outcome variable (Anselmsson et al., 2017). Jinfeng and Zhilong (2009) included trust as a component of retailer associations, which are linked to consumers’ memories of a retailer (Pappu and Quester, 2006a, b). Their results found trust, as a dimension of retailer brand equity, precedes retailer loyalty. Lee and Lee (2018) and Burt and Carralero-Encina (2000) viewed retailer trustworthiness as part of reputation, which represented the less tangible dimensions of store image. Although Gil-Saura et al. (2013) conceptualized trust as a dimension of retailer brand equity, their hypothesis was not supported. The results of their study and previous consumer branding literature that had shown trust positively influences brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001) suggested an opportunity to explore trust as an outcome of retailer brand equity. Anselmsson et al. (2017) was the first retailer brand equity study to propose and validate retailer trust as a mediator between retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty. Their study was also the first known study to align with Keller’s (2001) four step brand resonance framework, whereby retailer trust, represented as attitudes and responses to the brand, linked retailer brand equity to retailer loyalty. Although retailer trust has been somewhat overlooked within the retailer brand equity literature, recent studies suggest an opportunity for its further exploration as a mediating variable in the relationship of retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty.

2.5.2.2 Retailer Loyalty

Loyalty is widely studied in marketing, corporate reputation and retailing literatures. Loyalty is categorized as attitudinal or behavioural (Dick and Basu, 1994; Peppers and

Rogers, 2017); the former refers to a consumer's preference for a brand and the latter refers to their actual behaviour and patronage activity. They are both important concepts to understanding loyalty; although behavioural loyalty is more easily measured, attitudinal loyalty protects the relationship from competitive pressures. Swoboda et al. (2009) measured loyalty from both attitudinal (i.e., willingness to recommend) and behavioural (i.e., commitment to the retailer brand) perspectives. Swoboda, Weindel and Halsig (2016) refer to behavioural loyalty as consumers' intentional "readiness to re-purchase at a retailer or to recommend it to others" (p. 265). Pappu and Quester (2006a, b) also align with a behavioural approach and define retailer loyalty as consumers' intentions to purchase from the retailer as their primary choice. Jinfeng and Zhilong (2009) align with Arnett et al.'s (2003) definition of retailer loyalty whereby consumers are committed to purchasing products and services from preferred retailers, despite situational influences and marketing efforts which can lead to switching behaviour.

Of the 24 RBE studies reviewed for this thesis, loyalty is investigated in 17 of them. This demonstrates the important role retailer loyalty plays in conceptualizing and measuring retailer brand equity (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a, b; Haelsig et al., 2007; Baldauf et al., 2009; Swoboda et al., 2009; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Allway et al., 2011; Das et al., 2012; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2013a, b; Choi and Huddleston, 2014; Das, 2015; Londono et al., 2016; Çifci et al., 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Lee and Lee, 2018; Troville et al., 2019). The retailer brand equity literature continues to evolve. The earlier parallel-structure studies mostly focused on loyalty as a dimension of retailer brand equity (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester 2006a, b; Baldauf et al., 2009; Swoboda et al., 2009; Das et al., 2012; Das, 2015; Londono et al., 2016) whereas the more contemporary studies investigate loyalty as a two-step process where retailer brand equity leads to loyalty (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Allway et al., 2011; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2013a, b; Çifci et al., 2016). Most recently retailer brand equity studies aim to understand how consumers perceive the brand and how the elements are related. Thus it is now viewed as a sequential process whereby retailer brand equity mediates the relationship between retailer trust and loyalty (Anselmsson et al., 2017), or an eight-dimensional construct related to products and services, stores and consumers' experiences whereby retailer brand equity is a relevant and important predictor of loyalty, attitudes and word-of-mouth (Troville

et al., 2019). Loyalty is well represented in retailer brand equity research, and the contemporary studies view retailer loyalty as an outcome variable and part of a sequential process. This approach aligns with Keller's (2003) multi-step brand resonance framework, which has not yet been widely examined empirically within the retailer brand equity literature.

2.5.3 Employee-Based Brand Equity

An interest in the *retailer* as a brand and the role other stakeholders, such as *employees*, play in creating brand equity, is relevant not only to marketing and brand management domains but also within organizational behaviour and management areas of literature (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Akerlof and Kranton, 2005). It is in retailers' interests to invest in their brands not only to attract paying consumers but also to recruit talented employees (Berthon et al., 2005). Frontline employees play a particularly vital role within a retail bricks-and-mortar organization, not only because of their sheer numbers but also their propensity to endorse the retailer brand (Morokane et al., 2016), patronize the retailer where they work (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012), and deliver the corporate and product brand promises (King and Grace, 2008; Foster et al., 2010; Abratt and Kleyn, 2012). Thus, scholars across different literature areas – marketing, organizational behaviour and corporate branding – agree that *employees* are a firm's most valuable assets (de Chernatony et al., 2006; King and Grace, 2010). Frontline employees, specifically, are important retail stakeholders who play a variety of critical roles including brand ambassadors (Minchington, 2012), brand champions (Fram and McCarthy, 2003; Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014), brand builders (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Morhart et al., 2009), brand endorsers (Morokane et al., 2016), consumers (Abston and Kupritz, 2011; Anaza and Rutherford, 2012), and brand equity builders (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; DelVecchio et al., 2007; King et al., 2012; Gelb and Rangarajan, 2014). Thus, it is no surprise that scholarly interest in the employee's role in building retailer brand equity is gaining momentum.

Retail scholars have argued that an additional stakeholder perspective (e.g., employee) is critical to fully understanding and measuring retailer brand equity, as advocated by Christodoulides et al. (2006) and Davcik et al. (2015). However, the literature on employee-

based brand equity is limited, and in a retail context, even less is known about employees' contribution to the retailer brand equity building process. Until the role that employees play in retailer brand equity is better understood, retailers will not be able to fully measure their brand investment or build differentiating retailer strategies that have a sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, employee-based retailer brand equity is a research area that requires further development and exploration within the brand equity literature.

The employee-based view of brand equity is situated in the organizational behaviour area of scholarship. As discussed in Section 2.4 and shown in Figure 4, internal brand management (IBM) studies (including internal marketing, internal market orientation and internal branding) have developed over forty years and paved the way for the development of employee-based brand equity, which measures the outcomes of internal branding efforts (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). Miles and Mangold (2004) advocate for a better understanding of the employee branding process, which they define as "...the process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organizational constituents" (Miles and Mangold 2004, p. 68). They describe their employee branding model as a psychological contract whereby employees receive various formal and informal messages from inside the organization (i.e., human resources vs. co-workers) which form the basis for this contract. When employees receive positive and consistent formal and informal messages, they internalize the organization's brand image, and in turn, are motivated to project that positive image to consumers and other stakeholders. Employees are more likely to internalize the organization's brand image if they feel a high degree of trust from their employer. They note several favourable consequences result when organizations build strong brand image: higher levels of employee satisfaction and performance, service quality, consumer retention and reduced employee turnover (Rousseau, 1995) as well as positive word-of-mouth communications from consumer to employee, employee to consumer and employee to other stakeholders (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Miles and Mangold (2004) were the first to offer a comprehensive model for understanding the employee branding process. Although the model was not empirically validated, they made an important contribution to the employee branding literature by proposing dimensions of the employee branding process, to be tested in future research. Most importantly their work proposed that employees impact several key facets of business from brand equity, brand

messages and advertising to compensation, corporate culture and quality of service delivery; all of which are relevant elements to retail organizations.

The process for reviewing the employee-based brand equity literature included compiling an inventory of articles using a combination of the following search terms: ‘employee-based brand equity’, ‘employee equity’, ‘employee brand equity’, ‘internal brand equity’. Thus, studies that focused solely on adjacent topics such as employer branding (which focuses on prospective employees’ brand perceptions of the organization) or corporate branding (which focuses on external stakeholders’ brand perceptions of the organization) were excluded from the literature review as these domains are much larger than employee-based brand equity and do not focus on internal employees’ brand perceptions of the organization. A chronological literature review was chosen to show the evolution and conceptualization of employee-based brand equity (EBBE) over time. The conceptual and empirical studies on employee-based brand equity (also interchangeably referred to as employee brand equity EBE) are summarized in Appendix B.

Scholarly interest in EBBE spans a variety of countries including, USA, Germany, Australia, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, China and Turkey. EBBE has been examined in different contexts, from business-to-business firms and fast-moving consumer goods companies, to service-based organizations such as hotels, restaurants, banks, travel agencies and airlines. Several of the studies only indicated “service-based organizations” in their sampling strategy and did not specifically indicate retailing, even though retailers are service based organizations. Only two studies took a cross-sectoral approach (Del Vecchio et al., 2007; Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020) and compared two or more sectors using the same EBBE dimensions. Of the 15 EBBE empirical studies reviewed, 20 unique EBBE dimensions are identified. The dimensions can be divided into two categories: *employee-benefit dimensions* and *employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions*. The employee-benefit dimensions relate to the employee’s perceptions of the work they do in exchange for the benefits of working for the organization (e.g., compensation/benefits, work/life balance, work environment, socialization/training, benefits/privileges, employee development, performance appraisal, retention, internal brand management, employee brand knowledge effects, EBBE benefits). Thus, employee-benefit dimensions relate to the psychological contract employees have with their employers (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Lester and Kickul, 2001). Employee-

behaviour/perception dimensions are more complex than employee benefits (e.g., employee brand image, brand, brand identity, brand image, loyalty, intra-role behaviour, extra-role behaviour, awareness, perceived quality, brand endorsement, brand consistent behaviour, brand allegiance, role clarity, brand commitment, brand knowledge). They refer to the behavioural and cognitive attributes that reflect employees' willingness to participate and contribute to a retailer's brand success (King et al., 2012). In the literature, EBBE is mostly conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct with two to three constructs. Two studies (King et al., 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016) adopt King et al.'s (2012) three EBBE dimensions (brand endorsement, brand consistent behaviour and brand allegiance).

Boukis and Christodoulides (2020), Tsang et al., (2011) and Burmann et al., (2009a) draw upon identity theory to conceptualize EBBE. Organizational identity, which is rooted in organizational behaviour and is a form of social identity, is one lens through which to view employee-based brand equity. Organizational identity has an internal organization focus and employees are its primary stakeholder group (Albert and Whetten, 1985; He and Balmer, 2007). It is defined as employees' social identity within the organization where they are employed (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; He and Balmer, 2007) and is socially constructed and situational in nature (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001). Identifying with one's employer may mean having a sense of membership or emotional attachment with the organization's brand (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). When employees feel like they truly belong to their organization, the organization itself benefits. Feeling a sense of membership results in employees directing their attitudes and behaviours towards achieving their organization's goals, delivering on the brand's promise (Mills et al., 2014; Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020), exerting extra work effort (Yaniv and Farkas, 2005) and personal obligation to the brand. Employee-based brand equity studies seek to understand employees' perceptions of the organizational brand where they are employed. Employees' perceptions are, therefore, influenced by their social identity. Their social identities are individual entities and are not the organizations' identities. Thus, organizational identity (i.e., an employee's social identity within their organization) is inextricably linked to employee-based brand equity (i.e., an employee's perceptions of their organization's brand). Burmann et al. (2009a) advocates for an identity-based approach to brand equity as it can help organizations better understand if or how their internal brand management efforts contribute to brand success.

The review of employee-based brand equity literature revealed differences in country of study, industry, number and type of dimensions which contributes to the domain's overall fragmentation and lack of unity. DelVecchio et al. (2007) acknowledged the plethora of consumer-based brand equity studies and the scarcity of employee-based brand equity studies. Thus, they proposed a model to test whether an organization's brand equity influences prospective employees' perceptions of job opportunities, while focusing on employee benefit dimensions. DelVecchio et al. (2007) utilize Brand Asset Valuator (BAV) data to determine brand equity (or brand strength) and draws upon job characteristics theory (Hackman and Oldham, 1975) to determine appropriate EBBE antecedents (internal opportunity, skill development, work ethic, resume power). Using an experiment design with 385 upper-class university students, participants were required to read hypothetical job descriptions from a perceived high brand equity company and a perceived low brand equity company. DelVecchio et al.'s (2007) results supported their predictions that companies with higher perceived brand equity are associated with greater internal opportunities, and an organization's strong brand equity positively affects perceptions of skill development and job seekers' perceptions of expected work ethic. Their results also found job seekers perceive working for companies with strong brand equity would build power on their resume. Most importantly, the study concluded the higher the resume power (i.e., having a strong brand on the resume) the lower the participants' salary demands were when accepting the job offer. This study had important implications for managers; cultivating an organization with strong brand equity can be leveraged during recruitment and may also reduce hiring costs. With these findings DelVecchio et al. (2007) confirmed several dimensions (e.g., internal advancement, skills development, work ethic, resume power and perceived brand equity) could be relevant to future research on conceptualizing employee-based brand equity.

While DelVecchio et al.'s (2007) work examined prospective employees' perceptions of an organization's brand equity and its influence on job attributes and benefits, King and Grace (2009) advocated for a 'third perspective of brand equity' and coined the term employee-based brand equity (EBBE). Their proposed EBBE framework sought to provide service-based organizations (i.e., retail, hospitality, financial services) a means to a sustainable competitive advantage via the "added value attributed to an organization's brand as a result of employee-based brand building efforts" (King and Grace, 2009, p. 124).

Drawing on the vast literature of brand equity (Aaker, 1991, 1993; Keller 1996, 2001) and its associated organizational benefits such as competitive advantage (Kim et al., 2003; Pappu et al., 2005), King and Grace (2009) acknowledge the shift in branding literature and practice towards a more balanced brand management approach that considers both internal (i.e., employee) and external (i.e., consumer) perceptions of the brand. The benefits of internal brand management are well documented (see Section 2.5) and employees are central to the brand building process, thus, brand equity research from an employee perspective is necessary (de Chernatony et al., 2006). King and Grace (2009) draw upon internal brand management theory and extended Keller's (1998) cognitive psychology approach to brand equity and conceptualized EBBE as encompassing dimensions of internal brand management (information generation, knowledge dissemination, openness, the human factor), employee brand knowledge benefits (role clarity, brand commitment) and EBBE benefits (brand citizenship behaviour, employee satisfaction, intention to stay, positive employee word-of-mouth). This was the first comprehensive conceptualization of EBBE in the literature that moved it towards a more contextual approach (vs. Keller's 1998 connectionism thinking). It established a new foundation to measure EBBE and presented an opportunity to understand the unique relationship between the employee and the organization by expanding on existing brand equity theory (King and Grace, 2009).

Shortly after King and Grace (2009) introduced their EBBE conceptual model, King and Grace (2010) empirically tested it. Their results represented EBBE as a multidimensional construct that adopted existing scales from the IBM literature. Their results found openness positively influences information generation and knowledge dissemination; the human or 'H' factor (i.e., organizations treating employees with respect) has a positive effect on openness and knowledge dissemination; information generation has a positive effect on knowledge dissemination; knowledge dissemination has a positive effect on role clarity and brand commitment; role clarity has a positive effect on EBBE benefits; and brand commitment has a positive effect on EBBE benefits (King and Grace, 2010). Thus, this model created a novel way for academics and practitioners to build, measure and manage EBBE, and paved the way for the development and validation of an original EBBE scale offering a more refined employee brand equity instrument and greater application in both theory and practice (King and Grace, 2010). With 469 combined citations (Google, 2020) King and Grace (2009, 2010)

demonstrated leadership in the internal brand management field by advancing the study of employee-based brand equity and encouraging the scholarly and practitioner community to pursue and advance this area of research.

In King and Grace's (2010) seminal work, they foreshadowed how their empirically tested EBBE model would benefit from the development of an EBBE scale. Thus, King et al. (2012) produced a multi-dimensional and parsimonious scale that they refer to simply as employee brand equity (EBE), and based on King and Grace (2010), that could be used by brand equity scholars and practitioners to both advance knowledge on employee-based brand equity and provide a key performance measure for organizations seeking to build their brands. In their study, they define employee brand equity according to Brexendorf and Kernstock's (2007) definition: "EBE is the result when an employee possesses brand knowledge that engenders positive, productive employee brand -related behaviour that is congruent with the communicated brand identity" (King et al., 2012, p. 271). EBE has its roots in IBM and they define IBM as enabling employees to act and say positive things about their organization to deliver the brand's promise (King et al., 2012). Their EBE scale, developed and validated through a rigorous scale development process, consists of three dimensions: brand endorsement (defined as what employees *say*), brand consistent behaviour (defined as what employees *do*) and brand allegiance (defined as what employees *intend to do in the future*). They noted the importance of this new EBE scale in enabling scholars and practitioners to measure their organization's brand equity from an employee perspective. This has far reaching practical implications as it is also a mechanism for managers to justify and be accountable for the allocation of resources and investment into IBM strategies and activities. Combined with an organization's externally focused brand management strategies, the EBE scale provides a valuable tool to leverage employees' contributions to brand equity. Furthermore, the EBE scale allows organizations to demonstrate a more balanced approach to brand management, by incorporating internal and external brand perspectives. This scale has the potential to be applied across a variety of industries and types of employees.

Boukis and Christodoulides (2020) echoed Veloutsou and Guzman's (2017) and Christodoulides and de Chernatony's (2010) observations regarding the wealth of consumer-based brand equity studies and the lack of employee-based brand equity research. Aligning with Baumgarth and Schmidt's (2010) definition of EBBE, they note "...EBBE captures the

perceived added value that employees receive as a result of employee-based brand building efforts” (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020, p. 1). They extend King et al.’s (2012) EBE scale and draw upon previous IBM research to propose and empirically test an integrated model of antecedents and outcomes of EBBE. Their model proposes that employees’ perceptions of their organization’s brand equity is influenced by their supervisors’ behaviours, including internal market orientation and brand leadership, which in turn affects brand-related communication and information exchange (Boukis et al., 2014; Xiong and King, 2018). Thus, this research draws on equity and social identity theories and organizational behaviour and internal branding literature streams, and further advances the understanding of internal brand management by examining the relationship between the employee and the supervisor and its effects on employee-based brand equity. The EBBE model is conceptualized as two antecedents (internal market orientation and brand leadership) of EBBE, whereby EBBE is formed by brand knowledge (i.e., cognitive route) and brand identification (i.e., affective route), which leads to an internal outcome (brand value dissemination) and an external outcome (customer orientation) (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). The sampling strategy focused on 376 frontline employees from 103 organizations across a variety of service sectors (i.e., hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, banks and airlines). Using confirmatory factor analysis, the results showed support for brand leadership (but not internal market orientation) as an antecedent of EBBE. Even though internal market orientation is not an antecedent to EBBE, it does have a positive direct effect on both brand knowledge and brand identification. As predicted, brand knowledge (i.e., employees’ cognitive responses to branding) and brand identification (i.e., employees’ affective responses to branding) are the main determinants of EBBE, with brand knowledge being a strong predictor of EBBE. Regarding EBBE outcomes, the results show that EBBE is an important determinant of brand-related citizenship behaviours (i.e., internal outcome) and non-brand related citizenship activity such as customer orientation (i.e., external outcomes). Their research has important theoretical and managerial implications. It is the first study to confirm EBBE as a driver of internal stakeholders’ brand and non-brand related citizenship behaviours. Second, their results elucidate the influence supervisors have in the brand equity creation process by potentially enhancing the value the employee derives from their employer’s brand. Third, the research confirms the important

and influential role employees play in building brand equity to both internal and external stakeholders (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020).

The review of consumer-based brand, retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity literature highlights the important role that internal and external stakeholders play in building an organization's brand equity. Thus, this literature review would not be complete without a discussion on operationalizing stakeholder theory.

2.6 Operationalizing Stakeholder Theory

In Saleem and Iglesias's (2016) review of the field of internal branding, they describe the evolution of brands as having evolved from being merely identifiers of products, to representing a set of promises (Balmer, 2012) and to being part of the co-creation process (Merz et al., 2009). They describe the most recent era of the brand management process as the '*stakeholder focus era*' whereby organizations harness the power of their frontline employees to "...deliver the brand's promise so as to satisfy and retain various stakeholders" (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016, p. 44). Thus, this thesis operationalizes stakeholder theory as an organizing framework.

Stakeholder theory looks at the nature of the relationships between the firm and its various stakeholders (Hult et al., 2011). It assumes each stakeholder (e.g., employees, investors, suppliers, consumers) contributes to and influences the organization (Freeman, 1984). The literature review has highlighted the influential role of two stakeholders, the consumer and the employee, in the brand building process. However, only one stakeholder, the consumer *or* the employee, has been closely examined in retailer brand equity research to date. The consumer, more so than the employee, continues to be the emphasis of retailer brand equity research, due to the dyadic retailer-consumer transactions (Kotler, 1972), the consumer's role in supplying sales revenue (Hult et al., 2011) and the view that the consumer is at the heart of the brand (Keller, 1993, 2016). However, taking a more holistic perspective of managing and measuring retailer brand equity may be advantageous, due to the complexity and multi-sensory nature of the retailer brand equity (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004).

Jones (2005) developed a stakeholder model of brand equity to understand the sources of brand value. His study looked at multiple stakeholders (i.e., consumers, managers,

employees, suppliers, distribution partners, competitors, media) and emphasized the importance of identifying relevant stakeholders and prioritizing them based on their value and contributions. In simplistic terms, consumers supply sales revenue and employees supply labour. However, consumers' and employees' roles and contributions to the retail organization are evolving, as are the complexities in managing and measuring retailer brand equity. Recent research on brand identity suggests that interactions among multiple stakeholders, not a singular stakeholder, contribute to the creation of unified brand identity (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020; Michel, 2017). Donaldson and Preston (1995) examined descriptive, instrumental and normative types of stakeholder theory and asked a critical question, "Who are the legitimate stakeholders?" This thesis also asks, who are the legitimate stakeholders who influence retailer brand equity? The consumer's perceptions of the brand will always be of critical importance to any retail organization, and they are highly influential to the creation of retailer brand equity. However, in today's highly competitive and complex retail landscape, frontline retail employees, because they directly interact with consumers, also have the power to shape and influence a retailer's brand. The United States Department of Labour reported nearly five million retail sales workers in 2016, and nearly three million first-line supervisors of retail sales workers (DataUSA, 2018). Other sources have reported the retail industry directly employs 30 million workers in the United States alone (PwC, 2014). The sheer numbers of frontline retail employees make them worthy of more research.

While there is evidence that companies would benefit from considering the perceptions of multiple stakeholders (e.g., consumers, employees), not all stakeholders value the same things when it comes to what they look for in a company (Fombrun, 1996; Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Consumers look for reliable companies, whereas employees look for trustworthy companies (Fombrun, 1996). De Chernatony (1999) argues perceptual differences such as these among stakeholders should be eliminated so that the same corporate brand image appeals to all stakeholders. Resolving these differences and deciding how to position their brands internally and externally poses challenges for service-based companies such as retailers, because customer service and the brand promise are delivered by interaction with frontline employees (Chun and Davies, 2006). Chun and Davies' (2006) study of food and chain store retailers compared consumers' and employees' perceptions of corporate brand imagery. They found significant differences between consumers and retail employees on two

key dimensions of corporate brand imagery: *enterprise* (e.g., imaginative, innovative) and *competence* (e.g., reliable, leading). Enterprise was highly valued by consumers, but it had no impact on employee satisfaction. Employees, however, viewed competence to be a strong influencer of differentiation for the company, yet, this was not the case for consumers (Chun and Davies, 2006). Employees and consumers also showed similarities. They both viewed the corporate brand image dimension of *chic* (e.g., organizational prestige) to be an influential factor of differentiation. Both stakeholder groups agreed that the corporate brand image dimension of *agreeableness* (e.g., trust) had a significant influence on employee satisfaction and consumer satisfaction. Finally, both consumers and employees were aligned in their belief that the corporate brand image dimension of *ruthlessness* (e.g., control, power) was not an influential factor for either differentiation or satisfaction. Chun and Davies' (2006) study illuminated the differences and similarities between retail consumers and employees and showed that what appeals to one group (i.e., consumers like innovation) may not appeal to another group (i.e., employees feel stressed by innovation), and that there are also shared values in some cases. Their study also highlighted the need for marketing and human resources managers to bridge their gaps and recognize the link between their policies and practices (Chun and Davies, 2006).

There is mounting evidence that retailer brand equity should include additional stakeholder perspectives beyond the consumer (Christodoulides et al., 2006; Hult et al., 2011; King et al., 2012; Iglesias et al., 2013; Davcik et al., 2015). Researchers' calls for exploring additional perspectives is warranted and necessary to gain a more holistic understanding of retailer brand equity. While most retailer brand equity studies to date focus on one stakeholder, either the consumer (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Gil-Saura et al., 2013) or the employee (DeVecchio et al., 2007; King and Grace, 2010; Tavassoli et al., 2014), this research operationalizes stakeholder theory as an organizing framework and proposes a dual stakeholder lens of retailer brand equity. Thus, this research integrates both employees' internal and external brand perceptions to better understand the factors that influence the formation of retailer brand equity in a bricks and mortar retail context, vis-a-vis a comparison of PFREs and non-PFREs.

2.7 Literature Review Conclusions

Understanding the employee's role in the internal brand management process and in the formation of retailer brand equity remains a relatively new area of interest for marketing scholars. The calls for research of this kind mainly stem from the retailer brand equity literature or the employee-based brand equity literature. Thus, there is a need for research that enables the further understanding of the relationship between the retailer, the employee and how the employee influences the development of retailer brand equity.

Calls for future research have included the development of integrated EBBE models that combine brand perceptions of different stakeholders (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). Thus, research should also look to deepen the understanding of EBBE by comparing how EBBE is formed, its dimensions and influences across different service sectors (i.e., retail, hotels, restaurants, airlines), different types of retail sectors (e.g., grocery vs. fashion), different countries and different types of employees. Calls for future research have also included examining other contextual drivers (i.e., organizational culture) and moderators (e.g., employee characteristics) within an EBBE context (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020).

With the rise and growing power and influence of the retailer as a brand (Rios and Riquelme, 2008), retail scholars face new and unique challenges due to retail brands' multi-sensory nature and the complexity of the retail organization itself (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). However, retailer brand equity research remains fragmented and scarce (Londono et al., 2017; Anselmsson et al., 2017). The literature review also highlighted the lack of clarity on the structure of retailer brand equity, lack of consistency of its dimensions, and lack of consistency in its antecedents and consequences. Anselmsson et al., (2017) and Troiville et al., (2019) proposed two different sequentially structured retailer brand equity models, but they each take different approaches to the appropriate dimensions. Both authors, however, noted the importance of not simply applying dimensions of product-based brand equity models to retailer brand equity models. They stressed the importance of using retailer-specific attributes, given the unique nuances of retailers. Along those lines, Gil-Saura et al. (2013) expressed the need for further research to deepen the understanding of the relationship between retailer trust and store equity, within retailer brand equity literature. This speaks to the overall lack of understanding surrounding the outcomes of retailer brand equity. The

retail industry is vast and Swoboda et al., (2016) elucidated the differences among different retail sectors (i.e., fashion, electronics, grocery, DIY) and noted that few retailer brand equity studies address fashion retailing. There is mounting evidence that retailer brand equity should include additional perspectives beyond the consumer (Davicik et al., 2015; Iglesias et al., 2013; Hult et al., 2011; King et al., 2011; Christodoulides et al., 2006). This is echoed by Davcik et al. (2015) and their call for brand equity research from an internal (i.e., employee) stakeholder perspective. Employee patronage scholars (Dabholkar and Abston, 2008; Abston and Kupritz, 2011; Anaza and Rutherford, 2012) highlights the need to further explore the dual stakeholder perspective in retail (i.e., employees as consumers). There are many different types of employees, and at different levels, that influence the retailer. Thus, all employees should not be examined together. Chun and Davies (2006) emphasized the differences and similarities between retail consumers and employees and highlighted the need for the retailer brand to be managed collaboratively by marketing and human resources managers. Given the sheer numbers of frontline retail employees, and their responsibility to deliver the brand promise the consumer (King and Grace, 2009), frontline employees should be given top priority on the research agenda. Finally, with the growing momentum of research in both retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity, there is a need for these two disparate yet related streams of research to learn from each other and extend current knowledge and understanding of the unique relationship between the retailer and its frontline employees, who are ultimately responsible for directly delivering the brand promise to the consumer.

A review of the literature reveals a wealth of retailer brand equity research examining consumer-based retailer brand equity (Arnett et al., 2003; Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010; Gil-Saura et al., 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016), limited research examining employee-based retailer brand equity (Dabholkar and Abston, 2008; King and Grace, 2009) and even fewer studies investigating frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). Given the valuable input that both consumers' and employees' perceptions provide in retailers' brand building efforts, viewing retailer brand equity through a singular stakeholder lens (e.g., consumer or employee) is insufficient.

This literature review provided an overview of key research across employee patronage, internal brand management and brand equity fields of research. Stakeholder theory was also examined as a critical theoretical underpinning of this thesis. It supports the view

that many stakeholders contribute to and influence an organization. The literature review discussed the importance of the frontline employee in the context of retailer brand equity, and highlighted the relatively new concept of employee patronage, whereby employees can hold internal (i.e., as employees) and external (i.e., as consumers) views of their organization. The review established the vast field of internal brand management as the roots of employee-based brand equity. The chapter concluded with an examination of areas of future research regarding retailer and employee-based brand equity.

This review of relevant literature lays the groundwork for Chapter Three, whereby the fields of employee patronage, consumer-based brand equity, retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity intersect and the proposed conceptual model is described, the theoretical underpinnings are examined, and the hypotheses are developed.

3 Chapter Three: Model Development and Research Hypotheses

3.1 Introduction

This chapter connects the research questions to the proposed conceptual framework. It explains the development of the conceptual model and presents the building blocks for the development of an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity framework in bricks and mortar fashion retailing and its associated research hypotheses.

3.2 Research Questions

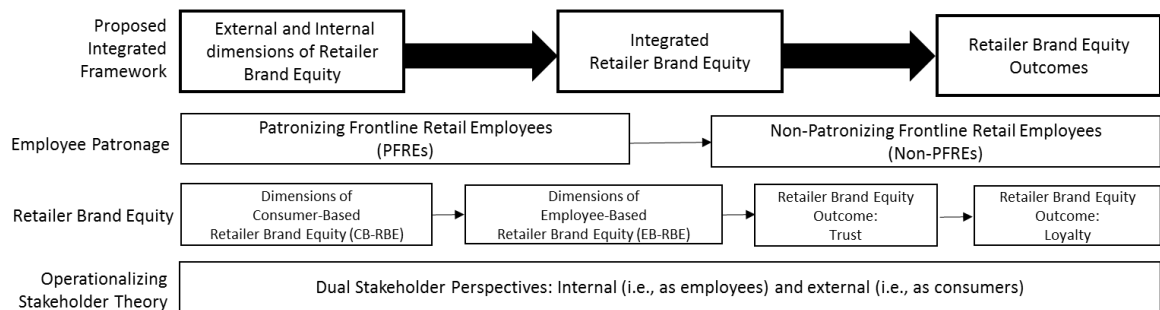
This research focuses on frontline retail employees, an overlooked, yet critical retail stakeholder. This study seeks to understand frontline employees' perceptions of their retailer's brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing. The two key research questions are:

- 1. What internal and external factors influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?*
- 2. Do patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs') perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?*

A conceptual framework is developed to address these research questions. The following sections connect key findings from the literature review to the development of the model and the research hypotheses. The theoretical foundation leading to the development of the conceptual model is discussed in the next section.

3.3 Theoretical Foundation

Three theoretical perspectives support the integrated framework proposed in this paper: operationalizing stakeholder theory, retailer brand equity theory (includes consumer-based retailer brand equity (CB-RBE), employee-based retailer brand equity (EB-RBE), retailer trust and retailer loyalty), and employee patronage, as presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Theoretical Foundations for proposed integrated framework

The proposed employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is referred to as an ‘integrated framework’ because it combines dimensions of consumer-based and employee-based retailer brand equity, which lead to the formation of integrated retailer brand equity and the resulting outcomes. The framework is built on three theoretical foundations. First, the model operationalizes stakeholder theory in that it uses a dual stakeholder perspective as an organizing framework. Typical retailer brand equity models prioritize consumer’s perceptions of the brand and assume consumers can only provide external perceptions of the brand. This model, however, considers a critical yet underexplored retail stakeholder, the frontline employee. The model operationalizes stakeholder theory by focusing on a dual stakeholder, the frontline employee who incorporates external (i.e., as consumers) and internal (i.e., as employees) perceptions of the retailer brand. Second, the model is grounded in brand equity theory, incorporating dimensions from consumer-based retailer brand equity and employee-based retailer brand equity, and proposed outcomes of retailer trust and retailer loyalty. This study takes a novel approach by integrating consumer-based and employee-based retailer brand equity dimensions into one retailer brand equity model. Third, the model is built on the current knowledge of employee patronage, whereby frontline employees are segmented as shoppers (i.e., patronizing frontline retail employees) or non-shoppers (non-patronizing frontline retail employees). Thus, the proposed integrated framework incorporates external (i.e., consumer) and internal (i.e., employee) dimensions of retailer brand equity, which combine to form integrated retailer brand equity, and which lead to retailer brand equity outcomes.

3.4 Conceptual Model

MacInnis (2011) defines conceptual thinking as “...the process of understanding a situation or problem abstractly by identifying patterns or connections and key underlying properties” (p. 140). Thus, the idea of a conceptual or theoretical contribution refers to seeing or understanding something new in an abstract way, devoid of data (MacInnis, 2011; Yadav, 2010). Despite an overall lack of conceptual articles in marketing journals (MacInnis, 2004), Yadov (2010) argues conceptual articles are disproportionately more influential (e.g., in terms of citations and awards) than empirical papers (e.g., papers that include data) because they cultivate new ideas, which is paramount to the knowledge discovery process (Hanson, 1958). With the goal of encouraging the marketing scholarly community to make conceptual advancements, MacInnis (2011) developed a novel typology of types of conceptualizations and entities around which conceptualization can occur. She proposes that conceptual contributions can have different goals, occur within different entities (i.e., domains, disciplines, constructs), have different evaluative criteria and may require differences in thinking skills (MacInnis, 2011) (see Table 3). The typology is described in terms of the overall conceptual goal (e.g., envisioning, explicating, relating, debating), the specific goal of the research (e.g., identifying or revising, delineating or summarizing, differentiating or integrating, and advocating or refuting), the meaning and the common name applied to the contribution (MacInnis, 2011, p. 138).

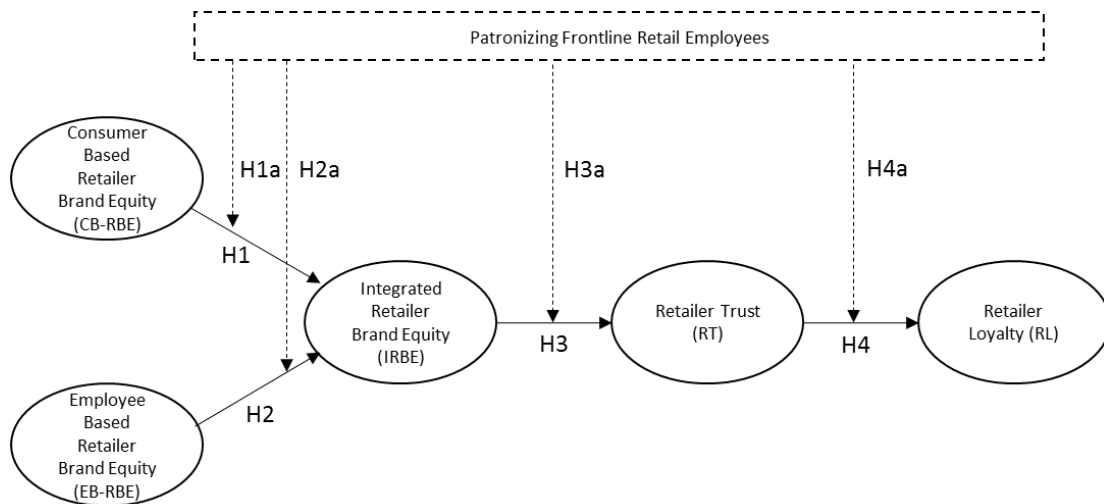
Table 3: Summary of Key Conceptual Contributions to Marketing

General Conceptual Goal	Envisioning		Explicating		Relating		Debating	
	Identifying	Revising	Delineating	Summarizing	Differentiating	Integrating	Advocating	Refuting
Meaning	To see that something exists	To reconfigure, shift perspectives or change	To detail, chart, describe or depict an entity and its relationship to others	To encapsulate, reduce or consolidate	To see how things are different, or dimensions that comprise a whole	To synthesize, amalgamate or harmonize	To support, justify or suggest an appropriate path	To challenge, counter argue, contest, dispute, question
Common Name Applied to Contribution	Novel Framework	Revised perspective	Conceptual framework; structural framework	Review paper	Typological / taxonomic framework; classification scheme	Integrative framework	Position paper	Critique; commentary

Adapted from: MacInnis, 2011

Thus, MacInnis' (2011) typology can be used as a tool to inspire, re-frame and organize one's research ideas, while advancing our conceptual thinking skills and encouraging the scholarly community to make a variety of conceptual contributions. Further, Summers (2001) provides examples of conceptual contributions such as new constructs that may be added to a conceptual framework, the development of additional theoretical linkages or improved rationale for these linkages.

With a general conceptual goal of 'relating' and a specific conceptual goal of 'integrating' (see red highlighted areas of Table 3), this study draws on stakeholder, brand equity and employee patronage theory and offers a series of testable hypotheses, based on the findings of past research. An integrative framework of employee-consumer retailer brand equity is developed from previously validated dimensions of consumer-based and employee-based retailer brand equity models and applies specific learnings from a pilot study (conducted as part of the MSc BMR phase, in 2016). This study advances existing employee-based and retailer brand equity research to conceptualize an integrated, multi-step employee-consumer retailer brand equity model. The model focuses on an overlooked yet critical primary retail stakeholder, the frontline employee. It further examines the frontline employee by comparing the differences among two types of frontline employees: patronizing and non-patronizing. To facilitate the discussion of the development of the conceptual model and its different levels of abstraction, the progression of the model is visually shown and discussed below in two stages. First, the basic conceptual model is presented in Figure 7. It depicts five main constructs, the hypotheses as well as the first order lower order components (LOCs) that connect to the second order higher order components (HOCs).

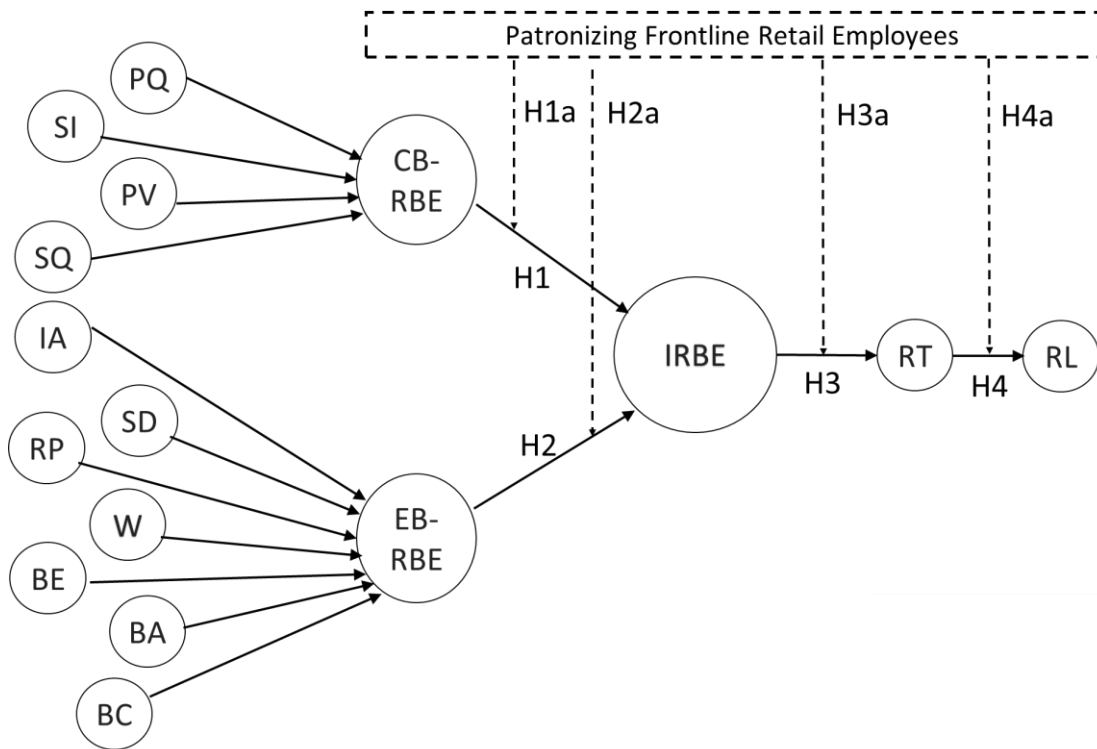
Figure 7: Conceptual Model (Basic)

The purpose of the model is to offer a broader, more holistic conceptualization of employee-consumer retailer brand equity. Starting with the basic conceptual model, the two main constructs on the left side of the model are consumer-based retailer brand equity (CB-RBE) and employee-based retailer brand equity (EB-RBE). These provide external (i.e., employee as consumer) and internal (i.e., employee as employee) employee perceptions, and contribute to the formation of a broader construct, integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE). The model follows a multi-step or sequential approach whereby IRBE leads to retailer trust (RT), and RT ultimately leads to retailer loyalty (RL). This is a unique approach that differs from other retailer brand equity models that typically model all retailer brand equity dimensions in a parallel fashion. The basic conceptual model facilitates an introduction to the higher order components (HOCs) that make up the structural (i.e., inner) model, which is conceptualized as a 3rd order hierarchical component model (HCM).

HOCs are constructs that represent their underlying LOCs in an HCM (Hair et al., 2017). LOCs are defined as subdimensions of HOCs within an HCM (Hair et al., 2017). HCMs contain higher levels of abstraction and involve at least one HOC that is related to two or more LOCs in a reflective or formative way (Hair et al., 2017). Reflective measurement models are identified by their arrows that point away from the construct, and formative ones have arrows pointing to the construct. The concepts of reflective and formative measurement

models are discussed more fully in Section 4.10.1 and 4.10.2, specifying the structural and measurement model. It should also be noted in structural equation modelling, the independent variables (outgoing relationships in the structural model) are referred to as exogenous variables and the dependent variables (incoming relationships in the structural model) are referred to as endogenous variables. The conceptual model in Figure 8 is now discussed including the first order LOCs and their formative path relationships (i.e., the LOCs arrows point to the HOC).

Figure 8: Conceptual Model with LOCs



The conceptual model includes three HOCs: consumer-based retailer brand equity (CB-RBE), employee-based retailer brand equity (EB-RBE) and integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE). These are modelled as HOCs because they are each related to two or more LOCs. Even though retailer trust (RT) and retailer loyalty (RL) are contained within the main model, they are not considered LOCs. They are referred to as latent variables (LVs), or constructs, because they do not relate to an HOC and they can be directly observed by means

of multiple indicators (i.e., items). Indicators will be discussed during the specification of the model in Section 4.11. The external and internal perspectives of frontline retail employees are illustrated by the following path relationships:

- external perspective: CB-RBE → IRBE
- internal perspective: EB-RBE → IRBE

CB-RBE and EB-RBE each lead to IRBE, in which IRBE is a composite of CB-RBE and EB-RBE. Following Keller's (2001), Gil-Saura et al.'s (2013) and Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) conceptualizations of brand equity as a sequential process, the model is conceptualized in a similar multi-step fashion, from left to right, whereby the exogenous variables CB-RBE and EB-RBE lead to IRBE, IRBE leads to RT, which acts as a mediating variable, and RT leads to the ultimate endogenous variable RL.

As previously mentioned, the conceptual model integrates two perspectives from one stakeholder and combines them into one integrated retailer brand equity model, including internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) perspectives of frontline retail employees. The main topic of inquiry for this research is frontline retail employees' perceptions of fashion retailer brand equity, and to determine if patronizing frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees. Thus, the conceptual model accounts for this with the overhead dotted line box that is located at the top of the model. This box points to the four relationships within the model that will be assessed for statistical differences among patronizing frontline retail employees and non-patronizing frontline retail employees. The relationships are as follows:

- CB-RBE → IRBE
- EB-RBE → IRBE
- IRBE → RT
- RT → RL

The model is referred to as a 3rd order HCM, with its three levels of abstraction including: eleven first order LOCs (PQ, SI, PV, SQ, IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA, BC), two second order HOCs (CB-RBE, EB-RBE), one third order HOC (IRBE) and two LVs (RT and

RL). The first order LOCs and their respective indicators will be discussed in detail in Section 4.11. The codes for the first order LOCs are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Lower Order Constructs (LOCs) and Codes

Consumer-Based Retailer Brand Equity LOCs and Codes		Employee-Based Retailer Brand Equity LOCs and Codes	
PQ	Product quality	IA	Internal advancement
SI	Store image	SD	Skills development
PV	Price/Value	RP	Resume power
SQ	Service Quality	W	Work demands
		BE	Brand endorsement
		BA	Brand allegiance
		BC	Brand consistent behaviour

The conceptual model will be discussed again, along with the relationships between the latent variables (i.e., structural model) and the relationships between the latent variables and their measures (i.e., their indicators) in Section 4.10.1 and 4.10.2, where the structural and measurement models are specified.

3.5 Dual Stakeholder Perspectives

This section discusses frontline retail employees' dual stakeholder role within the proposed Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) framework. Frontline retail employees are a unique stakeholder because they can offer both internal (i.e., as employees) and external (i.e., as consumers) perceptions of their retailer's brand (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012). Frontline employees and their role as 'consumers' are discussed first followed by their role as 'employees'.

Frontline Employees as 'Consumers'

Employee patronage, as discussed in Section 2.3, is an area of research that studies employees' roles as consumers and employees within their place of employment. Employee patronage, an under-researched and often overlooked area, is defined as "the cognitive and behavioural belief held by an employee that he or she consumes products and services produced by his or her firm" (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012, p. 341). This is a novel perspective because the majority of consumer behaviour studies assume a 'consumer' is an individual who is situated externally to the organization. Frontline employees are situated internally to the organization, however, as consumers they can also offer an external perspective. As such, frontline employees' social identities within their organization are highly nuanced. While some frontline employees become consumers after they start working at a retailer, many frontline employees are consumers of the retailer before they start working there and continue to be consumers throughout their employment. Consumers often identify with the retailer's brand (Williams and Connell, 2010). As a result of this identification, they may want to become an employee of their preferred retailer brand (Wang et al., 2017). This blurring of lines between employee and consumer are perpetuated by fashion retailers who commonly recruit from their most loyal consumers (Williams and Connell, 2010). For the purposes of this thesis, these cognitive and behavioural beliefs manifest as employees' external perceptions (i.e., as consumers) of the consumer-based retailer brand equity dimensions in the model (product quality, store image, price/value and service quality) and the endogenous constructs, retailer trust and retailer loyalty. Thus, the four proposed consumer-based dimensions and the outcome variables of the IRBE framework require frontline employees to refer to their experiences primarily as consumers.

There is not, however, a discreet boundary between a frontline employees' internal and external views of their employer's brand. For example, a frontline employee may also consider their knowledge of their retailer's customer experience and consumption processes. Many frontline employees are consumers, especially due to the ubiquitous retailer benefit, employee discounts. Crittenden and Albaum (2015) refer to employee discounts as a common perk that are as "American as apple pie" (page 423). Retailers provide discounts to their employees to encourage them buy the retailer's products, and this benefit is often extended to employees' friends and family members too. Whether or not frontline employees use their employee discounts, although in fashion retail they often do (Williams and Connell,

2010), they are very involved in and knowledgeable of their retailer's customer experience process because of their direct interactions with consumers and their front facing role in building relationships with consumers. They directly and intimately observe consumers' experiences and engage in dialogue with consumers every day (de Chernatony et al., 2006). This dialogue may include consumers' praising or critiquing the retailer's services, products or other aspects of the consumer's experience with the retailer. The unique relationship that frontline employees have with consumers further reinforces frontline employees' inevitable and intimate knowledge of the consumption experience. Thus, there is evidence to support frontline employees' direct and/or indirect involvement in the consumption experience, either through their own direct experiences purchasing and/or using their retailer's products and/or services or by facilitating the purchase and consumption experience with the retailer's consumers. And, it is this unique perspective that makes frontline employees such a valuable stakeholder in fashion retailing.

Frontline Employees as 'employees'

Whether a frontline employee is directly or indirectly involved in the consumption experience of their retailer, they are, without a doubt, an employee. As such, frontline employees' can offer internal perspectives of their retailer's brand, in response to an organization's internal branding efforts (Matanda and Ndubisi, 2013; King and Grace, 2009). Frontline employees, within the proposed IRBE framework, provide their internal perceptions of employee-based retailer brand equity dimensions (internal advancement, skills development, resume power, work demands, brand endorsement, brand allegiance, brand consistent behaviour). Like many occupations today, the frontline employee's role is highly nuanced, and there is blurring of lines between their role as an employee and a consumer, not to mention the other unpaid roles they take on in life (e.g., mother, student, neighbour, friend, daughter, aunt, volunteer...). To complicate matters, frontline employees, just like any individual, are bombarded with internal and external messages from a variety of sources: their employer, friends and family, other brands, social media and today's 24-hour news cycle (Jankowski, 2016). Therefore, the frontline employee, just like any individual today, cannot be easily compartmentalized into one role or another. Anaza and Rutherford (2012) empirically showed internal marketing is a predictor of employee patronage, providing further evidence of the blurring of lines between employees' roles as employees and consumers.

3.6 Research Hypotheses

This section explains the development of the eight hypotheses, and the support in the literature for each one. Viewing the conceptual model from left to right (refer to Figure 8) suggests that frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity as a 'consumer' or external stakeholder are positively associated with the creation of integrated retailer brand equity. It also suggests that frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity as an 'employee' or internal stakeholder are positively associated with the creation of integrated retailer brand equity. Frontline employees' internal and external perceptions of the retailer brand form the basis of a more holistic view of integrated retailer brand equity, which then leads to the formation of retailer trust and ultimately retailer loyalty. When comparing the perceptions of patronizing frontline employees and non-patronizing frontline employees it is proposed that patronizing frontline employees positively moderate the relationships between CB-RBE and IRBE, EB-RBE and IRBE, IRBE and Retailer Trust, and Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty.

Each of the relationships presented above are examined and discussed below, drawing upon established theories and relevant literature, to provide rationale for the development of each of the eight hypotheses.

3.6.1 Hypothesis 1

As discussed in Chapter Two, consumer-based retailer brand equity is a multi-dimensional concept. To clarify, the CB-RBE area of the conceptual model represents frontline employee's perceptions of their retailer's brand equity through their experience as a 'consumer' or an external stakeholder to the organization. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, CB-RBE within the conceptual model is a general construct that represents all underlying first order LOCs. Hypothesis 1, and its reference to CB-RBE, relates to all four LOCs (or sub-dimensions) within CB-RBE and proposes they are all positively associated with IRBE. Each of the four LOCs that were selected to represent the sub-dimensions of CB-RBE (product quality, store image, price/value, service quality), and their origins within the relevant literature are now discussed.

Product quality represents consumers perceptions of the level of quality of the products sold by the retailer (Anselmsson et al., 2017). In fashion, revenues from the sales of

products (i.e., clothing, accessories, shoes) represents 99.2% of clothing retailers' total operating revenues (Canadian Industry Statistics, 2017). Therefore, product quality is integral to the conceptualization of retailer brand equity in fashion retailing. Building on cognitive psychology theory, Keller (2003) referred to the associative network memory model to explain how consumer-based brand equity occurs. Thus strong, unique and favourable brand associations in one's memory "play a critical role in determining the differential response that makes up brand equity" (Keller, 2013: 45). Arnett et al., (2003) defined associations as consumer perceptions of product quality and perceived value that the retailer delivers. Pappu and Quester (2006a) defined associations to include retailer image and defined perceived quality as the retailers' total products and services offering. Although associations do not appear directly in this study's proposed conceptual model because it is a very broad construct, this thesis breaks down associations and includes its respective parts; one of which is product quality. As exemplified in Allaway et al.'s (2011), Anselmsson et al.'s, (2017) and Troiville et al.'s (2019) retailer brand equity models, product quality is an important dimension of retailer brand equity.

Store image is another important dimension of retailer brand equity. Store image, also referred to as retailer image, has an extensive history (Martineau, 1958; Lindquist, 1974) and offers multiple definitions and attributes (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000; Hartman and Spiro, 2005). Simply put, store image is defined as a combination of functional and symbolic elements, or "the consumer perception of the overall store image, relative to specific purchase behaviour contexts or specific store and service attributes" (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000, p.437). Anselmsson et al. (2017) include retailer image dimensions in their retailer brand equity model and refer to the concept as consumer perceptions of the physical store, its appearance and its associations. The store image dimension is important to include in this thesis's conceptual model because it is examined in a bricks and mortar fashion retailing context. Store image and its influence on retailer brand equity is supported in a variety of previously validated retailer brand equity measurement models (Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Gil-Saura, 2013) and it has been conceptualized as: physical store (Anselmsson et al., 2017), atmosphere (Troiville et al., 2019), layout (Allaway et al., 2011), physical facilities (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009); and store design (Swoboda et al., 2007). The store image dimension is what differentiates a consumer-based product brand (e.g., Levi's, a pair of jeans) from a

consumer-based retailer brand (e.g., Levi's, the retail store), thus it is an essential retailer specific dimension, especially for fashion retailers.

Price/value, also referred to as price quality, is central to all business strategies, including retail. It refers to the consumer's perception of the price they paid for the product or service, relative to the overall value they believe they received (i.e., value for money). It also speaks to the connection between the product's price (e.g., what the consumer paid for the product) and quality (e.g., what the consumer thinks about the product quality). Swoboda et al. (2007) note that price alone is not the main factor in generating consumer satisfaction and consumer loyalty in the long term. Thus, this thesis acknowledges the importance of price, but also gives attention to the concept of value. When examining price/value, the differences between *retailer brand equity* and *product brand equity* become more profound. Whereas product brand equity is driven by the consumer's perceptions of the product itself, retailer brand equity is driven by perceptions of the products the retailer sells and the services it offers and/or sells. Therefore, when a consumer is assessing the price/value of a retailer's brand, they are likely considering the actual price of the product, the service they received and the value they believe they received, among other factors. However, individuals evaluate price/value differently. For example, one person may think \$100.00 is too much to pay for a pair of jeans, whereas the next person may think it is good value for money. Arnett et al. (2003), Allaway et al. (2011), Jara and Cliquet (2012), Gil-Saura et al. (2013), Swoboda et al. (2016) and Anselmsson et al. (2017) found that value or price quality influences retailer brand equity, thus it is determined that price/value is an essential component to include in the conceptual model and is positively associated with integrated retailer brand equity.

Service quality is also integral to the conceptualization of retailer brand equity. Retailers not only sell products, they also sell and/or deliver services, which is an inherent component of the retail business model. Service quality refers to consumers' perceptions of the quality of the services the retailer delivers (Anselmsson et al., 2017). Service quality is conceptualized as an antecedent (Swoboda et al., 2007; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Swoboda et al., 2009) or dimension (Arnett et al., 2003; Allaway et al., 2011; Jara and Cliquet, 2012; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017) of retailer brand equity. In fashion, the array of services a retailer provides, such as product customization, tailoring or experiential retail, can be a key differentiator (Cullen, 2019). For example, consumers can create their own customized Nike shoes or monogram their Louis Vuitton handbag (Steel, 2018). Interestingly,

in their examination of the German fashion sector, Swoboda et al. (2016) found service not to be a key driver of retailer brand equity. Instead, in their study consumers were more focused on price, assortment and layout. However, they defined service quality primarily in terms of the interactions between employees and consumers. They did not consider after sales service (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Pappu and Quester, 2008) or service reliability (Pappu and Quester, 2008). Gil-Saura et al. (2013) did not include service quality, per se, as a dimension of retailer brand equity, but they included service quality measures in their store image dimension (e.g., ‘This store offers excellent customer service’, ‘This store has friendly personnel’), and found store image an important dimension of retailer brand equity. Thus, it is hypothesized that service quality is positively associated with integrated retailer brand equity.

The key consumer-based retailer brand equity studies (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Pappu and Quester, 2006b; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017) include *awareness* as a key antecedent or dimension of retail brand equity due the importance of the consumer having brand knowledge and being aware of the brand’s existence (Keller, 2003) as a starting point to building brand equity. As a point of clarification, this thesis excludes *awareness* from the conceptual model, due to the assumption that frontline employees, who are the focus of this study, are already aware of the retailer where they are employed. Therefore, it was deemed unnecessary to include the awareness dimension in the model.

In summary, this conceptual model includes four consumer-based retailer brand equity first order LOCs, each of which have been empirically validated in previous studies as noted below:

- PQ: product quality (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Allaway et al., 2011; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troville et al., 2019)
- SI: store image (Pappu and Quester, 2006a; DeCarlo et al., 2007; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017)
- PV: price/value (Arnett et al., 2003; Allaway et al., 2011; Jara and Cliquet, 2012; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2016; and Anselmsson et al., 2017)

- SQ: service quality (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Allaway et al., 2011; Jara and Cliquet, 2012; Anselmsson et al., 2017)

Of note, Arnett et al.'s (2003) retailer brand equity study was conducted in fashion retailing. Pappu and Quester's (2006a, 2006b), Swoboda et al.'s (2007), Swoboda et al.'s (2009), Gil-Saura et al.'s (2013) and Swoboda et al.'s (2016) studies included a variety of retailers, some of which were fashion retailers. Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) study included grocery and interior design retailers but did not include fashion specific retailers.

Thus, an integrated framework to measure the effects of CB-RBE on IRBE is proposed, whereby the effects of all four consumer-based retailer brand equity dimensions on CB-RBE is positively associated with IRBE. Given the aforementioned evidence, hypothesis 1 is stated as:

H1: All Consumer Based Retailer Brand Equity (CB-RBE) dimensions (PQ, SI, PV, SQ) are positively associated with Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE).

3.6.2 Hypothesis 2

Attention is now directed to the employee-based retailer brand equity dimensions of the conceptual model. Employee-based brand equity is defined as "...the differential effect that brand knowledge has on an employee's response to their work environment" (King and Grace, 2009: 130). While consumer-based brand equity is rooted in marketing, draws on cognitive psychology theory and has an overtly external focus, employee-based brand equity is rooted in organizational behaviour, draws on organizational identity theory and has an internal focus. Organizational identity refers to an employees' social identity within their organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; He and Balmer, 2007) and is socially constructed and situational in nature (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001). Aligning with the literature review, the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is conceptualized to include two categories of employee-based brand equity dimensions: employee-benefit dimensions and employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions. The employee-benefit dimensions refer to employees' perceptions of the work they do in exchange for the benefits of working for the organization. Thus, employee-benefit dimensions relate to the psychological contract employees have with their employers (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Lester and Kickul, 2001). Cardy et al. (2007) proposed a three-dimensional EBBE framework, of which two dimensions

related to employee benefits: value (compensation/benefits, work/life balance, work environment) and retention (socialization/training, benefits/privileges based on seniority, employee development, performance appraisal). Along a similar vein, DelVecchio et al. (2007) offer four EBBE antecedents that provide insights into employee's perceptions of retailer brand equity and can be viewed as employee benefits: *internal advancement*, *skills development*, *work ethic* and *resume power*. *Internal advancement* is defined as the employee's ability to advance their career (DelVecchio et al., 2007). *Skills development* refers to the employee's ability to both develop skills at their current employer but also gain relevant skills that make them marketable to other organizations (DelVecchio et al., 2007). *Work ethic* is defined by hard work and performance on the job (DelVecchio et al., 2007). Lievens and Highhouse (2003) refer to a similar concept but called it *task demands*. Finally, *resume power* is the strength of the company name on their resume and to assist them when searching for another job (DelVecchio et al., 2007). These four dimensions were included in the conceptual model and reflect frontline employees' perceptions of employee-benefits related to their retailer's brand equity. Work ethic was renamed to *work demands*, to better encapsulate relevant work-related demands of frontline retail employees and to reflect the definitions of both DelVecchio et al.'s (2017) *work ethic* and Lievens and Highhouse's (2003) *task demands*.

Employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions are more complex than employee benefits; they refer to the behavioural and cognitive attributes that reflect employees' willingness to participate and contribute to a retailer's brand success (King et al., 2012). King et al., (2012) developed a rigorous and validated employee brand equity scale that was subsequently advanced by other scholars (Poulis and Wisker, 2016; Erkmen, 2018). Thus, the model proposes the inclusion of King et al.'s (2012) three employee brand equity dimensions: *brand endorsement*, *brand allegiance* and *brand consistent behaviour*. These employee-centric dimensions encompass what an employee is saying (brand endorsement), doing (brand consistent behaviour) and what they are intending to do in the future (brand allegiance) (King et al., 2012).

Brand endorsement (or positive referrals by employees) can produce impressive organizational benefits (King et al., 2012). Miles and Mangold (2004) define employee branding, a concept analogous to brand endorsement, as "the process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and

other organization constituents” (p. 68). This draws on the theory of reasoned action where the best predictor of future behaviour is the intention to act (Schiffman et al., 2001). In marketing literature, word of mouth (WOM), has garnered much attention as of late (Wentzel et al., 2014) as brands want to know what their consumers are saying about them. The concept of brand endorsement follows the same logic; employers want to know what their employees are saying about them, and they hope it’s positive.

Brand allegiance in the context of employees is analogous to the concept of purchase intentions in the context of consumers. Brand allegiance refers to employees’ willingness to remain working at the retailer for a period of time; thus, remain committed to the organization. A study by Randstad (2017) reported that employee retention will be HR’s biggest issue by 2022. Hiring, firing and training drain company resources, therefore employers want to know if their employees intend to remain with them (King et al., 2012).

Brand consistent behaviour speaks to the types of employee behaviours that align with the company values and can enhance internal brand management efforts (King et al., 2012), yet they are not prescribed behaviours such as the ones in a job description. An analogous term, brand citizenship behaviour, was a critical behavioural element to successful internal brand management (Burmam et al., 2009b). Fashion retailers are complex organizations and can employ a few, hundreds or thousands of employees. With a large workforce, employee brand behaviour can be unpredictable and out of the retailer’s control. Employee behaviours are important, however, because they are linked to employee productivity (Deluga, 1994), and can influence retailer brand equity.

In summary, the EB-RBE portion (or internal perspective) of the model includes the following four supported employee-benefit dimensions:

- IA: internal advancement (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Cardy et al., 2007)
- SD: skills development (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Cardy et al., 2007)
- RP: resume power (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
- W: work demands (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Cardy et al., 2007)

The EB-RBE portion of the model also includes the following three supported employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions:

- BE: brand endorsement (King et al., 2012; King and So, 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016)
- BA: brand allegiance (King et al., 2012; Poulis and Wisker, 2016; Erkmén, 2018)
- BC: brand consistent behaviour (King et al., 2012; King and So, 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016)

Of note, DelVecchio et al.'s (2007) study focused on alcohol and consumer product companies (one being Ray-Ban, a fashion accessory product), and King et al.'s (2012) seminal research was conducted with service employees, of which 46.2% were frontline employees (the remainder were middle and senior level management). However, the study did not specify the type of service sector (e.g., retail, hospitality, banking).

The relationships between all seven employee-based retailer brand equity dimensions and IRBE are hypothesized as follows:

H2: All Employee Based Retailer Brand Equity (EB-RBE) dimensions (IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA, BC) are positively associated with Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE).

3.6.3 Hypothesis 3

The retailer brand equity literature of the past two decades has paid little attention to the retailer trust dimension, despite brand trust's association with overall brand equity (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001, 2005; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017). Retailers strive to consistently deliver value to all of their stakeholders, including consumers and employees. Having a trustworthy retailer brand reduces risk for consumers (Haelsig et al., 2007; Doyle, 1990) and improves a brand's strength (Lassar et al., 1995) for all stakeholders. Consumers place high value on the retailer brands they trust (Gil-Saura et al., 2013). It can also relate to the employee's confidence in their employer and their perceptions of their reputation (Burt and Carralero-Encina, 2000). Anselmsson et al. (2017) commented on researchers' divergence in studying the structural relationships between retailer brand equity dimensions, with differing views regarding what dimensions are dependent variables, predictors or mediating variables. These views are noticeably divergent when it comes to evaluating the retailer brand equity dimension of trust. Some scholars view trust as part of the parallel retailer brand equity model. For example, Gil-Saura et al. (2013) included trust as a dimension of store equity, taking the view that

consumers value the brands they trust. Other scholars view trust as an outcome of retailer brand equity's multi-step sequential process. For example, Anselmsson et al. (2017) posit that trust results from consumer's positive experiences with the brand, and then leads to loyalty, and concluding that trust and loyalty are both outcomes of retailer brand equity. In addition, earlier studies viewed loyalty along with other retailer brand equity dimensions (e.g., quality, awareness, and associations) in a parallel relationship. Without a clear understanding of the structure of retailer brand equity, whether its sequential or parallel, more research is needed. Anselmsson et al. (2017) were the first to offer an empirically tested retailer brand equity framework, like Keller's (2003) four-step brand resonance pyramid, in a retail context, and recommended future research to address other retail types and channels. Thus, this research aligns with the most contemporary conceptualizations of retailer brand equity. Given the importance of continuing to study multi-step retailer brand equity structures, and Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) recent finding that trust results from retailer brand equity, hypothesis 3 is stated as:

H3: Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) is positively associated with Retailer Trust (Trust).

3.6.4 Hypothesis 4

Loyalty is integral to retailer brand equity. Similar to trust, there is divergence among researchers regarding whether it is a dimension of retailer brand equity (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a, b; Swoboda et al., 2009; Das et al., 2012; Das, 2015), or a consequence of the process (Anselmsson et al., 2017; Martenson, 2007). A substantial number of retailer brand equity studies have found retailer loyalty to be an outcome of retailer brand equity (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Allway et al., 2011; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2013a, b; Swoboda, Weindel and Halsig, 2016; Çifci et al., 2016). Given trust's association with overall brand equity (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001, 2005; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017) and loyalty's widely studied role as an outcome of retailer brand equity, the two dimensions should be examined together in one model. Although Keller's (2003) multi-step brand resonance framework has not been widely studied to date, recent interest demonstrates the need to further empirically examine the stages involved in a retailer's brand equity building process. Following Anselmsson et al.'s, (2017) empirical retailer brand equity model that confirmed

trust mediates the relationship between retailer brand equity and loyalty, it is proposed that frontline employees operate similarly to consumers in that they need to trust the retailer before they are loyal to them. There is sufficient evidence leading to the fourth hypothesis:

H4: Retailer Trust (Trust) mediates the relationship between Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) and Retailer Loyalty (Loyalty).

3.6.5 Hypothesis 1a, 2a, 3a and 4a

Employee patronage is a literature area that studies employee's roles as consumers (Abston and Kupritz, 2011). This study focuses on frontline employees (including patronizing and non-patronizing), who have multi-faceted responsibilities as consumer service providers and consumers of their companies (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012). This critical yet mostly overlooked primary retail stakeholder may provide internal (i.e., as an employee) and external (i.e., as a consumer) perceptions of the retailer's brand. However, we do not yet know how frontline employees or different types of frontline employees (patronizing and non-patronizing), perceive each of the four dimensions of CB-RBE.

Given patronizing frontline employees experience as consumers, it is proposed they more strongly perceive the CB-RBE dimensions of the retailer's brand equity. It's important for retailers to better understand this stakeholder because of their sheer numbers and potential influence on consumer service levels and potential revenue. Abston and Kupritz (2011) found that employees who were consumers before becoming employees, and assuming they remained consumers during their employment, had stronger perceptions of the service provided at the retailer store where they work. In addition, Anaza and Rutherford (2012) concluded that employees "combined roles as patrons and employees will benefit the company's overall service performance" (p. 352). Thus, this theory is reflected in the conceptual model and the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between CB-RBE and IRBE.

H2a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between EB-RBE and IRBE.

H3a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between IRBE and Retailer Trust.

H4a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty.

In summary Hypotheses 1 through 4 address the first research question: ***What internal and external factors influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?***

Hypotheses 1a through 4a address the second research question: ***Do patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs') perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?***

3.7 Conclusion

Chapter Three introduced the conceptual model, based on well-established theory (Arnett et al., 2003; DelVecchio et al., 2007; Abston and Kupritz, 2011; King et al., 2012; Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019), that integrates frontline employees' internal and external perceptions of the retailer's brand. The structural model, including the HOCs and endogenous variables were explained, followed by the measurement model, with attention paid to the LOCs. Building on established frameworks in the brand equity (including consumer-based, employee-based and retailer), stakeholder theory and employee patronage literatures (presented in Chapter Two) a multi-step sequential model was presented whereby frontline retail employees' 'employee-based' and 'consumer-based' perceptions of their retailer's brand help to form integrated retailer brand equity, which leads to retailer trust and in turn retail loyalty.

Finally, it was hypothesized that patronizing and non-patronizing frontline employees' perceptions of their retailer's brand equity will differ. The patronizing frontline employee group have more experience as consumers; thus, it was proposed that their perceptions will have a greater effect on retailer brand equity. Understanding retailer brand equity from this unique stakeholder's perspective, and in a fashion retail context, is one way in which this thesis seeks to contribute to and advance the employee-based brand equity, retail brand equity and employee patronage literatures.

Chapter Three: Model Development and Research Hypotheses

The conceptual model presented in this chapter forms the basis for investigation in the remainder of this thesis. Chapter Four details the research methodology, research design and data analysis plan for testing the model and its eight hypotheses.

4 Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter opens with the author's philosophical assumptions that underpin this study (Section 4.2) and a detailed description of this study's research design (Section 4.3). The chapter then provides rationale for the chosen research method including approach and context (Section 4.4). This follows with an explanation of the chosen instrumentation and testing process (Section 4.5), research decisions made regarding the sample (Section 4.6), a discussion of common method bias issues and how they are addressed (Section 4.7), and the data collection process (Section 4.8). The chapter continues with an overview of the data analysis plan and rationale for the chosen analysis method (PLS-SEM) and a description of the advanced data analyses (multi-group analysis) that will be conducted in this study (Sections 4.9-4.12). The chapter concludes with limitations of the research methodology (Section 4.13), ethics approval and closing comments (Section 4.14).

4.2 Philosophical Assumptions

Easterby-Smith et al. (2013) offer four epistemological viewpoints when addressing research design issues: strong positivist, positivist, constructionist and strong constructionist. The starting point in developing the research design is to determine the researcher's ontological position and then link it to the appropriate epistemology. The epistemology chosen needs to align with the research study. The research aims for each epistemological viewpoint varies. While strong positivists prefer testing hypotheses, positivists start with propositions or clear research questions. Constructionists identify the focal issue and strong constructionists aim to "...explain how the research will add to the existing discussion." (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p. 72)

Given the predominantly quantitative nature of brand equity research and the researcher's preference to start with research propositions, it was determined that an internal realist ontological and a positivist (detached) epistemological approach most appropriately aligned with this research study and provided the philosophical lens for this research.

4.3 Research Design

The research design organizes the research activities to ensure the research objectives are met and the research questions are appropriately addressed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013). Table 5 below aligns the researcher's ontology, epistemology and methodology with the appropriate activities of this quantitative study. The first two columns are adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 2013. The final column outlines the key research design and methodological choices made for this study.

Table 5: Linking Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

Ontology	Internal Realism	
Epistemology	Positivism	
Research Aims	Exposure	Test the employee-based retailer brand equity model. Test the theory that patronizing frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline employees' perceptions. Identify the factors that influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity.
Starting Points	Propositions	Develops conceptual model and proposes eight hypotheses.
Data Types	Numbers and words	Use of an inferential, web-based cross-sectional survey with closed-ended questions, utilizing a 6-point Likert scale.
Analysis and Interpretation	Correlation and regression	Partial least squares - structural equation modelling; multi-group analysis.
Outcomes	Theory testing and generation	Contribute new knowledge about an underserved stakeholder group to the employee and retailer brand equity literatures. Develop a practical retailer brand equity measurement tool for fashion retail practitioners. Contribute methodology (i.e., HCM conceptualization of employee-based retailer brand equity) to employee and retailer brand equity literature.

Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 2013, p.25.

The research design phase required making several decisions, of which the key components, following Easterby-Smith et al.'s (2013) research design template, are summarized in Appendix C. The components include research background, rationale, research aims, data, sampling, access, ethics, unit of analysis, analysis, process, practicalities and theory.

4.4 Research Method

The research method explains the procedures used to collect and analyse the data. To address the eight hypotheses of this thesis a cross-sectional study was chosen, by way of an online survey. Survey research methods with cross-sectional designs align with a positivist epistemology, enabling researchers to measure multiple factors and examine potential underlying relationships (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013). Online surveys are widely used within

the marketing domain by academics and practitioners alike for a host of reasons. In some instances, they are preferred over self-administered mail and mall intercept surveys due to their cost effectiveness and speed. Surveys are an appropriate data collection instrument when moderate to large numbers of responses are needed. Therefore, it was the preferred method to collect the data within this study, to test the hypotheses and address the research objectives and questions.

4.4.1 Approach

The research approach is a cross-sectional design, whereby frontline employees working at a variety of fashion retailers in major metropolitan centres in Canada were asked about their perceptions of their retailer brand at a point in time. A cross-sectional research design allows for the investigation of how factors vary across organizations, situation, stakeholder or other units at a point in time (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013). Cross-sectional surveys are beneficial in that they allow the researcher to assess relationships between variables, differences among sub-groups and identifying mediators and/or moderators (Visser et al., 2000). This research design aligns with the author's positivist viewpoint. Disadvantages of cross-sectional design are that they do not describe processes over time or explain why the observed patterns exist (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013).

The researcher also considered a longitudinal design as it would have facilitated an understanding of a specific group of frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity over time and help to answer potential research questions relating to 'why?' The disadvantages of longitudinal studies include their cumbersome nature as they require multiple periods of data collection (from the same sample) and the expensive and complex administration requirements (Hair et al., 2003).

To maintain a reasonable scope for this doctoral research, and considering costs and time, a cross-sectional approach is an appropriate option. Of note, this approach provides an opportunity to achieve this study's research objective which seeks to better understand the relationship among different types of frontline employees' and retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing.

4.4.2 Context

This research is set within a Canadian bricks and mortar fashion retail context, as viewed through the lens of the frontline employee. Rationale for each decision related to the research topic of inquiry is explained below.

Retail: Retailers today don't just *sell* brands, they *are* brands. Retailers have evolved from transactional businesses to multi-sensory organizations (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004) that build and develop their own multi-dimensional brand equity (Anselmsson et al., 2017), which is influenced by internal and external stakeholders (Biedenbach and Manzhynski, 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016) and represents key drivers of a retailer's business success (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). Retailers build and invest in their brand equity to influence and persuade consumers (Gil-Saura et al., 2016), yet they must also invest in their employer brand equity to attract the best employees (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Retail is a complex industry; it is competitive and undergoing a transformation of sorts driven by high-profile store closures, changing consumer preferences, our interconnected society and shopping habits. Despite the challenges, retailer brands have a larger than ever presence on brand ranking lists (e.g., Amazon, Apple, Nike, Louis Vuitton). The emergence and strength of retailer brands is seen in Interbrand's List of Best 100 Global Brands (Interbrand, 2019) that now includes 48 retailers, who have usurped product brand behemoths such as Coca-Cola from the top ranks.

Frontline Retail Employees: In Canada, 11.5% of the workforce works in retail, amounting to 2.1 million Canadians (Retail Council of Canada, 2020). One of every ten dollars paid in salary in Canada goes to a retail employee and retailers invested \$9.1 billion in capital (Retail Council of Canada, 2019), making retail an important driver of the Canadian economy. A retailer's most important stakeholder group is consumers, due to their enormous purchasing power and ability to influence others. However, the second most important group is employees. But retail employees are not a homogenous group. Working in a head office with a Monday-Friday 9-5pm job is very different than working at the frontlines of retail on a shift schedule. Therefore, differentiating frontline employees and head office employees is an essential first step in segmenting them into appropriate groups. Even though frontline retail jobs are often the lowest paying ones, these workers are in direct contact with consumers every day. They are responsible for delivering the retailer's implied brand promise. And, they don't just hold an internal perspective of the retailer's brand. Frontline workers are often

attracted to a retailer as an employer because they have enjoyed shopping there, and in the case of fashion retail, may love their clothes. Thus, frontline employees represent important primary retail stakeholders for many reasons, including their unique internal and external perspectives as employees and consumers. Despite their unique role in the fashion retail organization, academic research is scarce, and there are no known studies that specifically investigate frontline employees' perceptions of fashion retailer brand equity.

Canada: Canada's population is roughly 37 million (World Bank, 2019), making it a relatively small country compared to the United States' population of 327 million. As a former marketing practitioner, finding appropriate Canadian-based branding research was a perennial issue. Through necessity, one reviewed the relevant US-based studies and adapted the findings accordingly. Although US-based research does provide valuable insights for its neighbour to the north, the structure of retail is very different among the two countries. For example, because of Canada's relatively small population, retail is quite consolidated where one will see similar retail chain stores from coast to coast. The United States' retail scene is the opposite; it is fragmented and highly regionalized due to its large population that can support a wide range of retailers. Yet, Canada has been an attractive base for international retailers' market expansion plans. Record numbers of international retailers have opened stores in Canada in 2017 (50+) and 2018 (30+) (Patterson, 2019), primarily fashion retailers seeking out store locations within the metropolitan centres (mentioned below). Therefore, the need for Canadian-specific research and the differing retail industry structures provides solid rationale for a Canadian focused study on retailer brand equity.

It is also worthy to mention the urban vs. rural differences in retail, which were also present in the pilot study. Therefore, this study focuses on frontline employees who reside in one of the five major metropolitan areas within Canada, that according to census data (Statistics Canada, 2020b) have a population of one million or more. Thus, the five metropolitan areas examined within this study are:

- Metro Vancouver Area (includes Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey etc.)
- Greater Edmonton Area (includes Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Leduc etc.)
- Greater Calgary Area (includes Calgary, Okotoks, Cochrane etc.)

- Greater Toronto Area (includes Toronto, Burlington, Mississauga, Brampton, Markham, Oshawa etc.)
- Greater Ottawa Area (includes Ottawa, Nepean, Kanata etc.)

Bricks and Mortar Fashion Retail: Key learnings from a pilot study conducted in 2016 revealed that generalizing an integrated retailer brand equity model across all retailer types (e.g., bricks and mortar, click and collect, e-commerce...) and categories (e.g., grocery, banking, hardware, fashion...) is challenging. E-commerce is less developed in Canada, vs. the USA, due to the vast geographic, and sparsely populated regions, and subsequent high costs related to shipping parcels long distances. Despite US-based retailers' investment into omni-channel retail, recent reports estimate 90% of shopping in the USA is still conducted through bricks and mortar stores (NRF, 2019). The decision to study fashion retail was driven by the strong growth fashion retailers experienced from 2018 to 2019, which was +5.07% (Retail Council of Canada, 2019), which represents the second highest growth category, behind general merchandise stores. Fashion retail is also a profitable business. Of all categories from auto parts to food, fashion (i.e., clothing, shoes and jewellery) commands the highest gross margins (Retail Council of Canada, 2019). Therefore, for these reasons, the decision was made to focus this thesis on bricks and mortar fashion retailers. For the purposes of this thesis, fashion retailers are defined as retailers that predominantly sell fashion and/or fashion related products in the following categories: clothing/apparel, shoes, jewellery, cosmetics and/or accessories (e.g., handbags, belts, scarves, sunglasses).

Given the transformation that is taking place in the retail industry, retailers are proactively seeking ways to improve their businesses, remain competitive, build powerful brands and recruit the best people. Retailers' thirst for research and knowledge that enable these improvements, would also appear to be on the rise. This thesis, which resides at the intersection of brand equity, internal brand management, employee patronage and stakeholder theory, seeks to make conceptual/theoretical, methodological, empirical and practical contributions. These reasons provide solid rationale for the worthiness of this research however it is not without its limitations (discussed in Section 4.6). Conducting research involves making choices that ensure the scope of research is manageable. The author hopes the choices made for this study provide valuable insights that can be leveraged by retail scholars and practitioners within Canada and beyond.

4.5 Instrumentation and Testing

The next section explains the process taken to design and develop the research instrument of choice, a web-based survey.

4.5.1 Survey Design

Developing the survey design included reviewing relevant literature on best practices (Iacobucci and Churchill, 2018) and potential pitfalls (Hulland et al., 2018). Several recent retail brand studies utilize online or web-based surveys to collect data (Chun and Davies, 2006; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; King and Grace, 2010; Gil-Saura et al., 2013). Online surveys are appealing due to their ease of use and ability to reach respondents across major retail markets (Stern et al. 2014). While other survey approaches (i.e., mall intercept, street intercept, store exit) are also used in brand equity studies, web-based surveys are now commonplace (Gunn, 2002). The online survey method was advantageous for this study as it allowed the researcher access to a specific type of respondent, frontline employees working at a variety of fashion retailers, and achieve a large geographic scope. Thus, for these reasons online surveys were deemed an appropriate option for this research.

Although surveys play an important role in academic marketing research, there are many sources of error that can bias results and limit the usefulness of the findings (Hulland et al., 2018). Best practices and weaknesses were considered when designing the survey, with attention paid to two key weakness areas: 1) survey unit representation; and 2) the measurement of constructs (Hulland et al., 2018).

Survey unit representation refers to whom the survey data describes or represents (Groves et al., 2004). In Hulland et al.'s, (2018) review of 522 survey-based papers published in JAMS, JM and JMR in the past decade they describe issues related to the choice of measurement object, description of sampling and assessment of potential non-response bias as areas of weakness. Please refer to Sample (Section 4.6) for a discussion of how these areas are addressed.

Hulland et al., (2018) also warn researchers of issues related to the measurement of constructs. They recommend pre-tests and methods for dealing with common method variance *a priori* and *post hoc*. The section on common method bias (Section 4.7) provides details on how these areas are addressed.

The survey design stage included reviewing the research questions and identifying the broad categories that would help to answer these research questions. The following categories were identified: qualifying / screening criteria questions, demographics, employment status (e.g., part-time or full-time), shopping frequency, compensation related (e.g., hourly wage, employee discounts), consumer-based retailer brand equity, employee-based retailer brand equity, trust and loyalty. Since the respondents were asked to provide either their internal perspective (i.e., as a frontline employee) or their external perspective (i.e., as a consumer) of the retailer brand where they work, the survey utilized very concise language and the respondents were guided through the survey with clearly communicated instructions. To facilitate the transition from consumer-based questions to employee-based questions, the respondents were given clear instructions. For example, before answering the set of consumer-based questions the respondents were instructed: *“Please reflect on your current shopping behaviours at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions.”* Before answering the set of employee-based questions the respondents were instructed: *“Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions.”* Please refer to the full survey in Appendix F.

4.5.2 Initial Item Pool

The initial item pool (i.e., list of questions) was generated based on a comprehensive literature review of existing and validated measures. Items were adapted and/or added to ensure the scale was relevant in a fashion retail context. The items discussed below represent the initial item pool for this research, of which were subsequently reviewed by an expert panel. Feedback from the expert panel session led to further revisions and assisted in determining what scales to include in the final survey. A discussion of the expert panel session is found in Section 4.5.5. A summary of the revisions made because of the expert panel session are also explained in this section. The revisions included refinement of the item definitions and scales. The final survey that was used to collect the data, including the list of item scales, is presented in Appendix F.

The initial item pool, along with definitions of the corresponding construct and the source of literature, are discussed below.

4.5.2.1 Consumer-Based Retailer Brand Equity

Consumer-based retailer brand equity refers to consumers' perceptions of a set of intangible assets or attributes that provide input into the strength of a retailer's brand equity. In this research the frontline employee is the unit of analysis, therefore they are asked to draw on their external experience as consumers to provide their perceptions of each attribute (i.e., store image, product quality, service quality, price/value). The attributes and their place within the literature were discussed in Section 3.6 where the research hypotheses were developed. Each of the four consumer-based retailer brand equity variables, their definitions and how the initial survey items (before they were reviewed in the expert panel session) are discussed below.

Product Quality

Product quality is defined as consumers' perceptions of the quality of the products sold by the retailer (Anselmsson et al., 2017). *Product quality* is initially composed of four items:

1. There is a high likelihood that products bought at the retailer where I work will be of extremely high quality (Arnett et al., 2003)
2. Overall, the retailer where I work sells high quality merchandise (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2008).
3. The retailer where I work sells products of consistent quality (Pappu and Quester, 2008)
4. When shopping at the retailer where I work, I expect to see high quality merchandise (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Arnett et al., 2003).

Store Image

Store image (also referred to as retailer image) is defined as the consumer's perceptions of the retailer itself, the physical store, appearances and its associations (Anselmsson et al., 2017). For frontline employees, they must use their external experience as consumers of the retailer to provide their perceptions of the store's atmosphere, facilities and variety of products and brands. Drawing upon previously validated scales, *store image* is initially composed of seven items:

1. The retailer where I work has a good reputation (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000)
2. The retailer where I work offers a very good store atmosphere (Pappu and Quester, 2008)
3. The retailer where I work has an interior that is visually appealing (Dabholkar et al., 1996; White et al., 2013).
4. The retailer where I work offers very convenient facilities (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Pappu and Quester, 2008)
5. The retailer where I work is easily accessible (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Chowdhury et al., 1998; Swoboda et al., 2016)
6. The retailer where I work offers very good variety of products (Chowdhury et al., 1998; Pappu and Quester, 2008)
7. The retailer where I work sells well-known brands (Swoboda et al., 2016).

Price/value

Price/value (i.e., also referred to as price/value quality) is defined as consumers' perceptions of the relationship between what they paid (i.e., price) and what they get (benefits, goods, services) (Levy et al., 2017). Price is believed to impact consumer's perceptions of the retailer brand and image (Herstein et al., 2013). Value in a retail context, when examined alone, is highly subjective and requires the consumer to compare the perceived benefits and sacrifices of their overall experience with the retailer (Zeithaml et al., 1988; Gil-Saura et al., 2013). However, when price and value are combined into one attribute the value is directly related to the price that was paid for a product. In fashion retailing, it is common practice for frontline employees to receive merchandise discounts, therefore, their perceptions of price/value are after the discount is applied. *Price/value* is initially composed of three items:

1. Merchandise at the retailer where I work is a very good value (Arnett et al., 2003; Gil-Saura et al., 2013)
2. The prices at the retailer where I work are acceptable (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Arnett et al., 2003)

3. I would consider the merchandise at the retailer where I work to be a good buy (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Arnett et al., 2003)

Service Quality

Service quality is defined as consumers' perceptions of the quality of services the retailer delivers to its consumers (Anselmsson et al., 2017). Service quality is particularly important in fashion retail (e.g., fetching sizes, offering product knowledge...) because consumers require support during their shopping experiences (Kumar and Kim, 2014).

Service quality includes customer service, after sales service and sales associates' attributes. It is initially composed of six items:

1. The retailer where I work offers very reliable consumer service (Pappu and Quester, 2008)
2. The retailer where I work offers very good after sales service (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Pappu and Quester, 2008)
3. The sales associates where I work are friendly (Swoboda et al., 2016; White et al., 2013)
4. The sales associates where I work are knowledgeable (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Swoboda et al., 2016; White et al., 2013)
5. The sales associates where I work are professional (Swoboda et al., 2016)
6. The sales associates where I work are honest with consumers (Swoboda et al., 2016)

The items that were subsequently removed from the model, due to internal consistency reliability issues, are discussed in Section 5.3.2.

4.5.2.2 Employee-Based Retailer Brand Equity

Employee-based retailer brand equity refers to frontline employees' perceptions of a set of intangible assets or attributes that provide input into the strength of a retailer's brand equity from an internal brand perspective. The seven employee-based retailer brand equity variables and their place within the literature were previously discussed in the research hypotheses Section 3.6. The four employee-benefit variables (internal advancement, skills development, resume power, work demands) are described first, followed by the three employee-behaviour/perceptions variables (brand endorsement, brand allegiance, brand

consistent behaviour). Each variable, their definitions and the proposed survey items are discussed below.

Internal Advancement

Internal advancement is defined as the employee's perception that they can advance their career within their organization (DelVecchio et al., 2007). *Internal advancement* is initially composed of three items:

1. I feel that I would be able to advance in my career at the retailer where I work (DelVecchio et al., 2007).
2. There would be a lot of desirable positions within the retailer where I work that I may be able to grow into (DelVecchio et al., 2007).
3. There would be many opportunities at the retailer where I work for advancement to better and higher positions (DelVecchio et al., 2007)

Skills Development

Skills development is defined as the employee's perception that they can develop valuable professional skills within their organization (DelVecchio et al., 2007). *Skills development* is initially composed of three items:

1. Working for this retailer, it is likely that I will develop skills that will make me attractive to other companies (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
2. The experience that I gain working for this retailer would make me more marketable to other firms the next time I go on the job market (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
3. The training and exposure I receive by working at this retailer will allow me to get an even better job at another company in the future (DelVecchio et al., 2007)

Resume Power

Resume power is defined as the employee's perceptions that working for this organization will strengthen their resume (DelVecchio et al., 2007). *Resume power* is initially composed of four items:

1. Working for this retailer is a definite resume builder (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
2. Having this retailer's brand name on my resume makes me stand out among other applicants for future jobs (DelVecchio et al., 2007)

3. Having this retailer's brand on my resume will lend credence to my abilities when searching for another job (DeIVecchio et al., 2007)
4. Working for this retailer is likely to make me highly regarded by recruiters at other firms (DeIVecchio et al., 2007)

Work Demands

Work demands refers to the employee's perception that all employees at their organization are hard workers (DeIVecchio et al., 2007) and that the work itself is demanding (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). *Work demands* is initially composed of four items:

1. Standards for performance for employees at the retailer where I work require that employees spend a lot of time and effort at their jobs (DeIVecchio et al., 2007; Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
2. I am expected to work long hours at this retailer (DeIVecchio et al., 2007; Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
3. Employees at the retailer where I work, work harder and/or longer hours than employees at other retailers in order to achieve high performance goals (DeIVecchio et al., 2007)
4. As an employee of this retailer I have to work long hours in order to achieve expected results (DeIVecchio et al., 2007)

Brand Endorsement

Brand endorsement is defined as positive external communications by the employee regarding their employer (King et al., 2012). *Brand endorsement* is initially composed of five items:

1. I say positive things to others about the retailer where I work (King et al., 2012).
2. I would recommend the retailer where I work to someone who seeks my advice (King et al., 2012).
3. I enjoy talking to others about the retailer where I work (King et al., 2012).
4. I talk positively to others about the retailer where I work (King et al., 2012).

5. I say positive things about the retailer where I work, via social media (researcher's proposal)

Brand Allegiance

Brand allegiance is defined as the employee's desire to maintain the relationship with their employer (King et al., 2012). *Brand allegiance* is initially composed of seven items:

1. I plan to stay working with this retailer for a while (King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016).
2. I plan to work for this retailer for 5 years from now (King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016).
3. I would turn down an offer from another retailer if it came tomorrow (King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013).
4. I am willing to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the retailer I work for successful (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
5. I am proud to be a part of the retailer I work for (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
6. I really care about the reputation of the retailer I work for (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000)
7. I feel like I really fit in where I work (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)

Brand Consistent Behaviour

Employees exhibit in-role and extra-role behaviours. Brand consistent behaviours are employee behaviours that are not necessarily prescribed but are consistent with the brand values of the organization (Burmann et al., 2009a; King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013). Thus, brand consistent behaviours refer to the extra-role (i.e., non-prescribed) behaviours that are not part of a job description (Ackfeldt and Coote, 2005). Brand consistent behaviours have also been described as brand citizenship behaviour (Du Preez et al., 2017) and organizational citizenship behaviour (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Thus, *brand consistent behaviour* is initially composed of four items:

1. I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand promise of the retailer I work for (King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013).

2. I consider the impact on my retailer's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation (King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013).
3. I am always interested to learn about my retailer's brand and what it means to me in my role (King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013).
4. My values are similar to those of the retailer I work for (King et al., 2013)

4.5.2.3 Retailer Trust

Retailer Trust

Consumers place high value on the retailer brands they trust (Gil-Saura et al., 2013). Therefore, trust in the context of retail is defined as the trustworthiness of the retailer's image (Anselmsson et al., 2017). It can also relate to the employee's confidence in their employer and their perceptions of their reputation (Burt and Carralero-Encina, 2000). *Retailer trust* is initially composed of three items:

1. I have total confidence in the retailer where I work (Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017)
2. The retailer where I work has never let me down. (Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017)
3. The retailer where I work has a good reputation. (Burt and Carralero-Encina, 2000)

4.5.2.4 Retailer Loyalty

Retailer Loyalty

Loyalty can be defined and measured from attitudinal and behavioural perspectives (Dick and Basu, 1994; Peppers and Rogers, 2017). Attitudinal loyalty means having a positive preferential attitude towards the brand and behavioural loyalty refers to actual behaviour and re-patronage activity. From an attitudinal perspective having a loyal base of consumers can reduce a retailer's vulnerability to competitor's actions (Arnett et al., 2003; Aaker, 1991). Retailer loyalty from a behavioural perspective is defined as the employee's likelihood of shopping at the retailer where they work, and not anywhere else, and recommending the retailer where they work to others (Arnett et al., 2003). Measuring loyalty from both perspectives is important because "attitudinal loyalty without behavioural loyalty has no financial benefit for a firm, but behavioural loyalty without attitudinal loyalty is

unsustainable” (Peppers and Rogers, 2017, p. 62). In this research, frontline retail employees’ attitudinal and behavioural loyalty to the retailer where they work is measured. From an organizational identity lens, frontline retail employees possess a social identity within the retailer where they work (He and Balmer, 2007). Employee patronage literature acknowledges frontline employees’ multiplicity of identity (DeMotta and Sen, 2017); thus, frontline retail employees may identify as employees, consumers, and/or as employee-consumers. To measure the ultimate endogenous variable, retailer loyalty, this research acknowledges frontline retail employees’ social identity as employee-consumers, where there is blurring of lines between their ‘employee’ and ‘consumer’ identities (DeMotta and Sen, 2017). As per the proposed 5-item measurement scale below, which draws on existing and previously validated loyalty scales in the retailer brand equity literature, questions 1 and 2 represent frontline retail employees’ attitudinal loyalty towards the retailer where they work and questions 3, 4 and 5 represent their behavioural loyalty towards the retailer where they work. *Retailer loyalty* is initially composed of five items:

1. I consider myself to be a loyal consumer of the retailer where I work (Yoo et al., 2000; Arnett et al., 2003)
2. When buying fashion, the retailer where I work is my first choice (Yoo et al., 2000)
3. I will not buy from other fashion retailers if I can buy the same item at the retailer where I work (Arnett et al., 2003)
4. Even when items are available from other retailers, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work (Arnett et al., 2003; Gil-Saura et al., 2013)
5. I would recommend the retailer where I work to my friends to shop there (Arnett et al., 2003)

4.5.3 Patronizing and Non-Patronizing Frontline Retail Employees

To test hypotheses 1a-4a, frontline employees are segmented into two groups: patronizing frontline retail employees and non-patronizing frontline retail employees. Retail patronage refers to the consumer who patronizes a retailer and its store (Darden, Erdem and Darden, 1983). Some scholars propose patronage is more attitudinal in nature and involves a relationship between the consumer and the retailer (Baltas, Argouslidis and Skarmas, 2010). The retailing literature, however, has focused on the behavioural aspects of patronage and

views it from a consumer's perspective (Blut et al., 2018). Retail patronage behaviour is measured by the number of store visits and store preference (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006), customer satisfaction (Babin, Darden and Griffin, 1994), patronage intention (Baker and Meyer, 2012) or shopping frequency (Chang et al., 2015). It is also measured attitudinally via positive word-of-mouth (Lacey, Suh and Morgan, 2007). Grewel and Levy (2007) advocate for behavioural measures of retail patronage (i.e., shopping frequency) and Mortimer et al. (2016) argue it has more managerial relevance than repurchase intentions alone. Scholars have argued increased shopping frequency reduces perceived risk and improves likelihood of future purchasing behaviour (Min, Overby and Im, 2012). In the retail literature, shopping frequency is measured with binary scales (frequently or infrequently) (Mortimer et al., 2016; Blut et al., 2018) or ordinal scales (Chang et al., 2015). Mortimer et al.'s (2016) grocery focused study stratified 'frequent' and 'infrequent' shoppers; frequent shoppers were defined as making 4-6 transactions in a 12-week time period and infrequent shoppers made only one transaction in the same time period.

Aligning with the retail literature's preference for behavioural measures of patronage, this research uses a shopping frequency measure to segment frontline employees into two groups: 1) patronizing; or 2) non-patronizing. Respondents were asked how frequently they shop at the retailer, since they began working there. An ordinal measurement scale was used for this question: 1) very frequently (e.g., every week), 2) frequently (e.g., several times per month), 3) occasionally (e.g., once per month), 4) rarely (e.g., several times per year), 5) very rarely (e.g., once per year), or 6) never. The stratification of 'patronizing' and 'non-patronizing' was defined by the frontline employees shopping frequency where patronizing frontline employees shopped very frequently or frequently at their retailer and non-patronizing frontline employees shopped occasionally, rarely, very rarely or never at their retailer. This question enabled the comparison of two different types of frontline employees based on their shopping behaviour.

Pan and Zinkhan's (2006) review of the determinants of retail patronage behaviour literature found the construct is highly nuanced, whereby factors such as atmosphere and prices influence consumer's patronage decisions. Shopping frequency can also be influenced by the type of product or service being purchased. For example, it is common for consumers to purchase food every day or make a big grocery trip every week. Other products such as electronics or gifts are purchased less frequently. In fashion, consumables like cosmetics may

be purchased more often than clothes or jewellery. This research acknowledges shopping frequency may not fully capture all of the nuances of patronizing behaviour and is not without limitations. These limitations are discussed in Section 4.12.

4.5.4 Measurement

For purposes of this research all survey items relating to consumer-based retailer brand equity, employee-based retailer brand equity, retailer trust and retailer loyalty used a 6-point Likert type scale with the following range: 1) strongly disagree, 2) mostly disagree, 3) slightly disagree, 4) slightly agree, 5) mostly agree, and 6) strongly agree. 6-point Likert scales do not have mid-points and are also referred to as forced-choice scales (Chang, 1994; Chyung et al., 2017). Compared to 5 or 7-point scales, the 6-point scale avoids the ‘neither agree nor disagree’ answers (Cummins and Gullone, 2000). Leung’s (2011) comparison of Likert scales found 6- and 11-point scales to follow a normal distribution and cited these as advantageous to the smaller 4- and 5-point scales. However, he found no major differences among the 4-, 5-, 6- or 11-point scales regarding neutral points, correlations, reliabilities or factor structures (Leung, 2011). Thus, the 6-point Likert scale alone was chosen for this study due to the following reasons: longer scales may confuse or deter respondents; smaller scales do not provide the required level of granularity; mid-point answers are not desirable; the sample population for this study, frontline retail fashion employees with at least 6 months experience working at the retailer, should be able to definitively answer each question; and, mixing scales may cause issues in final measurement in terms of deciphering respondents’ differentiation between the intended meanings of different numbers.

4.5.5 Expert Panel Session

In Hardesty and Bearden’s (2004) study on the use of expert judges to assess face validity, they note a lack of consistency in how researchers leverage expert judges, if at all, and the decision rule employed to decide what items to retain in a scale. Face validity is defined as “...the degree that respondents or users judge that the items of an assessment instrument are appropriate to the targeted construct and assessment objectives” (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004, p. 99). Achieving face validity is often an overlooked stage of research but it can potentially offer valuable insights into the final item scale. Therefore, they recommend researchers utilize new, untested or modified measures to provide evidence of face validity via a judging phase.

In their assessment of different expert judging procedures, they evaluated three commonly used decision rules in marketing research: sum-score, complete and not representative. Each are described below:

1. *Sum-score*: the first decision rule is operationalized as the total score for an item across all judges (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). For example, if a judge rated a construct as completely representative, the item received three points, whereas a construct that was rated as somewhat representative received two points and a construct rated as not representative would only be allocated one point. With the sum-score decision rule, all judges' ratings were considered when assessing what items to retain.
2. *Complete*: the second decision rule is operationalized as the number of judges who rated an item as completely representative of the respective construct (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). In this example, if a judge rated a construct as completely representative, the item received one point. Whereas items that were rated somewhat representative or not representative did not receive any points. Whereas sum-score included ratings of all judges, the complete decision rule is concerned with items that received the completely representative rating.
3. *Not representative*: the third decision rule is the inverse of the complete decision rule in that it is operationalized as the number of judges rating the item as not representative of the construct (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). In this decision rule, if a judge rated an item as not representative it received one point. Thus, the not representative decision rule gives clear direction to researchers regarding what items should be deleted.

Following their assessment of these three decision rules they found sum-score and complete to similarly predict item inclusion and the not representative performed most poorly (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). It is important that the items included in the survey reflect the desired construct (i.e., achieve face validity) because inferences, implications and conclusions will be made based on the final scale items (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). Thus, sum-score was the decision rule selected for this study, as it considers the ratings from all judges.

Even though the measures used in this research were previously validated, consumer and employee-based dimensions had never been combined into one model in this way as

proposed in this study. Due to this new combination of measures as well as some modifications, the judging phase was an important step to providing evidence of face validity for the proposed item pool and evaluate each item for relevance and clarity, and potentially improve the soundness of the scale. Following Hardesty and Bearden's (2004) suggested practices, a panel of three expert judges were convened to assess face validity of the initial item pool. A fourth judge reviewed the item pool remotely and provided feedback via email. The expert judge panel session was held at Rotman School of Management in Toronto, Ontario on December 14, 2018. The researcher moderated the session. The four experts included a marketing/branding practitioner, marketing strategy professor, leadership consultant and economics professor. Please see the list of experts in Appendix G.

The process for determining face validity includes the following three tasks:

1. Review each of the thirteen constructs and rate them as: (A) clearly representative of the definition provided, (B) somewhat representative, or (C) not at all representative (Zaichkowsky, 1985);
2. Remove ambiguous, redundant or unrelated items;
3. Evaluate the overall quality of the survey including appropriateness of specific language used in the wording of each item.

To accomplish these tasks, the experts were each given a printed handout that included: a written introduction reiterating the goals of the session, definitions of each construct, a list of corresponding items, other survey questions and a blank section to provide written feedback. After introducing the experts to each other, the moderator verbally explained the broader goals of the research, the goals of the session and asked the experts to initially review the definitions and items individually, and provide written comments regarding the ratings, suggested deletions and notes on quality of the survey. They each worked alone on this task for approximately twenty minutes. Then, the researcher moderated a group discussion whereby each expert was given an opportunity to verbally weigh in on areas they felt warranted improvement and discuss specific issues as a group. The moderator made notes during the session and asked each expert to leave their written notes behind, for further analysis.

Consideration was also given to what decision rule to employ: sum-score or complete. An *a priori* item-retention rule of sum-score was used whereby only items that were rated as

completely or somewhat representative by at least three out of four judges were retained. Sum-score was the preferred approach since it ensures valuable feedback and unique perspectives provided by each of the expert judges were incorporated into the assessment of the items, whereas the complete decision rule does not consider all judges' feedback, only the item ratings themselves. After the session, the researcher transferred all written feedback regarding suggested re-wording, items to remove and quality issues into a separate file and analysed them for insights and themes. The ratings for each of the thirteen proposed constructs were transferred to a spreadsheet, calculated as sum-score and analysed. Following the literature (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004; Lichtenstein et al., 1990), items rated as 'not at all representative' received one point, 'somewhat representative' items received two points and 'completely representative' items received three points. The results from all four judges are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of Expert Panel Session – Construct Ratings

	Expert A	Expert B	Expert C	Expert D	Sum Score
Customer-Based Retailer Brand Equity Constructs					
Product Quality	3	3	3	3	12
Store Image	3	3	3	2	11
Price/Value	3	3	3	3	12
Service Quality	3	2	3	2	10
Employee-Based Retailer Brand Equity Constructs					
Internal Advancement	3	3	3	3	12
Skills Development	3	3	3	3	12
Resume Power	3	3	3	3	12
Work Demands	2	2	3	3	10
Brand Endorsement	3	3	3	3	12
Brand Allegiance	3	3	3	3	12
Brand Consistent Behaviour	3	2	3	3	11
Outcome Constructs					
Retailer Trust	3	3	3	3	12
Retailer Loyalty	3	2	3	3	11

According to the results of the construct ratings, all constructs are retained. The five constructs, Store Image, Service Quality, Work Demands, Brand Consistent Behaviour and

Retailer Loyalty were rated as “somewhat representative” by some of the experts. Therefore, this presented an opportunity to improve them. The initial survey questions (as they were presented to the judges) are shown alongside the revised survey questions, in Appendix D, to show the revisions that were made to the survey items as a result of the feedback from the expert panel session. Even though a construct may have received an overall rating of “clearly representative of the definition provided”, the experts provided suggestions to improve the wording of the items (i.e., survey question) or they may have suggested additional questions. Therefore, additional questions were added to eight constructs: Store Image, Internal Advancement, Skills Development, Work Demands, Brand Endorsement, Brand Consistent Behaviour, Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty. Survey items were revised for three constructs: Product Quality, Price/value and Service Quality. No changes were made to Resume Power or Brand Allegiance.

Finally, the results of the analysis of the written comments indicated that some of the questions in other areas of the survey required re-wording. This led to minor modifications of the survey questions pertaining to the introduction and employee demographics and characteristics. The final survey is presented in Appendix F.

4.6 Sample

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit appropriate frontline employees with the following five screening / qualifying criteria:

1. 18 years or older
2. Currently working as a frontline retail employee at a fashion retailer [fashion retailer defined as a retailer that predominantly sells clothing/apparel, fashion accessories (i.e., scarves, handbags, belts, hats, sunglasses), cosmetics, jewellery or shoes]
3. Currently residing in Canada in one of the five metropolitan areas:
 - a. Metro Vancouver Area (includes Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey etc.)
 - b. Greater Edmonton Area (includes Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Leduc etc.)
 - c. Greater Calgary Area (includes Calgary, Okotoks, Cochrane etc.)

- d. Greater Toronto Area (includes Toronto, Burlington, Mississauga, Brampton, Markham, Oshawa etc.)
 - e. Greater Ottawa Area (includes Ottawa, Nepean, Kanata etc.)
4. Worked at the fashion retailer for at least 3 months
 5. Employed at the fashion retailer full-time or part-time (note: temporary or seasonal workers are excluded)

Any respondent who did not meet all five screening criteria were disqualified and redirected to the end of the questionnaire. This was accomplished by building logic options into the survey. The appropriate frontline retail employees were recruited by Qualtrics, an online market research sample aggregator. The goal was to obtain approximately 300 respondents, with roughly equal numbers of patronizing and non-patronizing frontline employees, to satisfy the sample guidelines suggested by Hair et al. (2017) for structural equation modelling. Hair et al. (2017) provide sample size recommendations in PLS-SEM for a statistical power of 80%, referencing Cohen (1992). According to these recommendations, a model with a maximum of seven arrows pointing to a construct (which is the case for this study) requires 80 observations for detecting R^2 values of at least 0.25 (with a 5% probability of error) (Hair et al., 2017).

4.7 Common Method Bias

Common method bias is a methodological issue when data is collected through one common source. In this study, there are multiple constructs being measured using common methods (i.e., one source). One way to address this issue would be to collect data through an additional source (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The unit of analysis for this study is individuals (i.e., frontline retail employees). However, the individual respondents do not all work at the same organization. They work at a variety of fashion retailers; therefore, the unit of analysis is somewhat expanded. Another way to alleviate common method bias, would be to focus in on a select group of retailers and in addition to the employee perception data, consider gathering sales or other performance related data. To address this issue, this study focuses on frontline retail employees who are employed by fashion retailers.

Podsakoff et al. (2003) defines seven potential sources of common rater effects and states the "...two primary ways to control for method biases are through (a) the design of the

study's procedures and/or (b) statistical controls" (p. 887). Prior to the current study, a pilot study was conducted in 2016. At that time, several common rater effects were identified and rated using a scale of high, medium or low importance. Solutions are provided for each issue, and presented in Appendix E.

This survey could be prone to implicit theories which refers to "...assumptions concerning the co-occurrence of rated items" (Berman and Kenny, 1976, p. 264). This could manifest in this survey because every respondent may not understand where the consumer and employee perspectives are required in different parts of the survey. Two strategies were conducted to mitigate this issue. First, the survey was separated into discreet sections; all of the employee-based questions were asked in one section and all of the consumer-based questions were asked in another section. Second, respondents were given clearly communicated instructions before each question regarding what perspective to take.

The learnings from the pilot study and the feedback from the expert panel session were leveraged when developing and designing the final survey for this research. This post-mortem analysis of the pilot study provided procedural improvements that were subsequently incorporated into this study.

4.8 Data Collection and Group Categorization Rules

Data was collected using an online survey instrument. Consideration was also given to a variety of web-based sampling platforms. A recent US-based study (Heen et al., 2014) compared three different yet popular online survey and sampling platforms: Survey Monkey, Qualtrics and Mechanical Turk. They were evaluated on sampling methods, demographic factors and population representativeness. Qualtrics performed best for recruiting strategies, income distribution and similarity to US Census estimates regarding age range, gender, race and ethnicity. The study concluded, "...as internet use becomes even more entrenched in contemporary society, the current problems with sampling biases due to different access to this technology will likely dissipate over time. Under these conditions, well-designed online surveys will increasingly offer a valuable method for consumer marketing and academic research" (Heen et al., 2014, p. 6).

With the rise of the smartphone, it is critical that online surveys are mobile friendly. Qualtrics was employed in the pilot study phase of this research (in 2016) and proved an

excellent option due to its mobile compatibility features (i.e., optimizes screen space and adjusts question formats to fit a small screen), data export functions (i.e., easy and clean export to CSV and Excel), user friendly dashboard reporting tools, real-time view of survey results, visually appealing survey design and user interface, and responsive consumer service.

Qualtrics panel services were retained to find appropriate respondents for this study. Qualtrics, in addition to providing online survey services, is a panel aggregator where they partner with 20+ online panel providers and supply a network of diverse respondents in regions around the globe. Respondents had the option to complete the survey using their mobile device or computer.

Before the start of the project Qualtrics provided a quote based on cost per respondent, as per the criteria provided by the researcher. Although Qualtrics is not the most inexpensive option, it offered several benefits. A project manager was assigned to the project who carefully reviewed the survey before deployment to ensure its design followed best practices, including checking survey logic and required questions. The project manager inserted attention checks into the survey which guaranteed respondents were carefully taking the survey. Qualtrics agreed to replace respondents who straight-lined through the survey or finished in less than one-third of the average survey completion length. Thus, saving the researcher from not having to pay for faulty or incomplete surveys. Qualtrics conducted a pre-test, where the researcher was able to review the preliminary results to ensure the survey was error-free, could be completed within a reasonable time and contained the appropriate questions. Qualtrics also allowed for a two-week grace period whereby the researcher had the opportunity review the results and discuss with the project manager any responses that need to be replaced due to quality issues.

Data were gathered over a four-week period in January 2019. Data collection was relatively fast, considering the five specific screening criteria required in this study. In total, responses from 361 qualified respondents were received, however 48 were removed because of partial responses and/or they failed the attention checks. Thus, 313 responses were obtained, satisfying the study's respondent screening criteria and the sample guidelines suggested by Hair et al. (2017) for structural equation modelling.

It was hoped that this study would obtain roughly equal numbers of patronizing and non-patronizing frontline retail employees. The qualification was communicated to Qualtrics

but proved to be a challenging criterion to fulfil. This became apparent in approximately week two of the data collection process, where 218 surveys were completed. Respondents were categorized as patronizing frontline retail employees (PFREs) or non-patronizing frontline retail employees (NPFREs) via the following shopping frequency measurement whereby respondents were asked how frequently they shop at the retailer, since they began working there. The measurement scale used for this question is: 1) very frequently (e.g., every week), 2) frequently (e.g., several times per month), 3) occasionally (e.g., once per month), 4) rarely (e.g., several times per year), 5) very rarely (e.g., once per year), or 6) never. It proved difficult to find employees who ‘very rarely’ or ‘never’ shopped at their retailer. Although this is not certain, one may infer that frontline employees working in fashion retail, due to the industry’s common practice of providing employee discounts on merchandise, are more likely to shop at their retailer. For the purposes of this study, it was determined respondents who answered ‘occasionally’ and ‘rarely’ would also be categorized as non-patronizing frontline retail employees. Respondents who answered, ‘very frequently’ (N = 60) or ‘frequently’ (N = 116) were categorized as PFREs (N = 176). Respondents who answered ‘occasionally’ (N = 93), ‘rarely’ (N = 34), ‘very rarely’ (N = 5) or ‘never’ (N = 5) were categorized as non-PFREs (N = 137). Thus, a more precise definition of a non-PFRE is a frontline retail employee who occasionally, rarely, very rarely or never shops at their retailer. To clarify, this frontline employee group will continue to be referred to as ‘non-PFRE’ throughout this study.

Finally, enforced quota restraints relating to age and geographic distribution were requested, but proved difficult to fulfil. Regarding age, the researcher requested an equal distribution for the first four age categories, and somewhat lower distributions for the final two categories. The researcher also hoped to achieve a geographic distribution representative of Canada’s population across the five metropolitan centres. Qualtrics was able to adhere to these restraints for the first 253 respondents. However, adhering to the original geographic distribution percentages proved difficult, therefore, the researcher agreed to have the geographic restraints lifted for the remaining 60 respondents.

4.9 Analytical Methodology

The following section provides information on the two types of structural equation modelling approaches most commonly used in the brand equity literature: PLS-SEM and CB-

SEM. It compares these two approaches and provides rationale for selecting PLS-SEM as the most appropriate and relevant data analysis technique for this study.

4.9.1 PLS-SEM vs. CB-SEM

A systematic review of the literature identified predominant research methods and data analysis techniques. A strong preference for quantitative analysis utilizing structural equation model (SEM) data analysis techniques was noted. The use of structural equation models (SEM) across marketing literature can be traced back to 1977 (Blunch, 2013). SEM models can be categorized into two types: covariance based (CB-SEM) or partial least squares (PLS-SEM). “CB-SEM is used to confirm or reject theories...and in contrast PLS-SEM is used to develop theories in explanatory research” (Hair et al., 2014, p. 4). General guidelines for choosing between PLS-SEM and CB-SEM are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Summary of Guidelines for Choosing PLS-SEM or CB-SEM

Decision Criteria	PLS-SEM	CB-SEM
Research Goals	Exploratory research Theory development and explanation of variance Predicting key target constructs Identifying key driver constructs	Theory testing or confirming Comparison of alternative theories
Estimation Procedure	Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression-based method	Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation procedure
Data Characteristics	Can handle small sample size; as long as sample is “10 times the largest number of formative indicators used to measure one construct” (Hair et al., 2014, p. 23)	Requires large sample sizes
Data Distribution	Non-normal distribution	Normal distribution
Model Characteristics	Can handle formative and reflective constructs; flexible in its modelling properties	Non-recursive relationships
Model Evaluation	Latent variable scores can be obtained for further analyses	Global goodness-of-fit criterion Measurement model invariance

Adapted from Rules of Thumb for Selecting CB-SEM or PLS-SEM, Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2011, p. 144.

4.9.2 Rationale for Selecting PLS Path Modelling

When considering the best approach to estimate the relationships in the structural equation model, the following three decision criteria were carefully considered: 1) research goals, 2) data characteristics; and 3) model characteristics. As outlined in Table 7, decision criteria and guidelines must be followed when choosing between component based PLS-SEM or covariance-based CB-SEM. Each of the three decision criteria are discussed below.

Research Goals

Since this research involves testing hypotheses and using variables from existing brand equity theories, initially it was assumed that CB-SEM would be the most appropriate approach to confirm theory. CB-SEM is primarily used to confirm or reject theories. However, Hair et al., (2017) note “the distinction between confirmatory and exploratory is not always as clear-cut as it seems” (pg. 3). What is unique about this conceptualization of employee-consumer retailer brand equity is the integration of employee *and* consumer dimensions into one model. Therefore, this thesis is more exploratory (i.e., theory building) than confirmatory (i.e., theory testing) in its goal to develop an integrated measure of retailer brand equity. The goal of this research is to develop theory by integrating two perspectives (consumer and employee) into one model and focusing on explaining the variance in the endogenous variables (retailer trust and retailer loyalty). Thus, regarding the first decision criterion, research goals, PLS-SEM is the most suitable SEM technique.

Data Characteristics

The sample size for this study (n=313) aligns with the sample sizes of other brand equity studies from the literature review. Although PLS-SEM is known for working efficiently and achieving high levels of statistical power with small sample sizes, it can also handle large sample sizes. Hair et al., (2017) explain that larger sample sizes increase the precision and consistency in PLS-SEM estimations. The data is non-normal, which is more suitable for non-parametric PLS-SEM than CB-SEM which requires normally distributed data. Thus, regarding the second decision criterion, data characteristics, PLS-SEM is the most suitable option.

Model Characteristics

The model contains formative and reflective constructs, has constructs with multi-item measures and is a complex model with many structural model relations (type II reflective-formative HCM). “Estimation of complex models with many latent variables and/or indicators is often impossible with CB-SEM” (Hair et al., 2017, p. 27). Further, CB-SEM is more commonly used on models with mainly reflective indicators (Diamantopoulos and Riefler, 2011), which is not the case here. Thus, regarding third decision criterion, model characteristics, PLS-SEM is the most suitable SEM technique.

Upon careful examination of the research goals, data characteristics and model characteristics, PLS-SEM is determined to be the most appropriate data analysis technique for carrying out this research.

4.10 Applying PLS-SEM

Hair et al. (2014; 2017) recommends an eight-stage systematic approach to applying PLS-SEM. This data analysis process includes the following eight stages:

1. Specifying the structural model
2. Specifying the measurement model
3. Data collection and examination
4. PLS path model estimation
5. Assessing PLS-SEM results of the reflective measurement model
6. Assessing the PLS-SEM results of the structural model
7. Advanced PLS-SEM analyses
8. Interpretation of results and drawing conclusions.

Stages one, two and three deal with setting up the model in the software and preparing the data. The fourth through eighth stages require running of the model through a variety of analyses using SmartPLS 3 software (Ringle et al., 2015). Once the analyses are conducted, the final stage deals with interpreting results and drawing conclusions. It is important to note that these steps occur after the initial conceptualizing of the model, which was explained in Section 3.4. Thus, the first two stages of applying PLS-SEM (stage 1: specifying the

structural model, and stage 2: specifying the measurement model) are described below. Stage three through seven are described in Chapter Five. Stage eight is discussed in Chapter Six.

4.10.1 Stage 1: Specifying the Structural Model

The use of path models or diagrams, "...early in the research process enables researchers to organize their thoughts and visually consider the relationship between the variables of interest" (Hair et al., 2014, p.33). There are two sub-models within a structural equation model: the structural (inner) model and the measurement (outer) model (Wong, 2019). PLS models require the specification of the structural or inner model, defined as the relationships between latent variables, and the measurement or outer model, defined as the relationships between the constructs and their corresponding indicator variables (Hair et al., 2014). These relationships are based on well-established measurement theory (Sarstedt et al., 2019) and illustrate the variable relationships and the research hypotheses (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, the structural (inner) model is specified first, and described in the section below, followed by the measurement (outer) models (in Section 4.10.2).

Structural (Inner) Model Specification

Specifying the structural model requires examining the sequence of constructs and the relationships between the exogenous (i.e., independent) and endogenous (i.e., dependent) latent variables. As explained in Section 3.4, the basis for this study's model, including the sequence of the constructs and the relationships between them, were drawn from existing consumer, retailer and employee brand equity models, well established theory, logic and the researcher's experience as a marketing practitioner (Hair et al., 2014).

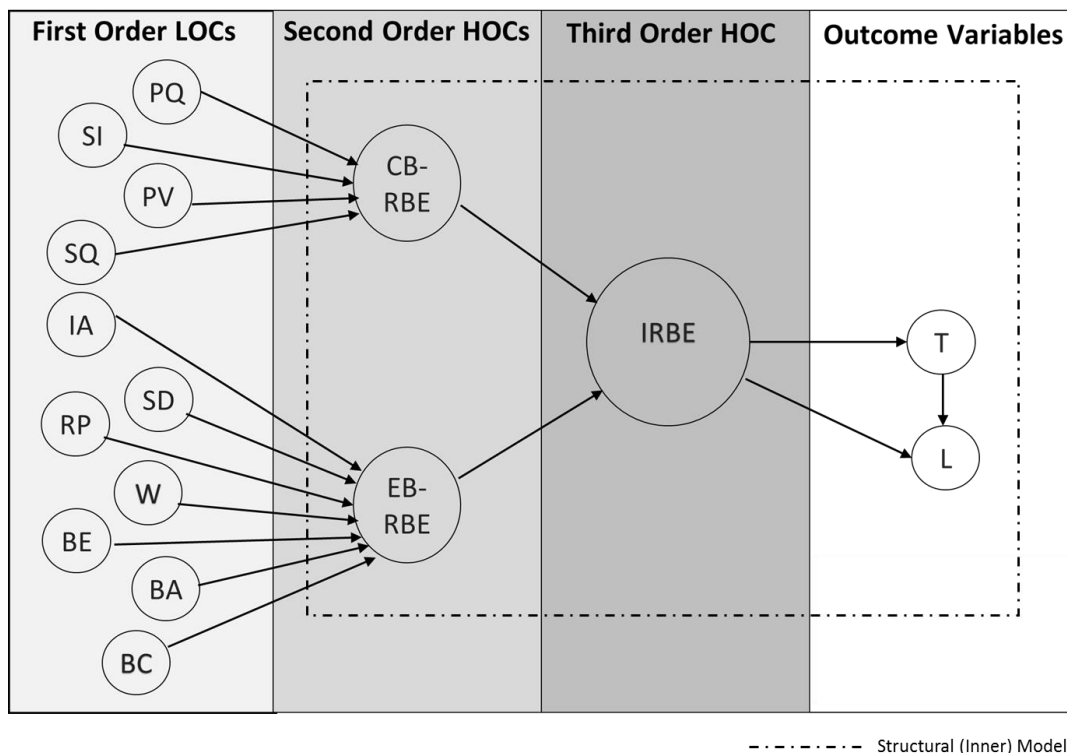
A construct is also referred to as a latent variable. Constructs or latent variables are abstract and cannot be directly observed. Therefore, each construct has a set of indicators, or directly measured observations (also referred to as items or manifest variables) that will be represented as questions in the online survey, the chosen data collection method for this research. In path models, constructs are visually represented by circles and indicators are represented by rectangles.

The main constructs of this model, consumer-based and employee-based retailer brand equity, are complex; thus, they require higher levels of abstraction. Therefore, the model is classified as a higher-order or hierarchical component model (HCM).

“Higher-order constructs (also known as hierarchical component models in the context of PLS-SEM; Lohmoller, 1989) provide a framework for researchers to model a construct on a more abstract dimension (referred to as a higher-order component) and its more concrete subdimensions (referred to as lower-order components). As such, they extend standard construct conceptualizations, which typically rely on a single layer of abstraction.” (Sarstedt et al., 2019, p. 1)

HCMs are used in marketing research because they lead to more parsimony and less model complexity (Edwards, 2001; Johnson et al., 2011; Polites et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2017). HCMs may also reduce collinearity among formative indicators (Hair et al., 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2019).

The model at the focus of this study, referred to as an HCM or higher-order construct, contains three levels of abstraction, including first order lower order components (LOCs), second order higher order components (HOCs) and third order higher order component (HOCs). Figure 9 depicts the three levels of abstraction and the sequence of the constructs, and the dotted line indicates the variables and constructs contained within the structural (inner) model.

Figure 9: Hierarchical Component Model (HCM) – Structural (Inner) Model

Starting at the far left of Figure 9 and moving to the right, the overall HCM will be described, followed by the structural model. The HCM consists of eleven first order LOCs (product quality - PQ, store image - SI, price/value - PV, service quality - SQ, internal advancement - IA, skills development - SD, resume power - RP, work demands - W, brand endorsement - BE, brand allegiance - BA, brand citizenship behaviour - BC), two second order HOCs (consumer-based retailer brand equity – CB-RBE, employee-based retailer brand equity – EB-RBE), one third order HOC (integrated retailer brand equity - IRBE) and two outcome or dependent latent variables (retailer trust – T and retailer loyalty - L). CB-RBE is specified as a second order construct made up of four first order LOCs (product quality, store image, price/value, service quality). EB-RBE is a second order construct made up of seven first order LOCs (internal advancement, skills development, resume power, work demands, brand endorsement, brand allegiance, brand citizenship behaviour). IRBE is a third order HOC made up of two second order HOCs (consumer-based retailer brand equity and employee-based retailer brand equity). The model is specified in a sequential or multi-step process whereby CB-RBE and EB-RBE form IRBE, and Retailer Trust mediates the relationship between IRBE and Retailer Loyalty. Thus, IRBE leads to Retailer Trust, which leads to the ultimate endogenous (i.e., dependent) variable, Retailer Loyalty.

The structural (inner) model itself is contained within the dotted line in Figure 9. The structural model specifies the relationships between the independent variables (CB-RBE, EB-RBE and IRBE) and the dependent latent variables (Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty) but does not include the relationships between the latent variables (i.e., PQ, SI, PV, SQ, IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA and BC) and their observed indicators. Thus, in the structural model, CB-RBE and EB-RBE represent exogenous variables because path arrows point outwards, IRBE is both an exogenous and endogenous variable because path arrows lead into it and point outwards, and Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty are endogenous variables because they have at least one path leading to it (Wong, 2019).

Mediation

A mediating effect occurs when a third variable intervenes between two other related constructs (Hair et al., 2017). The mediating variable reveals the true relationship between an exogenous (i.e., independent) and endogenous (i.e., dependent) variable. Mediating effects are proposed in this model, whereby Retailer Trust intervenes between IRBE and Retailer Loyalty. Therefore, the model will examine the direct effect of IRBE on Loyalty. The IRBE → Loyalty sequence is an example of a direct relationship. The model will also examine indirect effects where Retailer Trust is modelled as a possible mediator between IRBE and Retailer Loyalty. The IRBE → Trust → Loyalty sequence is an example of an indirect relationship.

Moderation

A moderator effect occurs when a third variable, referred to as the moderator, changes the strength or even the direction of a relationship between the exogenous and endogenous latent variables in a model (Hair et al., 2017). Moderator variables can be continuous or categorical. A continuous moderating variable is measured metrically whereas a categorical moderating variable is measured across two or more groups. Smart PLS 3 software measures moderating effects of two categorical groups using multi-group analysis. Comparing three groups is also possible using a manual approach. Multi-group analysis compares the same model across different samples of respondents.

The use of moderation or multi-group analysis is necessary to address this study's second research question: *Do patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs) perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?* The respondents in the study are categorized into two groups: patronizing frontline retail employees (PFREs) and non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs). Thus, PFREs are the categorical moderator variable in this study.

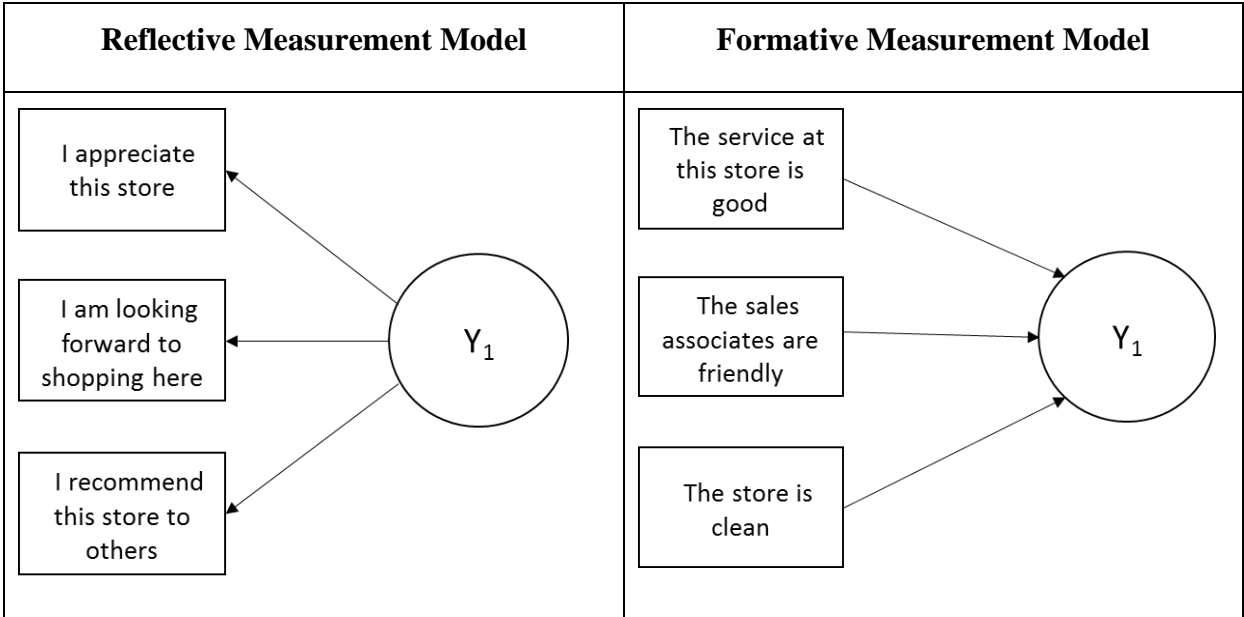
4.10.2 Stage 2: Specifying the Measurement Model

Whereas the structural (inner) model describes the relationships between the exogenous and endogenous constructs, the measurement (outer) model describes the relationships between the constructs and their corresponding indicator variables (i.e., measures or items), including the direction of the relationship.

“The measurement model specifies the relationship between constructs and measures...the direction of the relationship is either from the construct to the measures (reflective)...or from the measures to the construct (formative)...”
(Diamantopoulos et al., 2008, p. 1204).

Measurement (outer) models can be specified as formative or reflective, and they must be based on well-developed measurement theory. Formative measurement models “...are based on the assumption that the indicators cause the construct” (Hair et al., 2014, p. 43). In reflective measurement models, “...causality is from the construct to its measures” (Hair et al., 2014, p. 43). Measures are formative if their indicators have different themes and are not interchangeable. Or, measures are reflective if their indicators have a similar theme and are interchangeable, as per the examples presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Store Satisfaction Example – Reflectively and Formatively Measured Constructs



In the store satisfaction exemplar in Figure 10, the reflective measurement model contains three indicators that describe similar themes and are interchangeable. The arrows point from the construct (i.e., Y_1) towards the indicators. In the formative measurement model, the three indicators point towards the construct (i.e., Y_2), indicating they describe different themes and are not interchangeable.

HCMs can be specified as Type I: reflective-reflective, Type II: reflective-formative, Type III: formative-reflective or Type IV: formative-formative (Becker et al., 2012; Cheah et al., 2019; Ringle et al., 2012; Sarstedt et al., 2019). In Type I higher order constructs, the arrows point from the lower-order components to the indicators, and the arrows point from the higher-order component to the lower-order components. In Type II higher order constructs, the arrows point from the lower-order component to the indicators, and the arrows point from the lower-order components to the higher-order component. In Type III higher order constructs, the arrows point from the indicators to the lower-order components, and the arrows point from the higher-order component to the lower-order components. In Type IV higher order constructs, the arrows point from the indicators to the lower-order components and the arrows point from the lower-order components to the higher-order component.

“Although there are examples of formative models of retailer equity in the literature (e.g., Arnett et al., 2003; Londoño et al., 2016), the majority of studies that examined retailer equity conceptualized retailer equity dimensions as reflective models (Choi and Huddleston, 2014; Das, 2015; Das et al., 2012; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Pappu and Quester, 2006). Accordingly, in line with the existing literature, we conceptualized retailer equity as a multi-dimensional framework that is captured with first-order reflective dimensions” (Anselmsson et al., 2017, p. 197).

Thus, drawing on previous retailer brand equity studies the first order lower order components and their respective indicators are specified reflectively. Thus, a Type II: reflective-formative HCM is specified for this study whereby the lower order components points towards the indicators, the first order LOCs’ arrows point towards the second order HOCs (CB-RBE and EB-RBE), whose arrows point towards their order higher order construct (IRBE).

HCMs require researchers to evaluate the measurement model of the lower order components as well as the measurement model of the higher-order construct as a whole (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Two measurement (outer) models and the structural (inner) model are illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Hierarchical Component Model – Measurement (Outer) Models

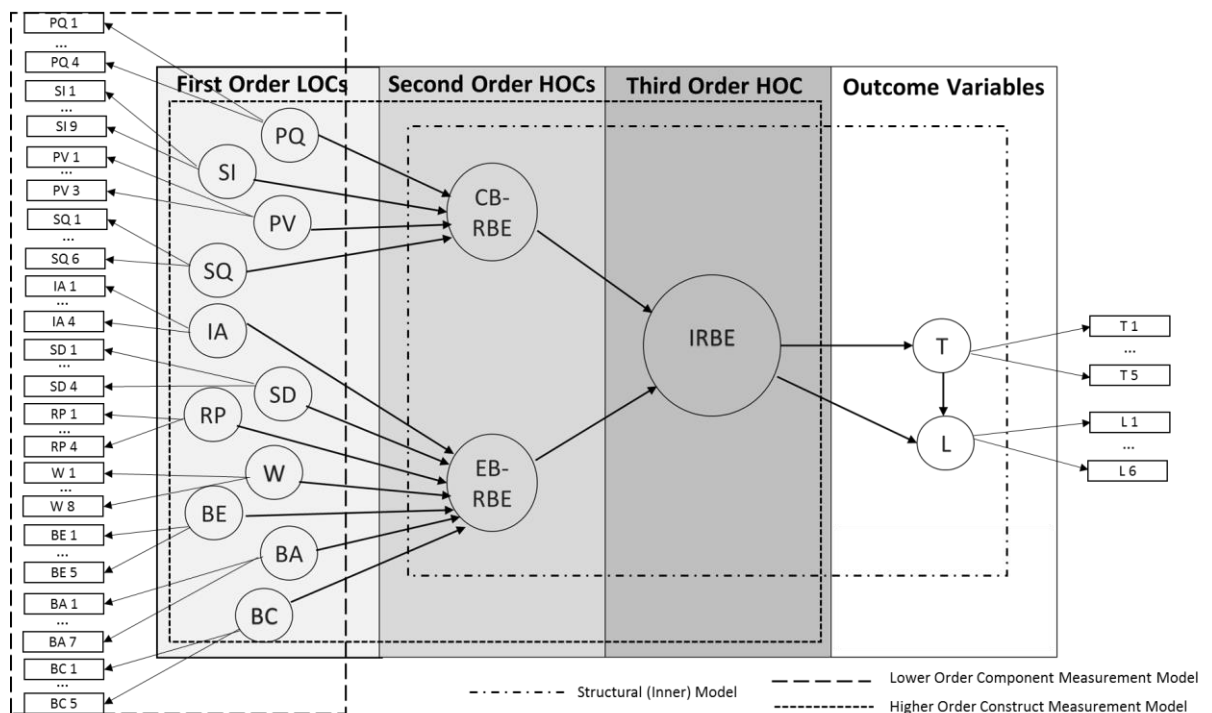
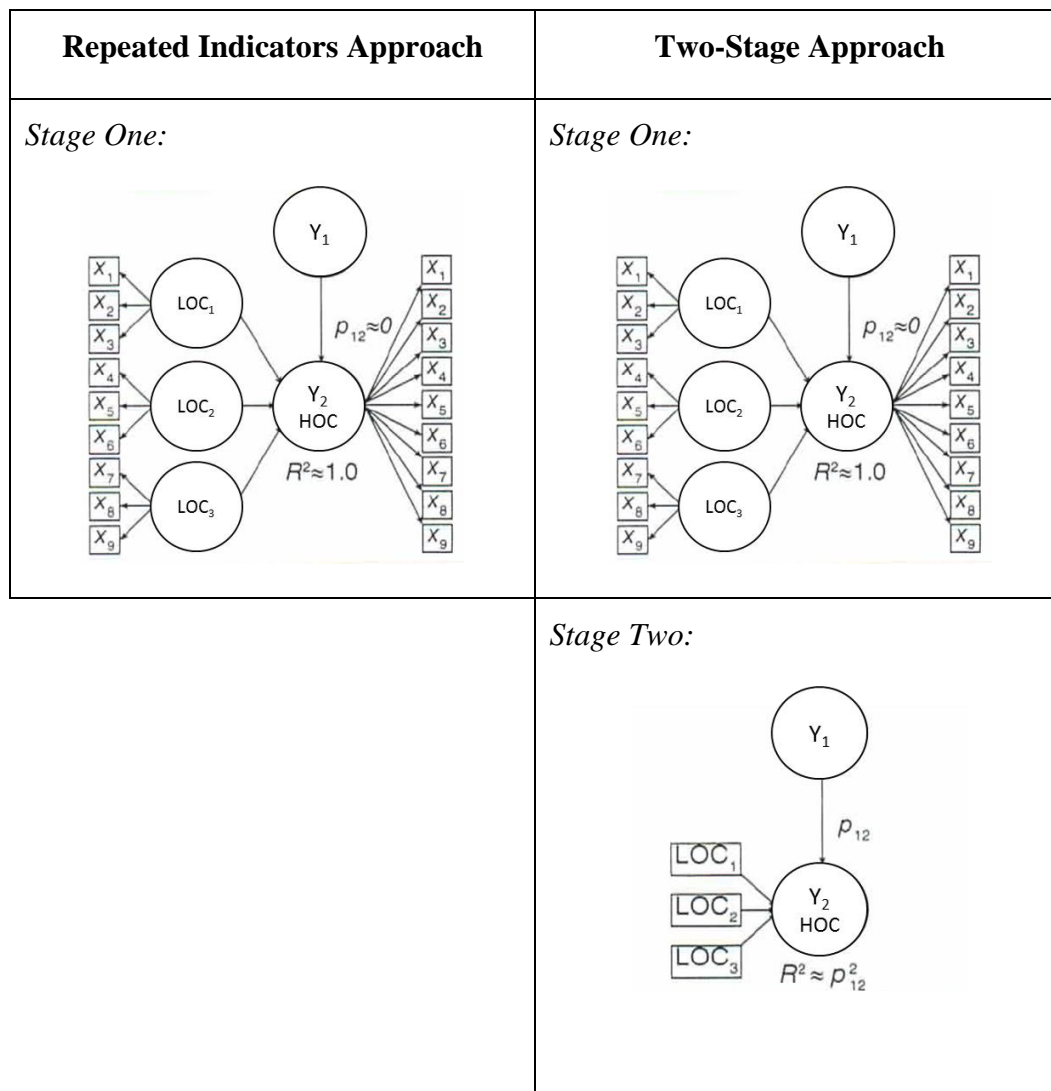


Figure 11 illustrates three models, via the areas contained within the dotted lines. There are two lower order component measurement models within the HCM. The first model (located on the left side of Figure 11) contains eleven lower order components (PQ, SI, PV, SQ, IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA and BC) and their respective indicators (PQ 1...PQ 4, SI 1...SI 8, PV 1...PV 3, SQ 1...SQ 6, IA 1...IA 4, SD 1...SD 4, RP 1...RP 4, W 1...W 8, BE 1...BE 5, BA 1...BA 7, BC 1...BC 5). The second model (located on the right side of the Figure 11) contains two latent or dependent variables (T and L) and their respective indicators (T 1...T 5, L 1...L 6). The higher order construct measurement model, as identified in Figure 11, contains the lower and higher order components, but it does not contain the indicators. The higher order construct measurement model shows the relationships between the higher-order components and its lower-order components. Thus, the proposed employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model consists of 13 lower order components and 69 indicator variables as follows: product quality (4 indicators), store image (8 indicators), price/value (3 indicators), service quality (6 indicators), internal advancement (4 indicators), skills development (4 indicators), resume power (4 indicators), work demands (8 indicators), brand endorsement (5 indicators), brand allegiance (7 indicators), brand consistent behaviour (5 indicators), trust (5 indicators) and loyalty (6 indicators). The 69 total indicators (i.e., items) used in the survey do not include the three attention check questions, which are explained in Section 5.2.5.

4.11 Specifying and Estimating Higher-Order Constructs

There are two approaches to consider when specifying and estimating higher-order constructs in PLS-SEM: 1) the repeated indicators approach, or 2) the two-stage approach (Ringle et al., 2012; Sarstedt et al., 2019). They are illustrated in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Repeated Indicators Approach and Two-Stage Approach for Reflective-Formative HOC



Adapted from Ringle et al., 2012

The repeated indicators approach is carried out in a single stage and requires all indicators of the LOCs to be repeated or assigned to the HOC (Lohmöller, 1989; Wold, 1982; Sarstedt et al., 2019) (see Repeated Indicators Approach in Figure 12). As an alternative, the two-stage approach, as its name dictates, is carried out in two stages, and involves: 1) using the repeated indicator approach to obtain the latent variable scores for the LOCs (see Two-Stage Approach: Stage One in Figure 12), and 2) the LOC latent variable scores become manifest variables in the HOC measurement model (Hair et al., 2017) (see Two-Stage Approach: Stage Two in Figure 12).

Hair et al. (2018) recommends the repeated indicators approach in most cases to identify the HOC. However, Sarstedt et al., (2019) conducted a literature review of sixteen PLS-SEM marketing studies from 1989-2018 and found 81.25% used the two-stage approach and only 18.75% applied the repeated indicators approach. Sarstedt et al. (2019) cautioned the repeated indicators approach can be problematic when a reflective-formative HOC is also the dependent variable in a path model. In such a case, the HOC's variance would be fully explained by the LOC resulting in a R^2 value of 1.0. Sarstedt et al. (2019) note that both approaches produce similar results. Considering the HOC in this study also serves as a dependent construct, the two-stage approach is selected.

There are two ways to conduct the two-stage approach: 1) the embedded two-stage approach (Ringle et al., 2012), and 2) the disjoint two-stage approach (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Becker et al., 2012). The steps involved in each approach are summarized in Table 8 (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

Table 8: Two Versions of the Two-Stage Approach

Embedded Two-Stage Approach	Disjoint Two-Stage Approach
<p><i>Stage 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use repeated indicators approach • Save the latent variable scores of all constructs and add these as new variables to the dataset • Use Mode A for reflectively specified measurement models and Mode B for formatively specified measurement models • Evaluate the LOC measurement model (note: the repeated indicators are not being evaluated) • Evaluate the structural model 	<p><i>Stage 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not use repeated indicators approach • Use the lower-order components of the HOC, without the higher-order component, in the path model. The lower-order components directly link to all other constructs that the HOC is theoretically related to • Save the latent variable scores of the lower-order components • Use Mode A for reflectively specified measurement models and Mode B for formatively specified measurement models • Evaluate the LOC measurement model
<p><i>Stage 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the HOC measurement model (note: the latent variable scores from the previous stage are used as indicators in the higher-order construct's measurement) 	<p><i>Stage 2:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the HOC measurement model (note: the latent variable scores from the previous stage are used as indicators in the higher-order construct's measurement) • Use Mode A for reflectively specified measurement models and Mode B for formatively specified measurement models • Evaluate the structural model

The main differences between these two versions of the two-stage approach are how the models are specified and what areas of the model are assessed within the first and second stages (Table 8). The first stage of the embedded two-stage approach repeats the indicators of the LOC onto the HOC, however, the first stage of the disjoint two-stage approach only uses the lower order components of the HOC in the path model and does not use the higher order component (Starstedt et al., 2019). Further, in the embedded two-stage approach the LOC measurement model and structural model assessments are conducted in stage one because the

latent variable scores are single items, therefore validating the single items would not produce meaningful results. The results evaluation in the second stage considers the HOC's measurement model, as expressed by the relationships between higher- and lower-order components. In the disjoint two-stage approach, the LOC measurement model is evaluated in stage one, and the HOC measurement model and structural model are assessed in stage two. Both approaches are appropriate when specifying reflective-formative type HOCs and they lead to similar results (Cheah et al., 2019). Thus, for the purposes of this study, the embedded two-stage approach was selected.

Consideration should also be given to what algorithm setting (i.e., measurement mode) to apply in the SmartPLS software. Sarstedt et al. (2019) and Hair et al. (2018) recommend using Mode A (i.e., correlation weights) in reflectively specified measurement models (e.g., reflective-reflective and formative-reflective) and Mode B (i.e., regression weights) for formatively specified measurement models (e.g., reflective-formative and formative-formative). Contrary to previous studies, Becker et al., (2012) found, however, when using the repeated indicators approach (which would also apply to the embedded two-stage approach), the choice of measurement mode applies only to the orientation of the higher order components and not the lower-order components. Thus, their study concluded that researchers should use Mode B for the repeated indicators on the higher order component, even if they are specified reflectively on the lower-order components (Becker et al., 2012). The model in this study is specified as a reflective-formative hierarchical component model, thus Mode B is the preferred setting.

4.12 Limitations to Research Design and Method

Although all decisions made within this study employed informed judgement and consideration of business research best practices, there are potential limitations with the chosen research design and method. Some of the study limitations are self-imposed due to research design choices (i.e., geography of survey respondents, the types of employees covered, the types of retailers covered). For example, the decision to focus on one type of stakeholder (frontline retail employees), within one industry (fashion retail) and one country (Canada) limits the generalizability of the results to other populations.

However, there are three key limitations inherent within the research itself, all related to the survey. First, some of the survey questions may be perceived as topic sensitive. A recent

study attributed cross-cultural differences to topic sensitivity (Roster et al., 2014). As a result, it is plausible that topics relating to compensation or the name of the respondent's current employer could be considered sensitive. Most of the survey questions were forced response; therefore, the respondent did not have the opportunity to select the 'prefer not to answer' option.

Second, the quality of data could be compromised if some of the respondents were 'professional survey takers.' Even though Qualtrics monitored how much time respondents took to complete the survey (and subsequently excluded surveys that were completed too quickly), the researcher was not able to determine the level of attention and care the respondents gave to completing the survey. For example, how carefully the questions are read and whether they are distracted while completing the survey. This limitation was minimized by employing Qualtrics to recruit the respondents. Qualtrics uses a rigorous recruitment process, but nothing is infallible.

Third, the shopping frequency question used to stratify 'patronizing frontline retail employees' and 'non-patronizing frontline employees' may be problematic. The question only focused on behavioural patronage. Thus, there is an opportunity to include attitudinal questions to holistically categorize employees' shopping behaviour. Furthermore, employees may have had difficulty accurately recalling their shopping frequency. As a result, the respondents may experience retrieval bias (Taylor, 1982). How much time has lapsed can play a factor in the ability of humans to accurately retrieve information, or, a unique question, such as this one, may not be as easily or accurately recalled (East and Uncles, 2008). Finally, employees' shopping frequency may also vary which compounds retrieval bias issues.

4.13 Ethics Approval

This research adheres to the University of Reading's policies regarding research practice and complies with its ethical requirements. The primary supervisor approved the ethics form via RSIS in October 2018. Section B of the Ethics Approval Form has been submitted with this thesis. An appropriate introduction to the online survey was developed using the Informed Consent template provided in the amended Ethics Approval Process Form, as presented in the first section of the survey in Appendix F.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter provided a description of the research methodology used for developing and testing the proposed employee-based retailer brand equity model according to the eight hypotheses presented in Chapter Four. The chapter provided background information and rationale for the chosen data analysis technique, PLS-SEM, including the specification and estimation of the structural and measurement models and how the analyses would be conducted. This segues into Chapter Five which presents the data collection process, data analyses and the results of the measurement and structural model assessments.

5 Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Results

5.1 Introduction

Data analysis is a critical phase of any research endeavour. To ensure a comprehensive and rigorous approach, Hair et al.'s (2014) eight-stage systematic approach to applying PLS-SEM is used to introduce the study results. Stage one (specifying the structural model) and stage two (specifying the measurement model) were explained in the previous chapter. Chapter Five explains how the quantitative data are organized and analysed. This includes results from stages three through eight of Hair et al.'s (2014) systematic procedure for applying PLS-SEM. The chapter begins by reporting the descriptive statistics. The approach to applying PLS-SEM continues below with the remaining stages three through eight. Stage three (Section 5.2) describes the data collection and examination process involving missing data, inspecting for suspicious responses, outliers, data distribution and presenting the sample demographics. Stage four (Section 5.3) estimates the path model. Stage five (Section 5.4) assesses the reflective measurement model including evaluating internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Stage six (Section 5.5) assesses the structural model including evaluating collinearity, significance and relevance of structural relationships, total effects, coefficient of determination, effect size, predictive relevance and mediator and moderator analysis. Stage seven (Section 5.6) includes advanced PLS-SEM analysis involving multi-group analysis. Finally, stage eight (Section 5.7) interprets the results and draws initial conclusions.

5.2 Stage 3: Data Collection and Examination

As described in the previous chapter, data were collected from frontline fashion retail employees via a web-based survey deployed by Qualtrics in January 2019. In total, 361 responses were received. 48 responses were removed from the analysis including respondents who failed the attention checks. Thus, 313 responses were used for data analysis. The data from the 313 completed surveys were accessed via the Qualtrics online dashboard that provides basic reporting features. Once the data were collected, the full data set was downloaded to a CSV file format and inspected for missing data, suspicious response patterns and outliers. Data were also inspected using two measures of data distribution, skewness and kurtosis; each is discussed below.

5.2.1 Missing Data

According to Little and Rubin (1987) missing data can occur for the following three reasons: MCAR (missing completely at random: there is no systematic difference between the missing and observed data), MAR (missing at random: there might be systematic differences between the missing and observed data as explained by other observed variables) or MNAR (missing not at random) (Bhaskaran and Smeeth, 2014). Possible reasons for missing data could be related to flaws in the questionnaire, where the researcher forgot to force response certain questions, or, in cases where respondents were not asked the same questions. In this survey, all questions activated the force response feature except for the final survey question whereby respondents had the option of providing their contact information, should the researcher need further clarification on their responses. The data were thoroughly inspected, and no missing data were found.

As previously discussed in Chapter Four, steps were taken when working with Qualtrics to ensure there would be no missing data. A Qualtrics project manager carefully reviewed the survey before deployment to ensure it worked as the researcher intended (e.g., checked the forced response questions). Qualtrics also conducted a pre-test which allowed the researcher to review 50 survey results and ensure they were error-free and not missing any data, before the full data were collected.

5.2.2 Suspicious Response Patterns

Researchers must also examine the data for suspicious response patterns before the data can be properly analysed (Hair et al., 2017). Straight lining occurs when a respondent, for example, answers 'somewhat agree' for a high proportion of the questions. This issue was eliminated by retaining Qualtrics' services because they agreed to replace respondents who showed suspicious response patterns such as straight-lining through the survey or finishing in less than 1/3 of the average survey completion length. Thus, the data did not contain any suspicious response patterns, and it could now be examined for the presence of outliers, the next stage of data inspection.

5.2.3 Outliers

Outliers are defined as responses to questions that are exceptionally high or low values (Hair et al., 2017). They can be problematic if they distort the data interpretation, they can

represent an element of the population or they can represent a unique sub-group of the sample (Hair et al., 2017). The process of identifying outliers can be accomplished through univariate, bivariate or multivariate statistical methods conducted using statistical software packages such as IBM SPSS (Hair et al., 2017).

The detection of outliers was achieved through a univariate examination of each of the original 69 variables used in this study. None of the observations contained exceptionally high or low values. Therefore, all 313 responses were retained for the next stage of analysis.

5.2.4 Data Distribution

As previously mentioned in Section 4.9.1, PLS-SEM is a regression-based nonparametric statistical method that does not require data to be normally distributed (Hair et al., 2017), because it does not make any assumptions about the distribution of data or the residuals (Sarstedt and Mooi, 2019). Rather, the research derives a distribution from the data using the nonparametric bootstrapping procedure, which is then used for significance testing of the coefficients (Hair et al., 2017).

However, an assessment of the normality of data is conducted to ensure data is not extremely non-normal (see Appendix H). Extremely non-normal data can inflate standard errors, thus risking not properly identifying statistically significant relationships (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2017).

Skewness refers to the symmetry of the variable's distribution. Kurtosis looks at the peak of distribution. A normal distribution occurs when both skewness and kurtosis are close to zero. To assess the normality, or shape, of the data, the skewness and kurtosis are examined for each of the 69 items contained within the survey. Each item was examined for skewness by identifying ones with values greater than +1 or lower than -1.

Each item was also examined for kurtosis by identifying ones with values greater than +1 or lower than -1. If the item's value was greater than +1, it is described as peaked or narrow (leptokurtic) distribution, whereby most of the responses are in the centre. Items with values lower than -1, it is described as flat (platykurtic) distribution.

Appendix H shows the results of the skewness and kurtosis analysis of each of the 69 items. From the analysis, twenty-eight items are classified as negatively skewed, twenty-six

are peaked (leptokurtic) and ten are flat (platykurtic). Thus, it can be said that less than half of the items are not normally distributed.

It is determined to retain all items in the study, since PLS-SEM does not require the data to be normally distributed (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2017). Absolute skewness and/or kurtosis values that are greater than +1 are indicative of non-normal data and values far greater than these guidelines indicate extremely non-normal data (Hair et al., 2017). In this case less than half of the data is non-normal. However, the data are not extremely non-normal. In addition, the sample size used for this study is adequate to mitigate the problematic issues when assessing the parameter's significance.

5.2.5 Other Data Discrepancies

Finally, the data were visually examined for other discrepancies that could potentially impact the data analysis stage.

The first discrepancy identified was the need to reverse the scale for survey item *Endorse_6* ('I use social media to say negative things about the retailer where I work'). Thus, the following reverse scale was employed: Strongly Agree (1), Mostly Agree (2), Slightly Agree (3), Slightly Disagree (4), Mostly Disagree (5), Strongly Disagree (6). The researcher reversed the answers for this item within the CSV file, and a new data file was created and saved.

The second discrepancy related to all survey items within the Retailer Trust variable, where several respondents' answers included the number '7'. This was odd since the chosen measure was a 6-point Likert scale. Upon investigation it was discovered that Qualtrics had not selected appropriate re-code values for these questions. The recode values for these questions were: Strongly Agree (7), Mostly Agree (5), Slightly Agree (4), Slightly Disagree (3), Mostly Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). The researcher compared the numeric data in Qualtrics with the text data and 'strongly agree', which should have been coded as '6' had been coded as '7'. The 'strongly agree' answers for these questions were recoded to '6'.

The third data discrepancy involved the attention check questions that were included in the survey to help the researcher identify straight-liners or respondents who were not carefully taking the survey. Three attention check questions (Q25, #4; Q34, #5; Q35, #3) were included in the survey (e.g., Please select "strongly agree" for this statement). The

attention check questions are located in the following sections: Store Image (item #4), Brand Endorsement (item #5) and Brand Allegiance (item #3). Respondents who failed the attention checks were discarded. Qualtrics agreed to replace respondents who failed attention checks or finished in less than 1/3 of the average survey completion length. There were 48 respondents out of 361 who failed the attention checks. The final data set contains 313 responses. The three attention check questions were not included in the measurement and structural model assessments, therefore, there were a total of 69 indicators assessed.

5.2.6 Sample Demographics

After examining the data for missing values, suspicious response patterns, outliers and normality, the sample demographics are analysed and presented. The key statistics regarding gender and the screening criteria are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Sample Demographics

	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents		Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Gender			Employment status		
Female	190	60.7	Full-time	237	75.7
Male	121	38.7	Part-time	76	24.3
Other	2	0.6			
Age			Job Title		
18-24	70	22.4	Sales Associate	159	50.8
25-29	65	20.8	Cashier	51	16.3
30-39	87	27.8	Assistant Store Manager	57	18.2
40-49	55	17.6	Store Manager	38	12.1
50-59	30	9.6	Other	8	2.6
60+	6	1.9			
Geographic Location			Retailer Type		
Vancouver	72	23.0	Clothing / Apparel	259	82.8
Edmonton	36	11.5	Accessories	23	7.4
Calgary	24	7.7	Cosmetics	19	6.1
Toronto	156	49.8	Jewellery	6	1.9
Ottawa	25	8.0	Shoes	6	1.9
Education			Length of Employment		
Did not complete high school	3	0.8	3-6 months	42	13.4
High School Diploma	60	19.2	6-12 months	45	14.4
Trade/Technical/Vocational School	18	5.8	1-2 years	77	24.6
Some community college (not completed)	52	16.6	2-4 years	66	21.1
Community College Diploma or Certificate	66	21.1	4-6 years	48	15.3
Bachelor's degree	91	29.1	6+ years	35	11.2
Master's degree	18	5.8			
Professional degree	3	1.0			
Doctoral degree	2	0.6			

More than half of the sample are female (60.7%). A total of 22.4%, 20.8%, 27.8%, 17.6%, 9.6% and 1.9% of the respondents were between the years of 18 and 24, 25 and 29, 30

and 39, 40 and 49, 50 and 59 and 60 and over, respectively. Over 80.0% work for fashion retailers that primarily sell clothing or apparel. Half of the respondents live in the Greater Toronto Area (49.8%), followed by Greater Vancouver Area (23.0%), Greater Edmonton Area (11.5%), Greater Ottawa Area (8.0%) and Greater Calgary Area (7.7%). Almost half have worked for the employer (i.e., retailer) more than two years. Three quarters work full-time. Half of the respondents have the job title ‘sales associate’.

Also, of note, almost one fifth (19.2%) of the respondents had only completed high school. The majority (80.0%) of the respondents’ highest level of education included some form of post-secondary education as follows: trade/technical/vocational school (5.8%), some community college (16.6%), bachelor’s degree (29.1%), community college diploma or certificate (21.1%), master’s degree (5.8%), professional degree (1.0%) or doctoral degree (0.6%).

Finally, respondents were categorized as patronizing frontline retail employees (PFREs) or non-patronizing frontline retail employees (NPFREs) via a shopping frequency measurement. The percentage of respondents in each category are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Shopping Frequency

	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
Very frequently (every week)	60	19.2%
Frequently (several times per month)	116	37.1%
Occasionally (once per month)	93	29.7%
Rarely (several times per year)	34	10.9%
Very rarely (once per year)	5	1.6%
Never	5	1.6%
TOTAL	313	100.0%

Respondents were asked the question “Since you began working for this retailer, how frequently do you shop there?”. Respondents who answered, ‘very frequently (every week)’ or ‘frequently (several times per month)’ were categorized as PFREs (N=176). Respondents who answered ‘occasionally (once per month)’, ‘rarely (several times per year)’, ‘very rarely (once per year)’ or ‘never’ were categorized as NPFREs (N=137).

5.3 Stage 4: PLS Path Model Estimation

Focus now shifts to the estimation of the PLS path model. This section discusses the data used to run the algorithm and how the PLS-SEM algorithm works.

5.3.1 PLS Data Set

The PLS data set used for this study includes 69 indicator variables (i.e., items) that were used to examine the relationships between the LOCs, HOCs and LVs. The sample demographics, previously presented in Section 5.2.6, were analysed separately with IBS SPSS statistical software.

A typical data set for PLS-SEM includes indicator variables (i.e., also referred to as items) within the columns and each observation in the rows. Table 11 illustrates an example of a data matrix for a PLS-SEM example (this is for example purposes only and is not intended to show the data matrix of this particular study). In the data matrix example below, there are 6 measured indicator variables (i.e., $x_1 \dots x_6$) and 3 constructs (i.e., $Y_1 \dots Y_3$). Part of solving the PLS algorithm includes inputting the measured indicators as *raw data* to estimate the constructs scores (i.e., for construct Y_1 , the scores are data points $Y_{1,1}$ to $Y_{50,1}$) (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 11: Data Matrix for PLS-SEM

Case	x_1	x_2	x_3	x_4	x_5	x_6	Y_1	Y_2	Y_3
1	$X_{1,1}$	$X_{2,1}$	$X_{3,1}$	$X_{4,1}$	$X_{5,1}$	$X_{6,1}$	$Y_{1,1}$	$Y_{2,1}$	$Y_{3,1}$
...
50	$X_{50,1}$	$X_{50,2}$	$X_{50,3}$	$X_{50,4}$	$X_{50,5}$	$X_{50,6}$	$Y_{50,1}$	$Y_{50,2}$	$Y_{50,3}$

Adapted from Hair et al., 2017, p.82

In this study, there are 69 measured indicator variables (i.e., $x_1 \dots x_{69}$) and 16 constructs (i.e., $Y_1 \dots Y_{16}$). Thus, the *raw data* set used for the PLS-SEM data analysis for this study includes 69 columns (as defined by the number of measured indicator variables) and 313 rows (i.e., sample size).

5.3.2 Estimating the Model

Estimating the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model using SmartPLS 3 software requires importing the raw data (described in Section 5.3.1) and estimating (i.e., drawing) the model. This requires careful attention to arrow direction and ensuring all indicator variables are appropriately repeated on the 2nd order LOCs and 3rd order HOC. If the model is estimated correctly (e.g., arrows are in place and there is at least one indicator associated with each construct) Smart PLS 3 will indicate so by showing the construct circles in blue. If the model is not properly estimated, the circles will remain red and the algorithm cannot run. However, SmartPLS 3 does not know the exact number of indicators associated with each construct. Therefore, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the model is drawn appropriately and accurately.

The researcher is also responsible for selecting appropriate algorithmic options and parameter settings. For HCMs, such as the one used in this study, the path or factor weighting schemes are preferred, but never the centroid one (Hensler et al., 2009). Becker et al. (2012) and Sarstedt et al. (2019) recommend a path weighting scheme when estimating reflective-formative higher order constructs, as is the case in this study, as it produces the best parameter recovery. As per Hair et al., (2017) the following rule of thumb for initializing the PLS-SEM algorithm were used: path weighting method, a value of +1 for the initial value of all outer weights, stop criterion of 0.0000001 and a value of 300 for maximum number of iterations (e.g., to ensure convergence).

When the path model is ready to run the PLS algorithm, the software automatically standardizes the raw data (i.e., data from the indicator variables) and the latent variable scores. Thus, it calculates standardized values for path coefficients between approximately -1 and +1 for structural model relationships (Hair et al., 2017). Estimated path coefficients close to +1 represent strong positive relationships and are usually statistically significant. The closer the estimated path coefficients are to 0, the weaker the relationship and are usually not statistically significant (Hair et al., 2017). As a rule of thumb, path coefficients with standardized values above 0.20 are usually statistically significant, and values below 0.10 are usually not. Significance testing of the structural model relationships requires evaluating the t values, p values and the bootstrap confidence intervals. The estimation results of the

measurement and structural models are discussed in full in Stage 5 (Section 5.4) and Stage 6 (Section 5.5).

5.4 Stage 5: Assessing the Measurement Model

The next stage of applying PLS-SEM involves assessing the measurement (i.e., outer) models of the lower order components and the overall higher-order construct using the SmartPLS 3 software package (Ringle et al., 2015). As specified in Section 4.10.2 there are three measurement models within this HCM: two measurement models of the lower order components (the relationships between the indicator variables and the lower order components) and the overall measurement model of the higher order construct (the relationships between the higher-order components and the lower-order components) (see Section 4.10.2, Figure 11). When evaluating HCMs, the appropriate measurement criteria must be applied to the measurement models of the lower order components and the measurement model of the overall higher order construct. The evaluation of this HCM follows the guidelines provided by Sarstedt et al. (2019), as follows: the evaluation of the measurement model of the lower-order components includes three key criteria: internal consistency reliability (i.e., Chronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (i.e., indicator reliability and average variance extracted) and discriminant validity; and the evaluation of the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct includes three key criteria: convergent validity, collinearity between indicators and significance and relevance of the outer weights.

The evaluation criteria of the measurement models of the lower-order components are shown and discussed in Section 5.4.1, followed by the evaluation criteria of the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct in Section 5.4.2.

5.4.1 Evaluation Criteria of the Measurement Model of the LOCs

The evaluation of the measurement model of the lower-order components (LOCs) includes three key criteria: internal consistency reliability (i.e., Chronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (i.e., indicator reliability and average variance extracted) and discriminant validity.

As previously discussed in Section 4.11 the embedded two stage approach was used to conduct the analyses. The standard repeated indicators approach was used in stage one,

whereby the 69 indicators were repeated on the second order HOCs and the third order HOC, to properly identify them. However, the repeated indicators themselves are not evaluated. Stage one also includes saving the latent variable scores of all constructs and subsequently adding them as new variables into the dataset, to analyse the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct in stage two. The focus of stage one is the evaluation of the measurement models of the lower-order components and the structural model (which will be discussed in Section 5.5).

Each criterion to evaluate the measurement models of the lower-order components are explained below, and the results are presented and discussed.

Internal Consistency Reliability

Chronbach's alpha, the common measure of internal consistency reliability, provides an estimate of the reliability based on the intercorrelations of the observed indicator variables. The latest research on PLS-SEM suggests that traditional internal consistency metrics such as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability provide conservative measures of reliability (Hair et al., 2017; Wong, 2019). Composite reliability values of 0.60-0.70 are acceptable in exploratory research (Bagozzi et al., 1998; Hair et al., 2017). Values between 0.90-0.95 are not desirable because they indicate that all the indicator variables are measuring the same phenomenon. Composite reliability values below 0.60 indicate a lack of internal consistency reliability. Therefore, both measures should be assessed with Chronbach's alpha representing the lower limits and composite reliability representing the upper limits (Hair et al., 2017), with the true reliability falling somewhere between these two measures. Refer to Table 12 for the reporting of both criteria.

Table 12: Results of Internal Consistency Reliability Analysis

	Latent Variables	Internal Consistency	
		Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
CB-RBE	Store Image	0.767	0.548
	Product Quality	0.905	0.858
	Price/Value	0.868	0.771
	Service Quality	0.923	0.900
EB-RBE	Brand Allegiance	0.889	0.844
	Brand Consistent Behaviour	0.876	0.823
	Brand Endorsement	0.865	0.765
	Internal Advancement	0.870	0.799
	Resume Power	0.919	0.882
	Skills Development	0.910	0.867
	Work Demands	0.781	0.446
Outcome Variables	Retailer Loyalty	0.820	0.714
	Retailer Trust	0.933	0.910

Results show all variables except two falls within the acceptable lower and upper limits. Two variables (Service Quality and Retailer Trust) have values between 0.923-0.900 and 0.933-0.910 respectively. These values are high, but not quite at the upper limit of 0.95. Therefore, all variables are retained with the model at this preliminary assessment stage.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is defined as “...the extent to which a measure correlates positively with the alternative measures of the same construct” (Hair et al., 2017, p.112). In this stage of analysis, indicator outer loadings, indicator reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) are evaluated.

Indicator Outer Loadings, Indicator Reliability and AVE

After checking that the PLS algorithm has successfully converged, and internal consistency reliability is achieved, the next metric to check is indicator reliability. In reflective measurement models this refers to the *outer loadings* (i.e., single regression results with an indicator acting as a dependent variable and a construct acting as an independent variable). For formatively measured constructs, the outer weights are used for results. The size of the outer loadings of each of the measured indicator variables is examined to ensure

they are statistically significant. As a rule of thumb, a latent variable should explain at least half of each indicator's variance. Thus, each outer loading should be 0.708 or higher, since 0.708^2 equals 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017).

The model contains 69 indicator variables. Each indicator's outer loading values were evaluated against the minimum acceptable level of 0.40 (for exploratory research) and at the > 0.708 level (Hulland, 1999) which is the preferred level. These values are derived directly from the SmartPLS 3 report. The indicator reliability number must be manually calculated. It is the square of the indicator's outer loading value, because the latent variable (or construct) should explain at least half of each indicator's variance (Hair et al., 2017).

The outer loadings of each of the 69 indicator variables were examined first and the AVE's of each construct were calculated. The AVE is defined as the communality of the construct and calculated as the sum of the squared loadings divided by the number of indicators for that construct. AVE values should be 0.50 or higher, since the construct should explain more than half of the variance of its indicators (Hair et al., 2017).

Two indicators outer loadings were below the threshold of 0.40 (Work_5, 0.380; Work_7, 0.389). Fourteen indicators were identified as having outer loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 (Image_3, 0.510; Image_5, 0.453; Image_6, 0.504; Image_8, 0.528; Image_9, 0.546; allege_2, 0.620; allege_4, 0.516; endorse_4, 0.636; endorse_6, -0.156; Work_2, 0.570; Work_4, 0.613; Work_8, 0.460; loyalty_5, 0.509; loyalty_6, 0.635). The literature advises the removal of indicators with values between 0.40 and 0.70. To be sure, the PLS algorithm was run a second time with the sixteen indicators removed from the model. The effects of the removal of each indicator was examined by re-calculating the composite reliability. To do so, the AVEs from this first round of analysis (69 indicators) were compared with the AVEs from a second round of analysis (53 indicators), noting if the removal from the model resulted in higher AVE values for the following latent variables: Store Image, Brand Allegiance, Brand Endorsement, Work Demands and Retailer Loyalty. The AVE scores improved in all cases. Upon closer examination of all constructs, face validity and composite reliability were not compromised with the removal of these indicators. However, upon closer inspection of Work Demands, the AVE only improved from 0.307 to 0.458. Since it did not quite meet the 0.50 threshold, other Work Demands indicators were examined for potential removal from the model. Work_3 was identified for removal since its outer loading decreased in the second

round to only 0.399. The PLS algorithm was run for a third time with Work_3 removed from the model, leaving 52 indicators. Results of the final round of convergent validity analysis, including outer loadings, indicator reliability and AVE, are reported in Table 13.

Table 13: Results of Convergent Validity Analysis

	Latent Variable	Number of Measures	Indicators	Loadings	Indicator Reliability (square root of loadings)	AVE
CB-RBE				>.708	>0.50	>0.50
	Store Image	3	image_1 image_2 image_7	0.690 0.780 0.697	0.476 0.608 0.486	0.524
	Product Quality	4	product_1 product_2 product_3 product_4	0.887 0.905 0.852 0.706	0.787 0.819 0.726 0.498	0.707
	Price/Value	3	price_1 price_2 price_3	0.842 0.783 0.860	0.709 0.613 0.740	0.687
	Service Quality	6	service_1 service_2 service_3 service_4 service_5 service_6	0.828 0.789 0.838 0.808 0.795 0.843	0.686 0.623 0.702 0.653 0.632 0.711	0.667
	EB-RBE	Brand Allegiance	5	allege_1 allege_5 allege_6 allege_7 allege_8	0.764 0.731 0.854 0.783 0.791	0.584 0.534 0.729 0.613 0.626
Behaviour		5	consist_1 consist_2 consist_3 consist_4 consist_5	0.755 0.725 0.767 0.798 0.779	0.570 0.526 0.588 0.637 0.607	0.585
Brand Endorsement		3	endorse_1 endorse_2 endorse_3	0.821 0.865 0.789	0.674 0.748 0.623	0.681
Internal		4	advance_1 advance_2 advance_3 advance_4	0.766 0.851 0.838 0.702	0.587 0.724 0.702 0.493	0.627
Resume Power		4	resume_1 resume_2 resume_3 resume_4	0.834 0.856 0.866 0.882	0.696 0.733 0.750 0.778	0.739
Skills Development		4	skills_1 skills_2 skills_3 skills_4	0.885 0.827 0.826 0.844	0.783 0.684 0.682 0.712	0.716
Work Demands		2	work_1 work_6	0.850 0.748	0.723 0.560	0.641
Outcome Variables		Loyalty	4	Loyalty_1 Loyalty_2 Loyalty_3 Loyalty_4	0.699 0.743 0.767 0.709	0.489 0.552 0.588 0.503
	Trust	5	Trust_1 Trust_2 Trust_3 Trust_4 Trust_5	0.831 0.858 0.840 0.896 0.863	0.691 0.736 0.706 0.803 0.745	0.736

In round three, all indicators were checked to ensure they reached the recommended thresholds (loadings: >0.70 ; indicator reliability: >0.50 ; AVE: >0.50). It was noted the AVE of Work Demands improved to 0.641. Thus, the model with 52 indicators, has achieved convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is “the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs by empirical standards” (Hair et al., 2017, p. 115). Assessing the discriminant validity of the model requires examining three measures: cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker criterion, and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations. Once again, the SmartPLS 3 software is utilized to run the three analysis to test for discriminant validity. Each measure is discussed below.

Cross-Loadings

Cross-loading must be checked to assess the discriminant validity of the indicators. This is reported in SmartPLS in table form with the indicators (i.e., survey items) in the rows and constructs (i.e., latent variables) in the columns. Rule of thumb states the indicator’s outer loading on the associated construct should be greater than any of its cross-loadings (i.e., its correlation) on other constructs (Hair et al., 2017). Table 14 displays the results of the cross-loadings for the 52 indicators (in the rows) and 13 latent variables (in the columns).

Table 14: Cross Loadings Analysis

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	advance_1	0.766	0.273	0.208	0.242	0.109	0.277	0.287	0.193	0.130	0.226	0.219	0.239	0.202
	advance_2	0.851	0.303	0.190	0.258	0.192	0.325	0.271	0.335	0.158	0.237	0.092	0.180	0.225
	advance_3	0.838	0.321	0.213	0.250	0.228	0.380	0.354	0.250	0.157	0.245	0.112	0.233	0.235
	advance_4	0.702	0.291	0.208	0.301	0.273	0.245	0.284	0.302	0.215	0.173	0.245	0.340	0.331
2	allege_1	0.323	0.764	0.519	0.565	0.488	0.493	0.517	0.174	0.427	0.460	0.431	0.445	0.187
	allege_5	0.265	0.731	0.521	0.483	0.368	0.489	0.457	0.053	0.359	0.366	0.401	0.376	0.144
	allege_6	0.324	0.854	0.582	0.643	0.452	0.505	0.549	0.130	0.431	0.490	0.396	0.414	0.241
	allege_7	0.257	0.783	0.600	0.577	0.365	0.415	0.458	0.137	0.411	0.487	0.397	0.481	0.168
	allege_8	0.305	0.791	0.639	0.607	0.459	0.467	0.543	0.144	0.375	0.532	0.502	0.414	0.245
3	consist_1	0.171	0.537	0.755	0.503	0.318	0.395	0.469	0.070	0.350	0.519	0.421	0.353	0.166
	consist_2	0.196	0.503	0.725	0.522	0.371	0.361	0.411	0.113	0.387	0.503	0.446	0.334	0.186
	consist_3	0.158	0.527	0.767	0.465	0.367	0.451	0.430	0.079	0.330	0.514	0.394	0.312	0.081
	consist_4	0.201	0.586	0.798	0.538	0.394	0.478	0.503	0.085	0.389	0.435	0.378	0.384	0.124
	consist_5	0.258	0.626	0.779	0.550	0.376	0.467	0.556	0.143	0.360	0.479	0.343	0.351	0.188
4	endorse_1	0.245	0.575	0.564	0.821	0.435	0.498	0.508	0.110	0.411	0.488	0.362	0.337	0.211
	endorse_2	0.326	0.640	0.571	0.865	0.410	0.493	0.527	0.224	0.442	0.459	0.381	0.442	0.295
	endorse_3	0.247	0.603	0.535	0.789	0.422	0.517	0.532	0.164	0.374	0.442	0.361	0.429	0.244
5	work_1	0.211	0.505	0.470	0.473	0.850	0.387	0.451	0.140	0.381	0.395	0.419	0.340	0.143
	work_6	0.199	0.354	0.277	0.334	0.748	0.400	0.406	0.138	0.265	0.247	0.261	0.333	0.180
6	resume_1	0.350	0.534	0.475	0.486	0.443	0.834	0.624	0.207	0.409	0.470	0.329	0.336	0.126
	resume_2	0.347	0.508	0.495	0.560	0.374	0.856	0.601	0.224	0.459	0.425	0.350	0.364	0.220
	resume_3	0.313	0.520	0.508	0.516	0.398	0.867	0.628	0.226	0.448	0.457	0.328	0.377	0.234
	resume_4	0.335	0.511	0.464	0.531	0.461	0.881	0.674	0.173	0.426	0.441	0.330	0.369	0.193
7	skills_1	0.371	0.590	0.574	0.542	0.460	0.653	0.885	0.098	0.448	0.537	0.428	0.386	0.140
	skills_2	0.321	0.500	0.484	0.505	0.421	0.588	0.827	0.100	0.414	0.474	0.344	0.349	0.125
	skills_3	0.305	0.522	0.494	0.513	0.411	0.604	0.826	0.206	0.487	0.502	0.408	0.392	0.212
	skills_4	0.286	0.564	0.550	0.578	0.517	0.640	0.844	0.144	0.409	0.529	0.391	0.422	0.168
8	image_1	0.237	0.067	0.047	0.087	0.066	0.142	0.072	0.690	0.181	0.034	0.101	0.222	0.313
	image_2	0.282	0.128	0.112	0.166	0.154	0.167	0.136	0.780	0.196	0.158	0.134	0.280	0.304
	image_7	0.221	0.150	0.110	0.174	0.142	0.208	0.131	0.697	0.271	0.048	0.129	0.178	0.277
9	product_1	0.213	0.482	0.425	0.456	0.363	0.475	0.472	0.303	0.887	0.403	0.597	0.557	0.147
	product_2	0.146	0.438	0.407	0.435	0.381	0.470	0.431	0.300	0.905	0.375	0.610	0.556	0.119
	product_3	0.183	0.412	0.385	0.437	0.356	0.405	0.456	0.260	0.852	0.358	0.531	0.535	0.125
	product_4	0.159	0.379	0.378	0.332	0.269	0.344	0.383	0.133	0.706	0.324	0.533	0.359	0.100
10	price_1	0.186	0.502	0.590	0.506	0.351	0.452	0.552	0.067	0.429	0.842	0.435	0.361	0.133
	price_2	0.233	0.496	0.470	0.423	0.330	0.383	0.429	0.073	0.301	0.783	0.403	0.339	0.157
	price_3	0.281	0.486	0.518	0.460	0.336	0.456	0.514	0.151	0.343	0.860	0.377	0.356	0.179
11	service_1	0.164	0.454	0.400	0.386	0.367	0.295	0.417	0.183	0.564	0.449	0.828	0.497	0.116
	service_2	0.277	0.495	0.410	0.413	0.432	0.385	0.380	0.226	0.593	0.415	0.789	0.564	0.222
	service_3	0.130	0.394	0.407	0.322	0.325	0.262	0.346	0.093	0.512	0.349	0.838	0.439	0.103
	service_4	0.198	0.451	0.449	0.360	0.328	0.359	0.453	0.160	0.576	0.374	0.808	0.503	0.126
	service_5	0.095	0.396	0.404	0.313	0.304	0.268	0.304	0.098	0.495	0.388	0.795	0.446	0.076
	service_6	0.144	0.460	0.451	0.386	0.366	0.332	0.372	0.067	0.568	0.421	0.843	0.514	0.122
12	trust_1	0.192	0.423	0.338	0.402	0.281	0.309	0.351	0.266	0.481	0.372	0.538	0.831	0.420
	trust_2	0.311	0.482	0.367	0.434	0.367	0.333	0.352	0.300	0.481	0.342	0.492	0.858	0.285
	trust_3	0.201	0.402	0.358	0.346	0.338	0.352	0.377	0.301	0.621	0.328	0.555	0.840	0.231
	trust_4	0.321	0.516	0.447	0.473	0.391	0.404	0.462	0.260	0.504	0.389	0.508	0.895	0.360
	trust_5	0.307	0.494	0.430	0.434	0.414	0.401	0.416	0.225	0.506	0.386	0.510	0.863	0.316
13	loyal_1	0.178	0.083	0.032	0.100	0.096	0.096	0.031	0.428	0.065	0.070	0.008	0.248	0.699
	loyal_2	0.246	0.152	0.124	0.206	0.159	0.146	0.127	0.331	0.091	0.114	0.088	0.254	0.743
	loyal_3	0.244	0.283	0.251	0.321	0.178	0.249	0.232	0.230	0.186	0.195	0.204	0.346	0.767
	loyal_4	0.241	0.177	0.108	0.213	0.127	0.125	0.119	0.249	0.047	0.145	0.116	0.229	0.709

As the results in Table 14 show, the indicator's outer loading on the associated construct are all greater than any of its cross-loadings (i.e., its correlation) on other constructs. Thus, the cross loadings meet the required threshold levels and discriminant validity is established.

Fornell-Larcker Analysis

The Fornell-Larcker measure suggests that the square root of the AVE of each latent variable should be larger than the latent variable correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017; Wong, 2019). The results of the Fornell-Larcker analysis are shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Fornell-Larcker Analysis

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Brand Allegiance	0.786												
2 Brand Consistent Behaviour	0.729	0.765											
3 Brand Endorsement	0.735	0.675	0.826										
4 Internal Advancement	0.377	0.259	0.334	0.791									
5 Loyalty	0.249	0.202	0.338	0.331	0.735								
6 Price Value	0.597	0.639	0.560	0.279	0.164	0.829							
7 Product Quality	0.511	0.475	0.497	0.211	0.207	0.435	0.841						
8 Resume Power	0.603	0.564	0.609	0.389	0.227	0.521	0.507	0.860					
9 Retailer Trust	0.542	0.454	0.488	0.316	0.401	0.425	0.603	0.420	0.858				
10 Service Quality	0.544	0.517	0.447	0.215	0.178	0.490	0.677	0.391	0.608	0.817			
11 Skills Development	0.645	0.621	0.632	0.380	0.208	0.604	0.520	0.735	0.458	0.467	0.846		
12 Store Image	0.166	0.130	0.204	0.342	0.394	0.118	0.303	0.242	0.313	0.172	0.163	0.722	
13 Work Demands	0.546	0.480	0.512	0.256	0.189	0.411	0.411	0.487	0.418	0.437	0.535	0.175	0.800

The square root of AVE for each latent variable is much larger than the corresponding latent variable correlations, therefore, discriminant validity has been established according to the Fornell-Larcker analysis (Table 15).

Hetero-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

Recent research suggests that cross-loadings and Fornell-Larcker criterion may not reliably detect discriminant validity issues (Henseler et al., 2015; Voorhees et al., 2016). Caution should be exercised when declaring the establishment of discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker, especially if the indicator loadings of the construct vary only slightly (e.g., outer loadings are between 0.60 and 0.80). Therefore, examining the hetero-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of the correlations is recommended. "HTMT is the ratio of the between-trait correlations to the within-trait correlations" (Hair et al., 2017, p.118).

Thus, HTMT estimates the true correlation between two constructs, also referred to as disattenuated correlation. Hair et al., (2017) advise HTMT values close to 1 indicate a lack of

discriminant validity. However, the exact HTMT threshold has been debated. Henseler et al., (2015) suggest a threshold value of 0.90 for constructs that are conceptually similar and a more conservative threshold of 0.85 for constructs that are more distinct. Henseler et al. (2015) advise HTMT values above 0.90 suggest a lack of discriminant validity.

To conduct the analysis, the HTMT values for all pairs of constructs are examined in matrix format. All values should be lower than 1, and ideally lower than the recommended threshold value of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2017). Results of the HTMT analysis are shown in Table 16.

Table 16: HTMT Analysis

	BA	BC	BE	IA	RL	PQ	PV	RP	SD	SI	SQ	RT	W
BA													
BC	0.872												
BE	0.912	0.850											
IA	0.457	0.318	0.424										
RL	0.302	0.240	0.386	0.412									
PQ	0.600	0.567	0.611	0.254	0.175								
PV	0.738	0.801	0.728	0.358	0.242	0.531							
RP	0.700	0.660	0.742	0.463	0.264	0.581	0.631						
SD	0.751	0.732	0.776	0.454	0.238	0.603	0.735	0.840					
SI	0.231	0.187	0.322	0.515	0.678	0.429	0.178	0.343	0.228				
SQ	0.621	0.602	0.536	0.248	0.185	0.769	0.586	0.436	0.524	0.237			
RT	0.617	0.522	0.583	0.367	0.452	0.680	0.506	0.468	0.513	0.445	0.669		
W	0.871	0.768	0.862	0.426	0.344	0.650	0.683	0.782	0.858	0.339	0.668	0.657	

The results show one potentially problematic correlation between BE (Brand Endorsement) and BA (Brand Allegiance) with a HTMT ratio of 0.912, which is only slightly above the 0.90 threshold but below 1. It is of concern as this may suggest a lack of discriminant validity. However, to be sure, after examining the HTMT ratios, an additional HTMT test is conducted to see whether the HTMT values are significantly different from 1. With this additional analysis, the correlation of BE (Brand Endorsement) and BA (Brand Allegiance) and all correlations are further examined to determine if discriminant validity is established.

To test if HTMT are significantly different than 1, the bootstrapping option is applied. The bootstrapping procedure in Smart PLS 3 software randomly draws subsamples from the original data set. Each subsample is then used to estimate the model. SmartPLS automatically repeats the process until a large number of random subsamples have been created, with about 5000 typically used. The following bootstrap settings are applied: complete bootstrapping; 5000 samples; confidence interval method: bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) bootstrap; test type: two-tailed; significance level: 0.05. Upon running the

bootstrapping option, the results of the HTMT, confidence intervals bias corrected are examined and presented in Table 17.

Table 17: HTMT Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected Analysis

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	2.5%	97.5%		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	2.5%	97.5%
BC -> BA	0.729	0.728	0.609	0.817	SI -> BA	0.164	0.171	0.002	0.343
BE -> BA	0.735	0.733	0.647	0.804	SI -> BC	0.129	0.137	-0.070	0.348
BE -> BC	0.675	0.673	0.554	0.771	SI -> BE	0.202	0.204	0.005	0.379
IA -> BA	0.376	0.376	0.223	0.505	SI -> IA	0.342	0.318	-0.048	0.473
IA -> BC	0.259	0.259	0.099	0.401	SI -> Loyalty	0.409	0.373	-0.078	0.542
IA -> BE	0.331	0.331	0.178	0.466	SI -> PQ	0.301	0.297	0.040	0.479
Loyalty -> BA	0.253	0.250	0.058	0.401	SI -> PV	0.117	0.129	-0.061	0.321
Loyalty -> BC	0.195	0.191	-0.017	0.362	SI -> RP	0.241	0.236	0.026	0.383
Loyalty -> BE	0.304	0.302	0.122	0.445	SI -> SD	0.161	0.168	-0.002	0.340
Loyalty -> IA	0.313	0.310	0.162	0.446	SQ -> BA	0.542	0.539	0.433	0.641
PQ -> BA	0.510	0.508	0.380	0.622	SQ -> BC	0.515	0.509	0.364	0.633
PQ -> BC	0.475	0.468	0.308	0.605	SQ -> BE	0.446	0.444	0.313	0.561
PQ -> BE	0.496	0.492	0.356	0.612	SQ -> IA	0.207	0.205	0.054	0.352
PQ -> IA	0.209	0.208	0.063	0.349	SQ -> Loyalty	0.157	0.155	-0.034	0.320
PQ -> Loyalty	0.147	0.147	-0.030	0.308	SQ -> PQ	0.676	0.675	0.562	0.769
PV -> BA	0.597	0.593	0.465	0.701	SQ -> PV	0.490	0.485	0.346	0.612
PV -> BC	0.638	0.633	0.517	0.728	SQ -> RP	0.389	0.387	0.260	0.506
PV -> BE	0.561	0.558	0.426	0.672	SQ -> SD	0.465	0.462	0.338	0.578
PV -> IA	0.280	0.280	0.133	0.416	SQ -> SI	0.170	0.179	-0.005	0.383
PV -> Loyalty	0.188	0.185	-0.006	0.355	Trust -> BA	0.542	0.541	0.415	0.655
PV -> PQ	0.435	0.430	0.283	0.562	Trust -> BC	0.454	0.453	0.308	0.585
RP -> BA	0.603	0.602	0.491	0.698	Trust -> BE	0.489	0.487	0.357	0.608
RP -> BC	0.565	0.563	0.448	0.659	Trust -> IA	0.312	0.312	0.167	0.448
RP -> BE	0.609	0.607	0.499	0.702	Trust -> Loyalty	0.379	0.380	0.241	0.502
RP -> IA	0.391	0.392	0.269	0.502	Trust -> PQ	0.602	0.602	0.474	0.712
RP -> Loyalty	0.225	0.224	0.066	0.360	Trust -> PV	0.425	0.423	0.285	0.552
RP -> PQ	0.507	0.504	0.384	0.610	Trust -> RP	0.421	0.420	0.287	0.545
RP -> PV	0.521	0.517	0.395	0.623	Trust -> SD	0.458	0.458	0.326	0.580
SD -> BA	0.645	0.643	0.529	0.739	Trust -> SI	0.313	0.296	0.003	0.466
SD -> BC	0.623	0.620	0.503	0.713	Trust -> SQ	0.606	0.607	0.491	0.713
SD -> BE	0.633	0.630	0.512	0.731	W -> BA	0.544	0.543	0.421	0.651
SD -> IA	0.380	0.379	0.233	0.507	W -> BC	0.478	0.475	0.331	0.603
SD -> Loyalty	0.190	0.188	-0.001	0.346	W -> BE	0.511	0.510	0.386	0.618
SD -> PQ	0.519	0.516	0.394	0.626	W -> IA	0.255	0.254	0.116	0.378
SD -> PV	0.604	0.600	0.484	0.696	W -> Loyalty	0.198	0.196	0.046	0.336
SD -> RP	0.735	0.734	0.661	0.796	W -> PQ	0.410	0.406	0.268	0.533
					W -> PV	0.409	0.406	0.263	0.537
					W -> RP	0.488	0.487	0.373	0.591
					W -> SD	0.536	0.535	0.422	0.637
					W -> SI	0.173	0.176	0.006	0.338
					W -> SQ	0.434	0.431	0.293	0.557
					W -> Trust	0.418	0.418	0.294	0.534

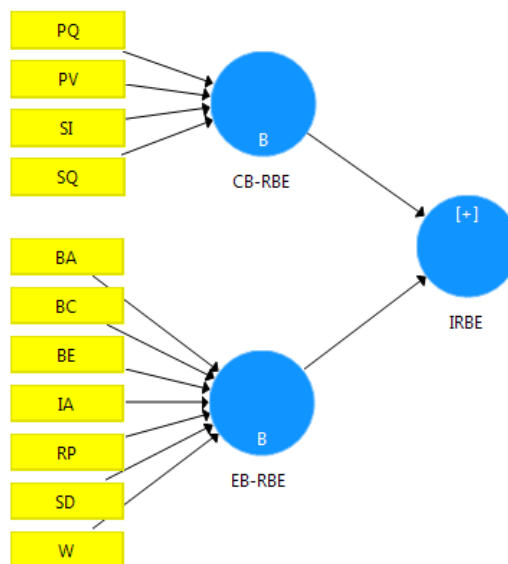
To achieve discriminant validity the confidence intervals, as shown in the 2.5% and 97.5% columns, should not include the value of 1 for all combinations of constructs. Specifically, the BE → BA relationship is examined since its HTMT ratio was 0.912, slightly above the 0.90 threshold. These HTMT confidence interval values, along with the values for

all other combinations of constructs show there are no confidence intervals containing the value of 1, therefore, discriminant validity is established.

5.4.2 Evaluation Criteria of the Measurement Model of the Overall HOC

This section concerns the evaluation criteria of the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct (HOC). This area of the model is visually depicted in Section 4.10.2, Figure 11. The evaluation criteria, as recommended by Sarstedt et al. (2019) are: convergent validity, collinearity between indicators and, significance and relevance of the outer weights. As previously discussed in Section 4.11 the embedded two stage approach was used to conduct the analyses. The standard repeated indicators approach was applied in stage one, as previously explained, and the latent variable scores of all constructs were saved and subsequently added as new variables into the dataset in stage two, to analyse the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct. The latent variable scores thus allow for the lower-order components to represent the indicators of the higher order components, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Measurement Model of the Higher Order Construct in PLS-SEM



Each criterion to evaluate the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct is explained below, and the results are presented and discussed.

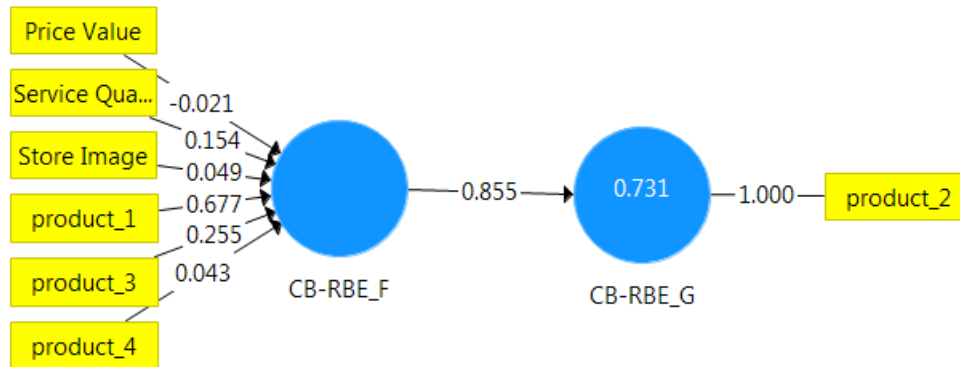
Convergent Validity

As explained in Section 5.4.1 convergent validity is defined as “...the extent to which a measure correlates positively with the alternative measures of the same construct” (Hair et al., 2017, p.112). In this stage of analysis, the latent variable scores are added to the dataset to allow for the lower-order components to represent the indicators of the higher-order components. The evaluation of the lower-order component measurement models (which were reflectively specified and include all 69 indicators) in Section 5.4.1 presented the following convergent validity criteria: indicator outer loadings, indicator reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). However, convergent validity is not assessed the same way for reflectively and formatively specified constructs. Since the measurement model of the higher order construct is formatively specified, a redundancy analysis is conducted to determine convergent validity.

Redundancy Analysis

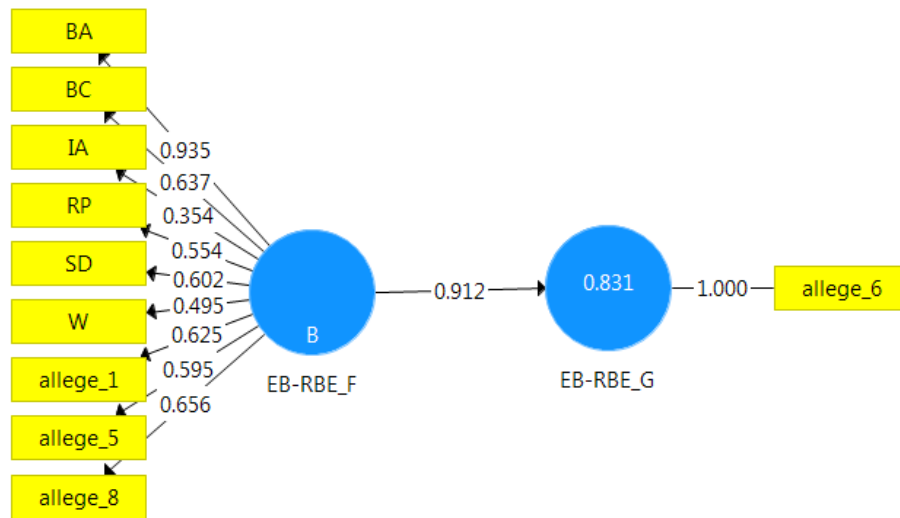
To assess the convergent validity of the formative measurement model, a redundancy analysis is conducted (Chin, 1998). This is done to “...test whether the formatively measured construct is highly correlated with a reflective measure of the same construct” (Hair et al., 2017, p. 140). Therefore, a global single item, that summarizes the essence of the construct (Hair et al., 2017), is needed to reflect each formative construct (Cheah et al., 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2019). This study contains three formative higher-order constructs: CB-RBE, EB-RBE and IRBE. To conduct the redundancy analysis, a global question was applied as an endogenous single-item construct to validate the formative measure of each of the three formatively measured constructs. Three different global questions were selected, and each were measured using 6-point Likert type scale with the following range: 1) strongly disagree, 2) mostly disagree, 3) slightly disagree, 4) slightly agree, 5) mostly agree, and 6) strongly agree.

The redundancy analysis for convergent validity assessment of formative measure CB-RBE is shown in Figure 14. The following statement, “Overall, the retailer where I work sells high quality products,” was selected as a global single item, capturing the essence of the construct, to reflect frontline employees’ perceptions of consumer-based retailer brand equity (CB-RBE) as criterion construct.

Figure 14: Redundancy Analysis for Convergent Validity Assessment of CB-RBE

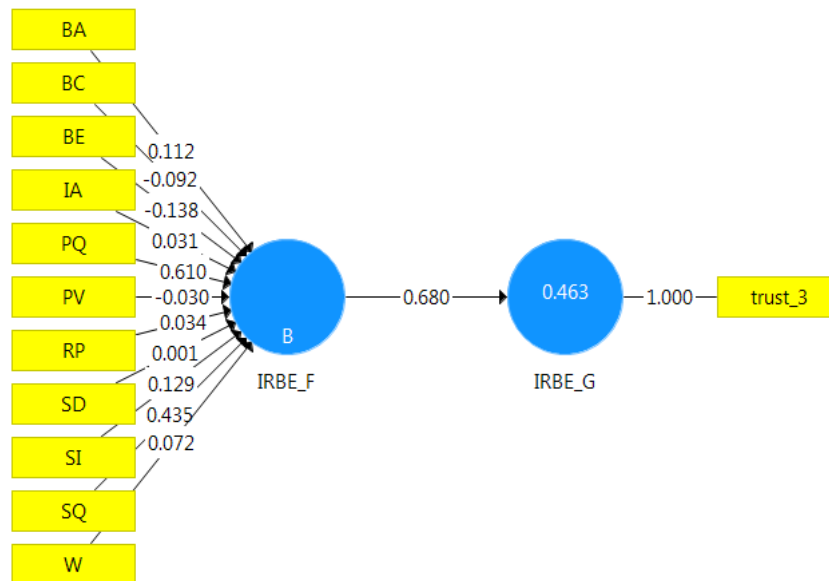
The original formative construct is labelled CB-RBE_F, and the global assessment of the consumer-based retailer brand equity using a single item construct is labelled CB-RBE_G. The analysis yields a path coefficient of 0.855 and R^2 of 0.731, which are above the recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50 respectively (Hair et al., 2017). CB-RBE contributes to a high degree of the formative construct's intended content, thus exhibiting convergent validity.

The following statement, "I am proud to be a part of the retailer I work for," was selected as a global single item, capturing the essence of the construct, to reflect frontline employees' perceptions of employee-based retailer brand equity (EB-RBE). The redundancy analysis for convergent validity assessment of formative measure EB-RBE is illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Redundancy Analysis for Convergent Validity Assessment of EB-RBE

The original formative construct is labelled EB-RBE_F, and the global assessment of the employee-based retailer brand equity using a single item construct is labelled EB-RBE_G. The analysis yields a path coefficient of 0.912 and R^2 of 0.831, which are above the recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50 respectively (Hair et al., 2017). EB-RBE contributes to a high degree of the formative construct's intended content, thus exhibiting convergent validity.

Finally, the following statement, "The retailer where I work has a good reputation," was selected as a global single item, capturing the essence of the construct, to reflect frontline employees' perceptions of the retailer's brand equity as criterion construct. The redundancy analysis for convergent validity assessment of formative measure IRBE is illustrated in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Redundancy Analysis for Convergent Validity Assessment IRBE

The original formative construct is labelled IRBE_F, and the global assessment of the integrated retailer brand equity using a single item construct is labelled IRBE_G. The analysis yields a path coefficient of 0.680 and R^2 of 0.463, which are slightly below the recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50 respectively, but not significantly different (Hair et al., 2017). If the values were well below the recommended thresholds, the formative construct could be refined by adding and/or exchanging indicators (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, it is concluded that IRBE contributes to a sufficient degree of the formative construct's intended content, thus exhibiting convergent validity.

To conclude the discussion on convergent validity analysis of the measurement model of the higher-order construct, each formatively measured construct (i.e., CB-RBE, EB-RBE and IRBE) is correlated with a reflective measure of the same construct and convergent validity of the overall higher-order construct is supported.

Collinearity Between Indicators

Collinearity issues arise if two variables within the model are highly correlated. This is problematic because it may indicate there are redundant constructs within the model. If this occurred, it would necessitate the removal of constructs, the merging of predictors into a single construct or creating higher order constructs (Hair et al., 2017).

Collinearity is assessed by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) for each set of predictor constructs separately for each section of the structural model. VIF is directly related to the tolerance value ($VIF_i = 1/\text{tolerance}$). These values can be obtained through the SmartPLS 3 algorithm. The inner VIF values for the formative constructs (i.e., CB-RBE and EB-RBE) are reviewed to check for potential collinearity issues, which act as lower-order components of IRBE. The analysis of the model produces VIF values of 2.385 for CB-RBE and 2.385 for EB-RBE, which are lower than the recommended threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017) as well as the conservative threshold of 3.0 (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, it is concluded there are no collinearity issues within the formative constructs of the model.

Significance and Relevance of Outer Weights

In this next stage, bootstrapping is run (5000 sub-samples, no sign changes) on the model to assess the significance and relevance of the formative constructs (i.e., CB-RBE and EB-RBE) via their outer weights. Their outer weights are calculated in SmartPLS via a multiple regression and appear as path coefficients in the path model. The results show CB-RBE's weight is moderate (0.352) and significant ($p < 0.01$) and EB-RBE's weight is pronounced (0.704) and significant ($p < 0.01$).

5.4.3 Conclusion: Assessment of Measurement Models

Stage 5 of Hair et al.'s (2017) systematic procedure for applying PLS-SEM involved the assessment of the measurement model of the lower-order components (Section 5.4.1) and the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct (Section 5.4.2). Sarstedt et al.'s (2019) recommendation for measurement model evaluation criteria for higher-order constructs were used, including: internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the LOC's measurement model; and convergent validity, collinearity between indicators and significance and relevance of outer weights for the HOC measurement model. The results are summarized in Table 18.

Table 18: Summary of Assessment of Measurement Models

Evaluation Criteria	LOC Measurement Model	HOC Measurement Model
Internal Consistency	YES	N/A
Convergent Validity	YES	YES
Discriminant Validity	YES	N/A
Collinearity	N/A	YES
Significance and Relevance of outer weights	N/A	YES

The results show clear support in all areas of evaluation criteria for the LOC and HOC measurement models.

5.5 Stage 6: Assessing the Structural Model

The previous analyses confirmed the construct measures are reliable and valid through the assessments of the measurement model of the lower-order components and the measurement model of the overall higher-order construct. Therefore, the next stage requires assessing the structural (outer) model. The results from stage one of the embedded two-stage approach are used to evaluate the structural model. Assessing the structural model involves examining the model's predictive capabilities and the relationships between the constructs (Hair et al, 2017).

There are six steps in the structural model assessment, as per the procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2017, 2019) and include the assessment of: collinearity issues (VIF); significance and relevance of the structural relationships (path coefficients, p values); total effects; in-sample explanatory power (R^2); predictive relevance (Q^2); effect size (q^2), and; out-of-sample predictive power (PLSpredict).

Typical goodness-of-fit measures such as chi-square or other fit indices associated with CB-SEM do not apply to PLS-SEM because PLS-SEM maximises the explained variance (Hair et al., 2017). In CB-SEM, "...it estimates parameters so that the differences between the sample covariances and those predicted by the theoretical/conceptual model are minimized" (Hair et al., 2017, p. 192). In other words, CB-SEM minimises the differences between covariance matrices. Therefore, instead of assessing goodness-of-fit, the structural model is

assessed to see how well it predicts the endogenous constructs (Sarstedt et al., 2014) which is accomplished by conducting steps two through six (listed above). All six steps of analysis are conducted and discussed below, starting with an assessment of collinearity issues.

5.5.1 Collinearity issues

The following sets of (predictor) constructs are assessed for collinearity: (1) SI, PQ, SQ and PV, as predictors of CB-RBE; (2) BA, BC, BE, IA, RP, SD and W, as predictors of EB-RBE; (3) CB-RBE and EB-RBE as predictors of IRBE; (4) IRBE as a predictor of RT; and (5) RT as a predictor of RL. The report shows the VIF values of all combinations of endogenous constructs (represented by columns) and corresponding exogenous (i.e., predictor) constructs (represented by rows). The results of the Inner VIF Values for each of the fifteen predictor constructs are presented in Table 19.

Table 19: Collinearity Analysis (Inner VIF Values)

	CB-RBE	EB-RBE	IRBE	RL	RT
BA		3.101			
BC		2.500			
BE		2.621			
CB-RBE			1.955		
EB-RBE			1.955		
IA		1.247			
IRBE					1.000
RL					
PQ	2.022				
PV	1.351				
RP		2.457			
SD		2.778			
SI	1.102				
SQ	2.021				
RT				1.000	
WD		1.583			

To ensure collinearity is not an issue, each of the inner VIF values must be below the threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017). The results show collinearity is not a critical issue, as there are not any values above 5.0, thus we continue to the next step which involves assessing the significance and relevance of the structural relationships.

5.5.2 Significance and relevance of the structural model relationships

The path coefficients are obtained via SmartPLS 3 to assess the significance and relevance of the structural model relationships. Examining the path coefficients is an important step because they represent the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The path coefficients have standardized values that fall between -1 and +1. If a path coefficient is close to +1, it represents strong positive relationships that are usually statistically significant. If a path coefficient is close to -1, it represents strong negative relationships that are usually statistically significant. However, the closer the estimated coefficients are to 0, these represent weaker relationships. Values close to zero are usually not statistically significant (i.e., not significantly different from zero) (Hair et al., 2014). The path coefficients are first assessed for significance, followed by assessments for relevance.

Significance

Significance of all structural model relationships is assessed using p values, t values and bootstrap confidence intervals.

“Whether a coefficient is significant ultimately depends on its standard error that is obtained by means of bootstrapping...when an empirical t value is larger than the critical value, we conclude that the coefficient is statistically significant at a certain error probability (i.e., significance level). Commonly used critical values for two-tailed tests are 1.65 (significance level = 10%), 1.96 (significance level = 5%), and 2.57 (significance level = 1%)” (Hair et al., 2017, p. 195).

Marketing researchers usually adopt a level of 5% for assessing statistical significance. Experiments can be 1% and exploratory research is often 10%. For the purposes of this study, we assess the path coefficients at a 5% significance level.

SmartPLS 3 reports provide both confidence intervals and bias corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals (BCa). BCa (Efron, 1987) are preferred since they adjust for biases and skewness in the bootstrap distribution and produce narrow confidence intervals (Henseler et al., 2009; Sarstedt et al., 2011). The general rule of thumb when evaluating BCa is if the confidence interval for an estimated path coefficient does not include a zero, one assumes a significant effect.

The results of significance testing (i.e., running the PLS-SEM algorithm with bootstrapping) of the structural model path coefficients are summarized in Table 20.

Table 20: Significance Testing Results of the Structural Model Path Coefficients

Hypothesized Relationships	Path Coefficients	<i>t</i> Values	<i>p</i> Values	95% Confidence Intervals	Significance ($p < 0.01$)
BA → EB-RBE	0.245	29.667	0.000	[0.232, 0.264]	Yes
BC → EB-RBE	0.221	28.537	0.000	[0.205, 0.235]	Yes
BE → EB-RBE	0.154	25.031	0.000	[0.143, 0.167]	Yes
CB-RBE → IRBE	0.397	26.849	0.000	[0.366, 0.424]	Yes
EB-RBE → IRBE	0.681	34.416	0.000	[0.645, 0.723]	Yes
IA → EB-RBE	0.110	14.946	0.000	[0.097, 0.126]	Yes
IRBE → RL	0.063	0.638	0.524	[-0.123, 0.268]	No
IRBE → RT	0.657	12.475	0.000	[0.546, 0.754]	Yes
PQ → CB-RBE	0.370	21.528	0.000	[0.340, 0.407]	Yes
PV → CB-RBE	0.233	18.386	0.000	[0.212, 0.261]	Yes
RP → EB-RBE	0.218	20.454	0.000	[0.200, 0.242]	Yes
SD → EB-RBE	0.221	27.046	0.000	[0.207, 0.238]	Yes
SI → CB-RBE	0.076	17.899	0.000	[0.069, 0.085]	Yes
SQ → CB-RBE	0.544	32.053	0.000	[0.513, 0.579]	Yes
RT → RL	0.336	3.877	0.000	[0.157, 0.494]	Yes
WD → EB-RBE	0.076	16.935	0.000	[0.068, 0.085]	Yes

Reading Table 20 from left to right, the sixteen hypothesized relationships are listed in the first column, followed by their respective path coefficients, *t* values, *p* values, bias corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals (BCa) and significance testing at the 1.0% level. Fifteen of the sixteen hypothesized relationships are supported at the 1% level of significance. One relationship is not supported (IRBE → RL), suggesting no relationship between integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) and retailer loyalty (RL). Since retailer trust (RT) is conceptualized as mediating IRBE and RL, the relationship between integrated retailer brand equity, retailer trust and retailer loyalty will be further examined via mediation analysis (Section 5.3.6).

Relevance

Once the significance of the hypothesized relationships is examined, attention turns to the assessment of the relevance of the hypothesized relationships. This step is important because, “...an analysis of the relative importance of relationships is crucial for interpreting

the results and drawing conclusions since such small coefficients, even though significant, may not warrant managerial attention.” (Hair et al., 2017, p. 197).

To accomplish this, the structural model path coefficients are interpreted relative to one another. If one path coefficient is larger than another, its effect on the endogenous latent variable is greater. Table 21 organizes the hypothesized relationships and their respective path coefficients from highest importance to lowest importance.

Table 21: Relative Importance of Hypothesized Relationships

Hypothesized Relationships	Path Coefficients
SQ → CB-RBE	0.544
PQ → CB-RBE	0.370
PV → CB-RBE	0.233
SI → CB-RBE	0.076
BA → EB-RBE	0.245
SD → EB-RBE	0.221
BC → EB-RBE	0.221
RP → EB-RBE	0.218
BE → EB-RBE	0.154
IA → EB-RBE	0.110
WD → EB-RBE	0.076
EB-RBE → IRBE	0.681
CB-RBE → IRBE	0.397
IRBE → RT	0.657
RT → RL	0.336
IRBE → RL	0.063

Looking at the relative importance of the four exogenous driver constructs for consumer-based retailer brand equity (CB-RBE), the results reveal frontline employees’ perceptions of the retailer’s service quality (SQ) is most important (0.544), followed by the quality of the products carried by the retailer (PQ) (0.370), and the perceived price/value the retailer offers (0.233). In contrast, the store image (SI) has the least bearing on the employees’ external perceptions of retailer brand equity (0.076).

Next, the seven exogenous driver constructs for the perceived employee-based retailer brand equity (EB-RBE) are examined. Frontline employees’ allegiance to the retailer brand (BA) is most important (0.245), followed by skills development (SD) (0.221), brand consistent behaviour (BC) (0.221), resume power (RP) (0.218) and brand endorsement (BE)

(0.154). In contrast, internal advancement (IA) (0.110) and work demands (WD) (0.076) do not have a strong influence on employee's internal perceptions of retailer brand equity.

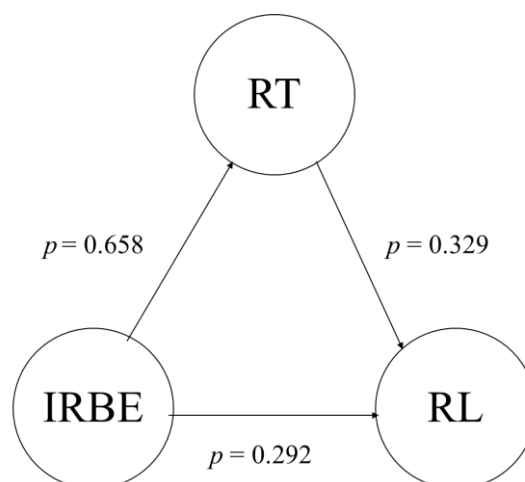
When examining the relative importance of CB-RBE and EB-RBE on IRBE, EB-RBE (0.681) is most important followed by CB-RBE (0.397). The relative importance of integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) on the two endogenous constructs retailer trust (RT) and retailer loyalty (RL) reveals frontline employees' perceptions of retailer trust (RT) is most important (0.657). Whereas, frontline employees' perceptions of retailer loyalty (RL) has relatively weak importance. However, perceptions of retailer trust (RT) on retailer loyalty (RL) appear to be relatively important (0.336).

Understanding the relevance of the constructs can also be evaluated through analysis of total effects, which is discussed and presented in the next section.

5.5.3 Total Effects

This section examines total effects, which is defined as the sum of direct and indirect effects. An examination of total effects is useful for this study, as it explores the differential impact of several internal (i.e., employee) and external (i.e., consumer) driver constructs on retailer loyalty, via retailer trust, a mediating variable. Thus, an examination of the total effects allows for the evaluation of direct and indirect effects. In Figure 17 the direct, indirect and total effects of IRBE, RT and RL are visually depicted.

Figure 17: Direct, Indirect and Total Effects



IRBE and RL are linked by a direct effect ($p = 0.292$). There is an indirect effect between the two constructs (IRBE and RL) via a mediating construct RT. To calculate the indirect effect, the path coefficient IRBE \rightarrow RT ($p = 0.658$) is multiplied by the path coefficient RT \rightarrow RL ($p = 0.329$). Thus, the product of the two effects (i.e., the indirect effect) is shown below:

$$\text{Indirect Effect} = 0.658 \times 0.329 = 0.216$$

The total effect is the sum of the path coefficients IRBE \rightarrow RL ($p = 0.292$) and IRBE \rightarrow RT ($p = 0.658$), multiplied by the path coefficient RT \rightarrow RL (0.329). The total effect is calculated as:

$$\text{Total Effect} = 0.292 + (0.658 \times 0.329) = 0.508$$

Although the direct effect of IRBE \rightarrow RL is moderate ($p = 0.292$), the total effect is strong (0.508). Thus, by examining the direct, indirect and total effects it suggests the direct relationship from IRBE to RL is mediated by RT. Further analysis of mediating effects will be discussed in Section 5.6.1.

Significance

To examine the significance of the total effects, the total effects of the four consumer-based exogenous constructs (product quality, store image, price/value, service quality) on the four endogenous constructs (CB-RBE, IRBE, RT, RL) were first examined using the bootstrapping results in SmartPLS, in Table 22.

Table 22: Bootstrapping Results for the Total Effects (Consumer Based)

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
CB-RBE → IRBE	0.391	0.393	0.028	14.019	0.000
CB-RBE → RL	0.114	0.113	0.038	3.034	0.002
CB-RBE → RT	0.257	0.259	0.028	9.227	0.000
PQ → CB-RBE	0.370	0.371	0.022	16.520	0.000
PQ → IRBE	0.145	0.145	0.011	12.906	0.000
PQ → RL	0.042	0.042	0.013	3.246	0.001
PQ → RT	0.095	0.096	0.009	10.389	0.000
SI → CB-RBE	0.077	0.074	0.033	2.360	0.018
SI → IRBE	0.030	0.029	0.013	2.284	0.022
SI → RL	0.009	0.009	0.006	1.459	0.145
SI → RT	0.020	0.020	0.010	2.086	0.037
PV → CB-RBE	0.233	0.232	0.015	15.666	0.000
PV → IRBE	0.091	0.091	0.005	16.695	0.000
PV → RL	0.027	0.026	0.009	3.135	0.002
PV → RT	0.060	0.060	0.006	10.132	0.000
SQ → CB-RBE	0.543	0.542	0.031	17.568	0.000
SQ → IRBE	0.212	0.213	0.020	10.721	0.000
SQ → RL	0.062	0.061	0.019	3.318	0.001
SQ → RT	0.140	0.140	0.015	9.623	0.000

The total effects from the consumer-based exogenous constructs on the endogenous constructs are all statistically significant at the 5% level, except Store Image → Retailer Loyalty. These results are consistent with the results presented in section 5.5.2.

The total effects of the seven employee-based exogenous constructs (internal advancement, skills development, resume power, work demands, brand endorsement, brand allegiance, brand consistent behaviour) on the four endogenous constructs (EB-RBE, IRBE, RT, RL) were also examined using the bootstrapping results in SmartPLS, in Table 23.

Table 23: Bootstrapping Results for the Total Effects (Employee Based)

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
EB-RBE → IRBE	0.687	0.686	0.031	22.489	0.000
EB-RBE → RL	0.201	0.198	0.064	3.155	0.002
EB-RBE → RT	0.452	0.452	0.038	11.853	0.000
IA → EB-RBE	0.111	0.109	0.015	7.266	0.000
IA → IRBE	0.076	0.075	0.012	6.574	0.000
IA → RL	0.022	0.022	0.009	2.588	0.010
IA → RT	0.050	0.049	0.009	5.728	0.000
SD → EB-RBE	0.221	0.222	0.012	19.091	0.000
SD → IRBE	0.152	0.152	0.011	13.920	0.000
SD → RL	0.044	0.043	0.014	3.245	0.001
SD → RT	0.100	0.100	0.008	12.235	0.000
RP → EB-RBE	0.218	0.219	0.013	17.024	0.000
RP → IRBE	0.150	0.151	0.012	12.552	0.000
RP → RL	0.044	0.043	0.013	3.288	0.001
RP → RT	0.098	0.099	0.008	12.337	0.000
WD → EB-RBE	0.076	0.076	0.007	11.537	0.000
WD → IRBE	0.052	0.052	0.004	12.664	0.000
WD → RL	0.015	0.015	0.005	3.181	0.001
WD → RT	0.034	0.034	0.003	10.456	0.000
BE → EB-RBE	0.154	0.154	0.009	18.095	0.000
BE → IRBE	0.106	0.106	0.008	12.961	0.000
BE → RL	0.031	0.030	0.010	3.227	0.001
BE → RT	0.070	0.070	0.006	11.344	0.000
BA → EB-RBE	0.245	0.246	0.011	22.423	0.000
BA → IRBE	0.168	0.169	0.011	14.957	0.000
BA → RL	0.049	0.048	0.015	3.234	0.001
BA → RT	0.111	0.111	0.009	12.245	0.000
BC → EB-RBE	0.221	0.220	0.013	16.705	0.000
BC → IRBE	0.152	0.151	0.008	18.202	0.000
BC → RL	0.044	0.043	0.014	3.114	0.002
BC → RT	0.100	0.099	0.009	11.270	0.000

The total effects from the employee-based exogenous constructs on the endogenous constructs are all statistically significant at the 5% level. These results are consistent with the results presented in section 5.5.2.

5.5.4 Coefficient of Determination (R^2 Value)

The goal of the PLS algorithm is the maximize the R^2 values of the endogenous latent variables within the structural model, and thereby is referred to as in-sample predictive power

(Rigdon, 2012; Sarstedt et al., 2014). Also referred to as the coefficient of determination, the R^2 value represents the amount of explained variance in the model's endogenous constructs. Thus, the R^2 value is a measure of the model's in-sample explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019).

R^2 values for each endogenous latent variable in the structural model range from 0 to 1. R^2 values closer to 1 indicate higher levels of predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2017) or greater explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019). What constitutes a 'high' level is debatable and relevant interpretations must be appropriate for the discipline. There is also debate within disciplines. Chin (1998) suggests R^2 values of 0.67 (substantial), 0.33 (moderate) and 0.19 (weak), whereas Henseler et al. (2009) and Hair et al. (2011) recommend R^2 values of 0.75 (substantial), 0.50 (moderate) and 0.25 (weak).

Interpreting R^2 values can also be problematic the closer the value of the endogenous construct is to 1. As more exogenous constructs are added to a model, inevitably the R^2 values will increase. Hair et al. (2017) caution "...the more paths pointing toward a target construct, the higher its R^2 value" (p. 199). Ideally, each of the structural model's endogenous variables will have high R^2 values, and the model should have fewer exogenous constructs. This is referred to as a parsimonious model.

Hair et al. (2017) suggest calculating the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2_{adj}) to account for any biases of a model with multiple exogenous constructs. However, the R^2_{adj} cannot be evaluated in isolation. It is only a valid measure when comparing two models to determine if one model has higher predictive power than another one.

The results of the R^2 values of the endogenous latent variables RT and RL reveal IRBE is an important and relevant predictor of retailer trust (0.432) which has a moderate value and retailer loyalty (0.143) which has a weak value.

5.5.5 Blindfolding and Predictive relevance Q^2

While R^2 values assist in determining a model's in-sample explanatory power, Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974) "...combines aspects of out-of-sample prediction and in-sample explanatory power," (Hair et al., 2019, p.12) to assist in the evaluation of a model's predictive accuracy. To assess Q^2 values, SmartPLS 3 software employs a blindfolding procedure (i.e., sample reuse technique) whereby every d th data point

in the endogenous latent variable construct's indicators are removed, and the model's parameters are re-estimated with the remaining data points (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2009; Tenenhaus et al., 2005). This procedure is only applied to endogenous latent variables that contain reflective indicators. According to rule of thumb, Q^2 values larger than zero indicate the path model's predictive relevance for the endogenous construct of focus. For this study, the blindfolding procedure is applied to the two endogenous constructs, retailer loyalty and retailer trust, each of which are reflectively specified. The results presented in Table 24 show three calculations: SSO (sum of squared observations), SSE (sum of the squared prediction errors) and Q^2 ($1 - SSE/SSO$).

Table 24: Predictive Relevance Q^2 Values

	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Loyalty	1,252.00	1,169.02	0.07
Trust	1,565.00	1,098.60	0.30

The results reveal both endogenous constructs are larger than zero. Trust has a higher value (0.30) and exhibits medium predictive accuracy, and Loyalty (0.07) exhibits small predictive relevance of the PLS path model. These results indicate support for the model's predictive relevance regarding the model's endogenous latent variables.

5.5.6 The f^2 and q^2 Effect sizes

The effect size f^2 is a measure of the magnitude of a specific predictor construct on an endogenous construct, independent of sample size. It measures the change in an endogenous construct's R^2 value when a specified exogenous construct is omitted from the model (Hair et al., 2017; Wong, 2019). Values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 indicate small, medium or large effect sizes or predictive relevance for an endogenous construct (Cohen, 1988). SmartPLS 3 software calculates the f^2 effect size, as follows:

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2_{\text{included}} - R^2_{\text{excluded}}}{1 - R^2_{\text{included}}}$$

SmartPLS 3 software does not compute the q^2 effect size, therefore it must be computed manually. The effect size is calculated as follows:

$$q^2 = \frac{Q^2_{\text{included}} - Q^2_{\text{excluded}}}{1 - Q^2_{\text{included}}}$$

To conduct the analysis, the exogenous construct is omitted from the model. The PLS-SEM algorithm is initially run with a particular exogenous construct (i.e., CB-RBE), the Q^2 value (i.e., Q^2_{included}) is calculated. Then, the PLS-SEM algorithm is run again without the particular exogenous construct, and the new Q^2 value (i.e., Q^2_{excluded}) is calculated. This procedure is repeated for the exogenous constructs (CB-RBE, EB-RBE, IRBE, Retailer Trust). With these two values, the formula above is applied.

When evaluating the results, the same rules of thumb for effect size f^2 also apply for q^2 effect size. 0.02 to 0.15, 0.15 to 0.35 and 0.35 or larger are interpreted as an exogenous construct having a small, medium or large effect size, or predictive relevance, respectively, for an endogenous construct (Hair et al., 2017). The effect sizes are presented in Table 25.

Table 25: Evaluation of Effect Size

	Trust					Loyalty				
	Path	f^2 effect		q^2 effect		Path	f^2 effect		q^2 effect	
	Coefficient	size	Effect size	size	Effect size	Coefficient	size	Effect size	size	Effect size
CB-RBE	0.551	0.326	large	0.168	medium	0.113	0.006	small	0.001	small
EB-RBE	0.198	0.042	small-med	0.022	small	0.073	0.003	small	0.000	no effect
IRBE	0.658	0.762	large	-0.053	neg effect	0.076	0.004	small	-0.005	neg effect
Trust	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.259	0.072	small-med	-0.041	neg effect

Referring to Table 25, the endogenous constructs (Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty) are in the top row, and the predictors (CB-RBE, EB-RBE, IRBE, Retailer Trust) are in the first column. The f^2 effect size results indicate CB-RBE and IRBE have a substantive impact on the R^2 values of Retailer Trust, and EB-RBE has a small to medium effect. However, CB-RBE, EB-RBE and IRBE have small effects on the R^2 values of Retailer Loyalty, and Retailer Trust has a small to medium effect. The q^2 effect size results indicate CB-RBE has a medium effect on the Q^2 values of Retailer Trust, and EB-RBE has a small effect and IRBE has a negative effect. A negative effect occurs when the endogenous construct's Q^2 value increases when an exogenous construct is omitted from the model. CB-RBE has a small effect on the Q^2 values of Retailer Loyalty, however, EB-RBE have no effect, and IRBE and Retailer Trust have negative effects. When evaluating effect sizes, Benitez et al. (2020) advise “just as all actors in a movie cannot play a leading role, it is unusual and unlikely that most constructs will have a large effect size in the model” (p. 11).

5.5.7 Model Fit

Model fit indices allow researchers to judge how well a hypothesized model structure fits the empirical data, which in turn enables the researcher to identify if the model is correctly specified (Hair et al., 2017). However, the applicability of model fit criteria within PLS-SEM is strongly debated and highly controversial (Rigdon, 2012; Henseler and Sarstedt, 2013; Henseler, 2018; Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2016; Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2019). Researchers are cautioned when reporting and using model fit in PLS-SEM because the proposed criteria are still in the early stages of research and the critical threshold values are developed for CB-SEM and not often applicable to PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017). Furthermore, the usefulness of a global goodness-of-fit (GoF) measure as proposed by Tenenhaus et al. (2004, 2005) has been challenged by PLS scholars who argue that GoF does not represent a goodness-of-fit criterion for PLS (Henesler and Sarstedt , 2013), they are not applicable to formatively measured models and they are not able to separate valid from invalid models (Henesler and Sarstedt, 2013; Hair et al., 2017).

Although PLS researchers are advised not to use GoF, the SmartPLS software has recently introduced a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) measure (Hu and Bentler, 1999), which quantifies the divergence between the observed and estimated covariance matrices. It is considered an approximate fit criterion to assess the discrepancy between the ‘observed’ and ‘approximated’ or ‘latent variable’ values of the dependent variables and the values predicted by the PLS model (Wong, 2019). To assess the model’s SRMR, the SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015) software is used and the Consistent PLS Algorithm is selected (Wong, 2019), and ‘select all latent variables for initial calculation’ is checked in the setup. The model’s SRMR value is 0.07 and below the suggested 0.08 threshold (Hu and Bentler, 1999), which indicates acceptable fit¹.

Recent PLS literature advises researchers to primarily rely on criteria that assess the model’s predictive performance (Rigdon, 2012, 2014; Sarstedt et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2019).

¹ SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015) software currently calculates model fit measures, however their website cautions, “SmartPLS provides them (model fit measures) but believes that there is much more research necessary to apply them appropriately. So far, these criteria usually should not be reported and used for the PLS-SEM results assessment” (SmartPLS, 2020).

Shmueli et al. (2016, 2019) suggest PLS researchers use prediction-oriented model evaluations such as testing the out-of-sample predictive capabilities of PLS path models. Thus, attention is now focused on assessing the model's out-of-sample prediction using PLSPredict.

5.5.8 PLSPredict

Up until now, the quantitative analyses conducted in this thesis have focused on assessing the model's explanatory power and in-sample predictive power. The complexity of analyses performed in this thesis also aligns with the level and extent of analyses conducted by the studies that were examined earlier in the literature review (Section 2.0). Marketing researchers, in general, have prioritized the assessment of model coefficients, their significance and relevance, and testing hypotheses, rather than testing whether their models can predict new cases (Shmueli et al., 2019). Shmueli et al., (2019) also argue, "...given the growing concerns about marketing research's practical relevance (Homburg et al., 2015; Reibstein et al., 2009; Lehmann et al., 2011), researchers should include out-of-sample prediction as an integral element of model assessment in PLS-SEM and as a way to assess their model's practical relevance" (p. 2). Thus, recent advances in PLS-SEM now allow researchers to assess the model's out-of-sample predictive power via PLSPredict (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2019; Shmueli et al., 2019). PLSPredict (Shmueli et al., 2016, 2019) is a new prediction-oriented model evaluation approach that uses a holdout sample-based procedure to enable the assessment of a model's out-of-sample predictive power. Rasoolimanesh and Ali (2018) recently noted that "...to date, research has not yet developed clear guidelines for using PLSPredict, which hinders its application" (p. 243). Shmueli et al. (2019) addresses this issue and is the first to publish guidelines on how to apply PLSPredict to PLS-SEM models and interpret the results. Thus, their guidelines are followed throughout this section, which in turn allows for a more robust and comprehensive analyses of the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model, the focus of this thesis.

Applying PLSPredict and Interpreting Results

PLSPredict via the SmartPLS 3 software assesses the model's out-of-sample predictive power, thus providing insight into how the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model will eventually be used to predict a new observation. Three decisions

must be made before initiating the procedure: 1) number of folds; 2) number of repetitions, and 3) selection of appropriate prediction statistic to determine degree of prediction error (Shmueli et al., 2019). The number of folds refers to number of equally sized subsets the data will be split into. Shmueli et al. (2019) suggest ten folds ($k = 10$) as a rule of thumb, assuming the training sample still meets the model's minimum sample size requirements. Therefore, ten folds ($k = 10$) are chosen for this study. The number of repetitions refers to how many times the algorithm is run. Researchers must consider if the aim of the research is to predict a new observation from multiple estimated models or a single model. For the purposes of this study, the aim is to mimic how the PLS model will eventually be used to predict a new observation using a single model. Thus, a single repetition is chosen ($r = 1$). Finally, the appropriate prediction statistics must be selected. The three prediction statistics and their respective formulas are depicted below, where y_i is the value of y for observation i ($i = 1, \dots, n$) and \hat{y}_i is the predicted value for that observation (Shmueli et al., 2019):

Mean absolute error (MAE) is the average absolute differences between the predictions and the actual observations, and is expressed as:

$$MAE = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n |y_i - \hat{y}_i|$$

Mean absolute percentage error (MAPE) is the prediction error as a percentage metric, and is expressed as:

$$MAPE = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \left| \frac{y_i - \hat{y}_i}{y_i} \right|$$

Root mean squared error (RMSE) is the square root of the average of the squared differences between the predictions and the actual observations, and is expressed as:

$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2}{n}}$$

In terms of when to apply PLSPredict, the measurement model must first achieve a sufficient level of internal consistency, convergent validity, discriminant validity, collinearity and significance and relevance of outer weights, and the structural model must achieve a

sufficient level of collinearity, significance and relevance of path coefficients, as well as in-sample explanatory and predictive power. The employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model has achieved the relevant evaluation criteria, therefore, as per the guidelines of Shmueli et al. (2019), the model is ready to be assessed for out-of-sample predictive power by applying the PLSPredict procedure. The PLSPredict results are presented in Table 26.

Table 26: PLSPredict Results for Retailer Loyalty and Retailer Trust

Item	PLS-SEM		LM	PLS-SEM - LM
	$Q^2_{predict}$	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE
loyal_1	-0.008	1.299	1.342	-0.043
loyal_2	0.032	1.389	1.462	-0.073
loyal_3	0.087	1.351	1.524	-0.173
loyal_4	0.025	1.384	1.486	-0.102
trust_1	0.262	1.292	1.297	-0.005
trust_2	0.275	1.310	1.307	0.003
trust_3	0.284	1.228	1.145	0.083
trust_4	0.301	1.326	1.375	-0.049
trust_5	0.317	1.325	1.354	-0.029

For the purposes of this research, the PLSPredict analysis focuses on the model's key endogenous construct, Retailer Loyalty (loyal_1...loyal_4), but the prediction statistics for the model's other endogenous construct, Retailer Trust (trust_1...trust_5), are also reported. As per Shmueli et al.'s (2019) guidelines for interpreting PLSPredict results, the first step is to assess the PLS-SEM $Q^2_{predict}$ value for all indicators of the measurement model, and check if all values are greater than zero ($Q^2_{predict} > 0$). Upon inspection, eight of the nine endogenous construct indicators are greater than zero except for 'loyal_1' (-0.008). Since the value is not significantly below zero, it is not of great concern and as per the guidelines it is appropriate to proceed to the next step.

The second step requires the inspection of the distribution of prediction errors, via the residual histograms in SmartPLS 3. If the prediction errors are highly symmetrically distributed, RMSE is the preferred prediction statistic. MAE is the preferred prediction statistic if they are not. Since the prediction errors are highly symmetrically distributed, RMSE is the preferred prediction statistic for the purposes of this study.

The third step is to check if the PLS-SEM RMSE values are less than the linear regression model (LM) RMSE values (or naïve benchmarks), because each of the three

prediction statistics (MAE, MAPE and RMSE) are scaled where smaller values indicate higher predictive power. Thus, Shmueli et al. (2019) provide the following guidelines:

1. *PLS-SEM < LM for none of the indicators*: If the PLS-SEM analysis (compared to the LM) yields lower prediction errors in terms of the RMSE (or the MAE) for none of the indicators, this indicates that the model lacks predictive power.
2. *PLS-SEM < LM for a minority of the indicators*: If the minority of the dependent construct's indicators produces lower PLS-SEM prediction errors compared to the naïve LM benchmark, this indicates that the model has a low predictive power.
3. *PLS-SEM < LM for a majority of the indicators*: If the majority (or the same number) of indicators in the PLS-SEM analysis yields smaller prediction errors compared to the LM, this indicates a medium predictive power.
4. *PLS-SEM < LM for all indicators*: If all indicators in the PLS-SEM analysis have lower RMSE (or MAE) values compared to the naïve LM benchmark, the model has high predictive power.

Upon examination of the model's ultimate endogenous construct, Retailer Loyalty, the PLS-SEM values for all indicators are less than the LM values. Thus, this model has high predictive power. Upon examination of the model's other endogenous construct, Retailer Trust, two out of five or the majority of the indicators in the PLS-SEM analysis yields smaller prediction errors compared to the LM. Thus, this indicates medium predictive power. Shmueli et al., (2019) recommend the reporting of all endogenous indicators, however, they note the PLS-Predict analysis should focus on the model's key endogenous construct (retailer loyalty). Thus, it is concluded the model exhibits moderate to high predictive power.

5.6 Stage 7: Additional Analyses

5.6.1 Mediator Analysis

Now that the model's predictive power is confirmed, attention turns to evaluating the influence, if any, of mediators within the model. The analyses and their respective results are discussed below.

Zhao et al.'s (2010) comprehensive evaluation of mediation methodologies and analyses led to the description of two types of *non-mediation* and three types of *mediation*:

Non-Mediation

- Direct-only non-mediation (no mediation): Only the direct effect is significant
- No-effect non-mediation (no mediation): Neither the direct nor indirect effect are significant

Mediation

- Complementary mediation (partial mediation): The indirect effect and the direct effect both are significant and point in the same direction.
- Competitive mediation (partial mediation): The indirect effect and the direct effect both are significant and point in the opposite directions.
- Indirect-only mediation (full mediation): The indirect effect is significant but not the direct effect.

In this study, 'Retailer Trust' is a potential mediating variable, because it intervenes between two other related constructs, 'IRBE' and 'Retailer Loyalty'. The direct effects, indirect effects and total effects were assessed on the relationships from IRBE to RL, IRBE to RT, and RT to RL. The results of the total effects analysis in Section 5.5.3 suggests the direct relationship from IRBE to RL is mediated by RT. However, the type of mediation was not determined. Testing for the type of mediation involves running a series of analyses using the SmartPLS 3 software, including assessing significance of indirect and direct effects. These results of the analyses are discussed below.

Significance Analysis of the Indirect and Direct Effects

The indirect effect is expressed as the product of the path coefficient from IRBE to RT (0.658) and RT to RL (0.329), via the mediating variable RT. To test the significance of the indirect effect, the bootstrapping procedure is applied with these settings: 5,000 bootstrap samples, complete bootstrapping, bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap, two-tailed testing, significance level of 0.05. The results are presented in Table 27.

Table 27: Significance Analysis of the Direct and Indirect Effects

Path	Direct Effect	95% confidence			Significance (p < 0.05)?	Indirect Effect	95% Confidence		
		interval of the direct effect	t Value				interval of the indirect effect	t Value	Significance (p < 0.05)?
IRBE→Loyalty	0.292	[0.078, 0.459]	3.034	YES	0.216	[0.091, 0.322]	3.731	YES	

Please note: the direct and indirect effect values presented here were automatically calculated through the bootstrapping procedure in Smart PLS 3 software. They vary slightly from the values previously discussed in Total Effects (Section 5.5.3), which were manually calculated.

The significance of the indirect effects is examined first. The results reveal the indirect effect is significant since the 95% confidence level does not include a zero. Although not required in this analysis, the t value and p values are checked for completeness. The empirical t value of the indirect effect (0.216) for the IRBE → RL relationship is 3.731 yielding a p value of 0.000. The results of the significance analysis of the direct effects reveals a moderate relationship from IRBE → RL (0.292). The empirical t value of the direct effect (0.292) is 3.034 yielding a statistically significant p value of 0.002. Following Zhao et al.'s (2010) types of mediation, this is categorized as 'complementary mediation', since the direct and indirect effects are both statistically significant and point in the same direction. Thus, the results confirm RT partially mediates the IRBE → RL relationship.

To determine the strength of the mediation effect, the VAF (variance accounted for, explained, in the dependent variable by the indirect relationship).

$$VAF (IRBE) = \text{indirect effect} / \text{total effect} = 0.216 / 0.292 = 0.739$$

The VAF indicates that 73.9% of the total effect of IRBE on Retailer Loyalty is explained by the Retailer Trust mediator. Based on VAF results, Retailer Trust partially mediates the relationship between IRBE and Retailer Loyalty.

5.6.2 Multi-Group Analysis

An *a priori* multi-group analysis using SmartPLS is conducted to address the second research question and the associated research hypotheses:

2. Do patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs') perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?

- **H1a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between CB-RBE and IRBE.**
- **H2a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between EB-RBE and IRBE.**
- **H3a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between IRBE and Retailer Trust.**
- **H4a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty.**

PLS-MGA (partial least squares – multi-group analysis) is used to compare path coefficients between patronizing frontline retail employees and non-patronizing frontline retail employees. Thus, this research seeks to analyse whether the structural (inner) model relationships effects differ significantly for frontline employees who patronize (i.e., shop) at their retailer from frontline employees who do not or rarely patronize (i.e., shop) at their retailer ($H_0 : p^{(1)} \neq p^{(2)}$). The SmartPLS software performs the PLS-MGA calculations and assumes one-sided hypotheses whereby $p^{(1)}$ is larger than $p^{(2)}$.

The first consideration when conducting multi-group analysis is to ensure the number of observations within the two groups meet the minimum sample size requirements. According to Hair et al. (2018) the rule of thumb for PLS-SEM is to take the maximum number of arrows pointing to a latent variable and apply the ten times rules. In the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model, the maximum number of arrows are six, therefore, a minimum of 60 observations per group are required.

Thus, the grouping variable used to split the data set is the shopping frequency question from the survey, presented below with the corresponding number of observations (n).

Q: Since you began working for this retailer, how frequently do you shop there?

- Very Frequently (every week) ($n = 60$)
- Frequently (several times per month) ($n = 116$)
- Occasionally (once per month) ($n = 93$)
- Rarely (several times per year) ($n = 34$)
- Very Rarely (once per year) ($n = 5$)
- Never ($n = 5$)

Thus, to ensure the two comparison groups have a balanced number of observations, the following parameters for the multi-group analyses are established. Group A is defined as employees who shop at their retailer very frequently ($n = 60$) or frequently ($n = 116$), for a total of 176 observations. Group B is defined as employees who shop at their retailer occasionally ($n = 93$), rarely ($n = 34$), very rarely ($n = 5$), never ($n = 5$), for a total of 137 observations.

Table 28: Summary of Results of Multi-Group Analysis (PFREs and Non-PFREs)

Hypothesis	Path	Group A: PFRE		Group B: Non-PFRE		Welch-Satterthwait MGA			Sig.	
		$p^{(1)}$	se ($p^{(1)}$)	$p^{(2)}$	Se ($p^{(2)}$)	$p^{(1)} - p^{(2)}$	t -Values			
1a	CB-RBE → IRBE	0.487	0.049	0.34	0.039	0.147	2.37	0.019	Supported	
2a	EB-RBE → IRBE	0.607	0.041	0.731	0.036	0.124	2.273	0.025	Not Supported	
3a	IRBE → Trust	0.559	0.066	0.658	0.054	0.099	1.169	0.238	Not Supported	
4a	Trust → Loyalty	0.198	0.132	0.251	0.137	0.053	0.279	0.781	Not Supported	
		N = 176		N = 137						

The results in Table 28 show positive and statistically significant differences between the two groups as observed in the relationship between consumer-based retailer brand equity and integrated retailer brand equity (CB-RBE → IRBE). However, there was a negative and statistically significant difference between the groups as observed in the relationship between employee-based retailer brand equity and integrated retailer brand equity (EB-RBE → IRBE). There were no statistically significant differences in the IRBE → Trust and Trust → Loyalty relationships. Thus, PFREs and non-PFREs together can be interpreted as an aggregate data group and substantiates generalization of a single underlying theoretical model for the IRBE

→ Trust and Trust → Loyalty relationships examined in this integrated retailer brand equity model.

5.7 Support for Research Hypotheses

Overall, the results of the analysis of the structural model shows evidence of good explanatory power and predictive analysis. Please see summary of results presented in Table 29 for the LOC measurement model, the HOC measurement model and the structural model.

Table 29: Summary of Results of All Evaluation Criteria for Measurement and Structural Models

Evaluation Criteria	LOC Measurement Model	HOC Measurement Model	Structural Model
Internal Consistency	YES	N/A	N/A
Convergent Validity	YES	YES	N/A
Discriminant Validity	YES	N/A	N/A
Collinearity	N/A	YES	YES
Significance and Relevance	N/A	YES	YES
Explanatory Power	N/A	N/A	YES
Predictive Power	N/A	N/A	YES

Thus, the research findings are now applied to the first four research hypotheses.

H1: All Consumer Based Retailer Brand Equity (CB-RBE) dimensions (PQ, SI, PV, SQ) are positively associated with Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE).

The research findings provide evidence to support H1.

H2: All Employee Based Retailer Brand Equity (EB-RBE) dimensions (IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA, BC) are positively associated with Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE).

The research findings provide evidence to support H2.

H3: Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) is positively associated with Retailer Trust (Trust).

The research findings provide evidence to support H3.

H4: Retailer Trust (Trust) mediates the relationship between Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) and Retailer Loyalty (Loyalty).

The research findings provide evidence to support H4.

The results of the multi-group analysis are now applied to the final four research hypotheses.

H1a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between CB-RBE and IRBE.

The research findings provide evidence to support H1a.

H2a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between EB-RBE and IRBE.

The research findings do not provide evidence to support H2a.

H3a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between IRBE and Retailer Trust.

The research findings do not provide evidence to support H3a.

H4a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty.

The research findings do not provide evidence to support H4a.

5.8 Conclusion

Chapter Five presented the results of the quantitative analyses conducted for this research using partial least squares structural equation modelling applied to a 3rd order hierarchical component model. The chapter introduced the data collection and examination procedures, followed by PLS path model estimation and specification, the evaluation of the measurement models of the lower order components, measurement model of the overall higher-order construct and the structural model. The measurement models of the lower order components were assessed against current best practice evaluation criteria: internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The measurement model of the higher-order construct was assessed against current best practice evaluation criteria: convergent validity, collinearity between indicators and significance and relevance of outer weights. Finally, the structural model was assessed against current best practice evaluation criteria: collinearity between constructs, significance and relevance of the path coefficients and explanatory and predictive power. Additional analyses included mediating impacts of Retailer Loyalty on IRBE and Retailer Trust, a multi-group analysis comparing the perceptions of retailer brand equity among patronizing frontline retail employees and non-patronizing frontline retail employees. Each of the research hypotheses were then addressed.

The next chapter discusses contributions of the research, managerial implications, limitations, suggestions for future research and concluding remarks.

6 Chapter Six: Contributions, Limitations and Future Research

6.1 Introduction

The final chapter interprets the results and draws conclusions by discussing the contributions of the research, managerial implications, limitations and areas of future research. The chapter begins by revisiting the purpose of the research (Section 6.2). The next section discusses and interprets the research findings in relation to the two research questions and eight hypotheses (Section 6.3) as well as their theoretical and practical implications. Next, the conceptual, methodological, empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge are discussed (Section 6.4), followed by managerial implications (Section 6.5). Finally, limitations of the research are discussed (Section 6.6), followed by opportunities for future research (Section 6.7) and concluding remarks (Section 6.8).

6.2 Review of Research Purpose

The objective of this research is to develop a measure of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity. It achieves this by examining frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity from internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) perspectives, identifying the key factors that influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing and determining if and how patronizing frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity (i.e., employees who frequently shop at their retailer) differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (i.e., employees who occasionally or never shop at their retailer). The first stage of the research included a critical review of the relevant literature, to establish the current level of knowledge, gaps and opportunities across brand equity, internal brand management and stakeholder fields of literature. The review of relevant theories and consumer, retailer and employee brand equity models and measures informed the development of an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity conceptual framework and the associated research hypotheses. A survey was developed and reviewed by an expert judge panel. Data were collected and the proposed model and hypotheses were empirically tested with a quantitative analysis approach using PLS-SEM and SmartPLS 3 software. The results of the study are presented and reported. Finally, the results are interpreted, and conclusions are drawn.

6.3 Discussion of Research Findings and Implications

This section addresses the two research questions and eight hypotheses, by discussing the relevance, implications and significance of the research findings. The two research questions are addressed first, followed by the eight hypotheses.

6.3.1 Answering the Research Questions

1. What internal and external factors influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?

To answer the first research question, four consumer-based (i.e., external) (PQ, SI, PV and SQ) and seven employee-based (i.e., internal) (IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA and BC) retailer brand equity dimensions were examined for the strength of the path coefficient and statistical significance. As per the analysis and results presented in Section 5.5.2 all relationships (i.e., path coefficients for each of the eleven factors) are strong (i.e., close to +1.0) and statistically significant. The results confirm each of the eleven dimensions examined in this model influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity. Looking at the relative importance of the eleven dimensions (from most important to least important), their individual and combined importance, and how they individually and collectively influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity, can help retailers understand which factors offer the greatest potential and/or priority for brand building activities. This is essential in retailing, given the conflicting demands and priorities that retailers face in an increasingly competitive environment and the growing accountability of management having to justify their resource and investment decisions. The relative importance of the retailer brand equity dimensions and the findings from this research are discussed in terms of the following: CB-RBE (i.e., employees' external perceptions of retailer brand equity, as consumers), EB-RBE (i.e., employees' internal perceptions of retailer brand equity, as employees), and IRBE (i.e., their combined internal and external perceptions of retailer brand equity).

CB-RBE

In this portion of the study, four external retailer brand equity dimensions (PQ, SI, PV and SQ) were tested. Frontline employees' perceptions and the relative importance of each of the exogenous driver constructs for the perceived CB-RBE (consumer-based retailer brand

equity) are now examined. The results reveal service quality (SQ → CB-RBE; $\beta = 0.544$, $p < 0.001$) was most important, followed by product quality (PQ → CB-RBE; $\beta = 0.370$, $p < 0.001$) and price/value (PV → CB-RBE; $\beta = 0.233$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, perceived store image (SI → CB-RBE; $\beta = 0.076$, $p < 0.001$) had the least bearing on frontline employees' perceptions of CB-RBE. The findings clearly demonstrate quality of the services the retailer delivers (as measured by service quality), the quality of the products sold by the retailer (as measured by product quality) and their perceptions of the relationship between what they get and what they paid (as measured by price/value) are crucial for frontline retail employees. Even though frontline retail employees' perceptions of the physical store, appearances and associations (as measured by store image), are seemingly less important than service quality, product quality and price/value, this study does not mean to imply that store image does not hold any relevance in a retailer's marketing strategy. A possible interpretation is that frontline employees view store image as a 'basic' or minimum requirement of retailer brand equity, thus placing less value on it versus other consumer-based factors such as service quality, product quality and price/value. Another interpretation is that frontline employees do not view store image as a powerful means for their retailer to differentiate themselves; rather, they believe it is expected. However, neglecting one area may lead to other negative consequences. This reasoning draws on the two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) where investing in only one brand equity dimension will not directly add value. Rather, neglecting one dimension entirely could destroy the value that had previously been created. Furthermore, if retailers do not manage the dimensions of their brand equity well, these dimensions could become liabilities (Aaker, 1991). If they are handled well, and managed better than their competition, they can be interpreted as assets (Aaker, 1991; Anselmsson et al., 2017). These results put forward the prioritization of the consumer-based factors of service quality, product quality and price/value as the critical factors that frontline retail employees perceive as influencing retailer brand equity, specifically in fashion retailing. Retailers must measure and manage each brand equity dimension over time to achieve the right balance.

In Haelsig et al.'s (2007) inter-sector consumer-based retailer brand equity study, they compared retailer specific dimensions among grocery, textiles (i.e., fashion), electronics, DIY and furniture retailing sectors. Their results showed service was the most important dimension in the textile sector, followed by price/value, assortment, advertising and store

design (i.e., store image). Their results are similar to the results of this thesis, in that service was most important and store image was the least important dimension in the retailer brand building process. However, they note, in fashion retailing all dimensions have a significant influence on the retailer brand (Haelsig et al., 2007), thus it is critical that retailers aim for coherence of all dimensions.

In Troiville et al.'s (2019) study, which tested eight consumer-based retailer brand equity dimensions (access, assortment, atmosphere, convenience, employees, product quality, product value, private brands), they found in store atmosphere to be the most important, followed by product quality, product value, assortment (i.e., selection), employees (i.e., promptness and attention), private brands (i.e., retailer's own brands), convenience and access. Their findings provide an interesting contrast to the findings of this thesis, and may suggest consumers (i.e., individuals who do not work at the retailer, but shop there) perceive retailer brand equity in both similar and different ways than frontline employees (i.e., employees who shop and work at the retailer). From a similar perspective, both studies showed product quality and product value (interpreted as price/value in this thesis) to be important contributors to retailer brand equity. However, while Troiville et al. (2019) found store atmosphere to be the most important retailer brand equity dimension for *consumers*, this thesis found in store atmosphere to be the least important retailer brand equity dimension for *frontline employees*. These comparisons suggest that frontline employees may be less demanding than consumers when it comes to store atmosphere. Further, Troiville et al. (2019) found service quality provided by frontline employees (i.e., promptness and attention) to be less crucial to consumers. Whereas, in this thesis, frontline employees perceived service quality to be the most crucial consumer-based determinant of the retailer's brand equity. Given the key role brand equity plays in developing competitive differentiation (Feuer, 2005), the contrast in findings between these two studies suggests retailers should consider a variety of stakeholder perspectives to understand the underlying drivers of their retailer brand equity. Retailers may find similarities and/or conflicting priorities between two important stakeholders, their consumers and frontline employees. Thus, this research suggests an opportunity for retailers to build a variety of stakeholder perspectives into their brand management practices in order to develop more comprehensive and robust brand strategies.

EB-RBE

In this study, seven employee-based (i.e., internal) retailer brand equity dimensions (IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA and BC) were tested. Of the seven dimensions, four were employee-benefit variables (internal advancement, skills development, resume power, work demands) and three were employee-behaviour/perceptions variables (brand endorsement, brand allegiance, brand consistent behaviour). Frontline employees' perceptions and the relative importance of each of the exogenous driver constructs for the perceived EB-RBE (employee-based retailer brand equity) are now examined. The results reveal brand allegiance (BA → EB-RBE; $\beta = 0.245$, $p < 0.001$), skills development (SD → EB-RBE; $\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.001$), brand consistent behaviour (BC → EB-RBE; $\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.001$) and resume power (RP → EB-RBE; $\beta = 0.218$, $p < 0.001$) are most important, followed by brand endorsement (BE → EB-RBE; $\beta = 0.154$, $p < 0.001$) and internal advancement (IA → EB-RBE; $\beta = 0.110$, $p < 0.001$). Work demands (WD → EB-RBE; $\beta = 0.076$, $p < 0.001$) is the least important dimension in the development of retailer brand equity. The results demonstrate the employee's desire to maintain a relationship with the retailer where they work (as measured by brand allegiance) was most important factor of EB-RBE. This was followed by frontline employees' perception that they can develop relevant and valuable professional skills within their organization (as measured by skills development), their demonstration of positive extra-role behaviours (as measured by brand consistent behaviour), the employee's perception that working at this retailer with strengthen their resume (as measured by resume power), the employee's propensity to say positive things about their retailer (as measured by brand endorsement), the employee's perception that they can advance their career within the organization (as measured by internal advancement), and their perception that their colleagues are hard workers and the work itself is demanding (as measured by work demands). The top two most important factors (internal advancement and skills development) are employee-benefit variables. These relate to the employee's perceptions of the work they do in exchange for the benefits of working for that retailer, and they speak to the psychological contract these frontline employees have with the retailer where they work (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Lester and Kickul, 2001). However, the employee's perceptions of their work demands, which are also employee-benefit variables, held the least relative importance. This finding does not necessarily imply that work demands do not hold any relevance in a retailer's internal branding or retention strategies. A possible interpretation is that frontline employees view

work demands as an expected side-effect of working in retail, thus placing less value on it versus other employee-based factors such as internal advancement, skills development and brand consistent behaviours. Another interpretation is that frontline employees do not view work demands as a powerful means for their retailer to differentiate themselves; rather, they believe these basic aspects of the job are commonplace.

IRBE

Finally, to interpret the results from an integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) context, attention now turns to assessing and weighting all eleven internal and external retailer brand equity dimensions. From a holistic perspective, the results show frontline employees' *internal perceptions* of the brand (EB-RBE → IRBE; $\beta = 0.681$, $p < 0.001$) present stronger path coefficients than their *external perceptions* of the brand (CB-RBE → IRBE; $\beta = 0.397$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, from a practical perspective frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity appear to be primarily influenced from their internal perspective of the brand as an employee and secondarily influenced from their external perspective as a consumer. However, when all eleven dimensions are ranked, a different pattern appears. The eleven dimensions and their rankings are presented in Table 30 below.

Table 30 Internal and External Factors of Employee-Based Retailer Brand Equity

Hypothesized Relationships	Path Coefficients	Significance ($p < 0.01$)
SQ → CB-RBE	0.544	Yes
PQ → CB-RBE	0.370	Yes
BA → EB-RBE	0.245	Yes
PV → CB-RBE	0.233	Yes
SD → EB-RBE	0.221	Yes
BC → EB-RBE	0.221	Yes
RP → EB-RBE	0.218	Yes
BE → EB-RBE	0.154	Yes
IA → EB-RBE	0.110	Yes
SI → CB-RBE	0.076	Yes
WD → EB-RBE	0.076	Yes

Interestingly, when the eleven dimensions are ranked individually in order of importance, the *external factors* of service quality (SQ) and product quality (PQ) hold the top two spots. These are followed by brand allegiance (BA), price/value (PV), skills development (SD), brand consistent behaviour (BC), resume power (RP), brand endorsement (BE) and

internal advancement (IA) holding medium importance and store image (SI) and work demands (WD) having the lowest relative importance. It is noteworthy that the two most important dimensions are consumer-based ones. This is important as frontline employees' external perceptions of the retailer brand have not been previously studied in the literature. Since frontline employees spend most of their time as an employee (i.e., working 8-10-hour shifts) vs. being a consumer, it was expected that internal factors would rank highest. These findings emphasize the importance for retailers to view their frontline employees as dual stakeholders with internal and external views of the organization. Frontline employees do not just view their retailer as a place of work, they also view their retailer as a place to shop, which in turn influences their perceptions of the retailer brand.

The retail industry is fiercely competitive and retailer brands need to differentiate from incumbents and start-ups to increase market share (Troiville et al., 2019). Employees play an important role in the branding process (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) and provide a means for competitive differentiation. Frontline employees are particularly important stakeholders for retailers and can offer dual perspectives. Although the concept of employees as consumers is not a new phenomenon (Berry, 1981; Lusch et al., 1996; Fram and McCarthy, 2003; Fram and McCarthy, 2004; Anaza and Rutherford, 2012), it has not been examined in the retailer brand equity literature to date. From a practical perspective, these results suggest that retailers should consider frontline employees' internal (i.e., as employees) *and* external (i.e., as consumers) perceptions of the brand to better understand what factors contribute to the development of their retailer brand equity. Up until now, retailer brand equity studies have focused on the consumer as the primary stakeholder of interest, and the few studies that assess frontline employees' perceptions of the brand assume they hold a singular viewpoint (i.e., internal perspective). These studies only consider frontline employees' internal perceptions of the brand (i.e., as employees), however, they do not consider their external brand perceptions (i.e., as consumers). Thus, it is necessary for retailers to also consider frontline employees' experiences as consumers and employees when measuring their retailer brand equity.

2. Do patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs') perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?

To answer the second question, the results of the multi-group analysis are reviewed. A multi-group analysis is conducted whereby the shopping frequency question contained within the survey is used to categorize Group A (patronizing frontline retail employees; very frequently or frequently shop at the retailer) and Group B (non-patronizing frontline retail employees; occasionally, very rarely, rarely or never shop at the retailer). There are three key findings. First, patronizing frontline employees differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees, but not significantly across all relationships. A summary of the path coefficients (p), standard errors (se) and Welch-Satterthwait MGA results for Group A (PFREs) and Group B (non-PFREs) for each employee-based retailer brand equity dimension tested in this study is presented in Table 31.

Table 31: Summary of Multi-Group Analysis Results for PFREs and non-PFREs

	Group A: PFRE		Group B: non-PFRE		Welch-Satterthwait MGA		
	$p^{(1)}$	$se(p^{(1)})$	$p^{(2)}$	$se(p^{(2)})$	$p^{(1)} - p^{(2)}$	t -Value	Sig.
CB-RBE → IRBE	0.487	0.048	0.340	0.038	0.147	2.370	0.019
EB-RBE → IRBE	0.607	0.041	0.731	0.036	0.124	2.270	0.025
IRBE → RT	0.559	0.064	0.658	0.054	0.099	1.169	0.244
Trust → RL	0.198	0.134	0.251	0.136	0.053	0.279	0.781
IRBE → RL	0.165	0.231	0.123	0.162	0.042	0.148	0.883
SQ → CB-RBE	0.548	0.039	0.541	0.051	0.007	0.108	0.914
PQ → CB-RBE	0.360	0.046	0.391	0.030	0.030	0.559	0.577
PV → CB-RBE	0.192	0.033	0.264	0.024	0.072	1.817	0.071
SI → CB-RBE	0.106	0.031	0.045	0.039	0.060	1.201	0.232
BA → EB-RBE	0.240	0.019	0.250	0.015	0.010	0.417	0.677
SD → EB-RBE	0.234	0.024	0.217	0.015	0.016	0.583	0.561
BCB → EB-RBE	0.234	0.019	0.219	0.019	0.014	0.529	0.597
RP → EB-RBE	0.216	0.032	0.224	0.014	0.008	0.244	0.808
BE → EB-RBE	0.157	0.018	0.154	0.010	0.004	0.176	0.861
IA → EB-RBE	0.112	0.030	0.108	0.020	0.004	0.112	0.911
WD → EB-RBE	0.089	0.009	0.067	0.009	0.022	1.766	0.079
	N = 176		N = 137				

As the table shows, PFREs and non-PFREs produce different path coefficients. To determine if they are statistically significant, the significance of the difference of path coefficients (Sig.) must be $p < 0.10$. The following relationships are statistically significant ($p < 0.10$): CB-RBE → IRBE, EB-RBE → IRBE, PV → CB-RBE and WD → EB-RBE.

When assessing the eleven internal and external dimensions (SQ, PQ, PV, SI, BA, SD, BC, RP, BE, IA and WD) there are differences in the path coefficients between the two

groups, which allow for a ranking of importance. Second, when comparing the consumer-based retailer brand equity factors that are most relevant to PFREs vs. non-PFREs, the results show both groups value the same factors: service quality (SQ), product quality (PQ), price/value (PV) and store image (SI). However, there are differences when comparing the employee-based retailer brand equity factors that are most relevant to PFREs vs. non-PFREs. For PFREs, the factors most relevant to them are brand allegiance (BA), skills development (SD), brand consistent behaviour (BC), resume power (RP), brand endorsement (BE), internal advancement (IA) and work demands (W). The employee-based retailer brand equity factors that are most relevant to non-PFREs are: brand allegiance (BA), resume power (RP), brand consistent behaviour (BC), skills development (SD), brand endorsement (BE), internal advancement (IA) and work demands (W). Therefore, the third finding is that PFREs place the most value on brand allegiance, skills development and brand consistent behaviour, whereas non-PFREs place the most value on brand allegiance, resume power and brand consistent behaviour. Interestingly, both PFREs and non-PFREs place value on a combination of employee-benefit and employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions.

The multi-group analysis conducted in this thesis is comparable to the marketing concept of segmenting consumers. Market segmentation studies are common practice in retailing, whereby organizations divide (i.e., segment) their consumers into smaller groups based on characteristics (i.e., demographics, geography, psychographics, behaviours) to optimize products, design marketing communications and advertising to different consumers and refine brand strategies (Grewal et al., 2015). Rust et al.'s (2000) work on segmentation categorized consumers according to their lifetime value to the firm, "lead", "iron", "gold" and "platinum" levels, creating the Customer Pyramid. According to a study by Bain and Company (2008), organizations who effectively tailored their product and service offerings via segmentation strategies achieved 15.0% profit on average versus 5.0% profit for companies who failed to segment their consumer base successfully (Markey, du Toit and Allen, 2008). Thus, like market segmentation, employee segmentation (Cardy et al., 2007) presents opportunities for retailers to better understand characteristics of their frontline employees, how they perceive their brand and to tailor their product and service offerings accordingly. Furthermore, while organizations may use market segmentation to refine and target their product, sales and marketing strategies to consumers (Grewal et al., 2015) retailers can leverage employee segmentation to be more efficient and effective in attracting, retaining

and motivating current and prospective employees (Moroko and Uncles, 2009). This thesis illuminates the opportunity for retailers to leverage segmentation strategies to divide their frontline employees into smaller groups and use these insights to potentially enhance their employees' perceptions of their retailer brand.

Even though marketing managers generally view the 'external' stakeholder (i.e., consumer) as their prime target audience, the results show that frontline employees have opinions about the externally managed brand assets, such as service quality, product quality, price/value and store image. And, their perceptions of the externally managed aspects of the retailer's brand contribute to their overall perceptions and strength (or weakness) of the retailer's brand equity. Thus, retailers should consider analysing their retailer brand equity drivers with more granularity. Dividing frontline employees into segments according to different characteristics may produce more precise and insightful analyses and enable retailers to adapt their brand strategies appropriately. Understanding the frontline employees' external perceptions of the brand could provide insights to the marketing department and their internal perceptions of the brand could provide insights to the human resources department, and vice versa. Together, these two often 'siloes' departments may find opportunities to collaborate and build collaborative and holistic brand strategies.

6.3.2 Addressing the Hypotheses

The research findings are now discussed to address the eight research hypotheses.

H1: All Consumer Based Retailer Brand Equity (CB-RBE) dimensions (PQ, SI, PV, SQ) are positively associated with Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE).

The study supports this hypothesis. Troiville et al. (2019) criticized past consumer-based retailer brand equity studies that did not integrate retailer-specific attributes. Service quality (SQ), product quality (PQ), store image (SI) and price/value (PV) are all retailer specific attributes that account for external perceptions of the quality of the services the retailer delivers, the quality of products the retailer sells, the physical store, appearances and its associates, and the perceived value between what the employee bought and what they paid. Previous studies have validated them as key dimensions of consumer-based retailer brand equity (Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019). Therefore, the results of this study reinforce the results of the most recent retailer brand equity studies and provide supporting evidence of the positive and significant relationship that exists between all consumer-based

retailer brand equity dimensions (CB-RBE) and integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing.

H2: All Employee Based Retailer Brand Equity (EB-RBE) dimensions (IA, SD, RP, W, BE, BA, BC) are positively associated with Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE)

The study supports this hypothesis. Brand allegiance, brand endorsement and brand consistent behaviour have been previously validated as key dimensions of employee-based brand equity (King and Grace, 2010; King et al., 2012; Porricelli et al., 2014; Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020), but not in a fashion retail context. Thus, this thesis shows support for the existence of a positive and significant relationship between these dimensions and integrated retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing. Furthermore, the results from this thesis provide support for what frontline employees do (brand consistent behaviour), say (brand endorsement) and intend to do in the future (brand allegiance) are critical to a retailer's brand building efforts. Skills development, resume power, internal advancement and work demands have all been previously validated and shown to have positive and significant relationships with brand equity (DeVecchio et al., 2007) in a fast-moving consumer goods employment setting. Thus, the results from this thesis lend support for the existence of a positive and significant relationship between these job attribute dimensions and integrated retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing.

H3: Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) is positively associated with Retailer Trust (Trust)

The study supports this hypothesis. The path coefficient of 0.658 with a significance at the $p < 0.001$ level demonstrates a positive and statistically significant relationship between IRBE and retailer trust. Trust continues to be overlooked in retailer brand equity models (Troiville et al., 2019) despite the strong association of trust with overall brand equity (Keller, 2001; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Anselmsson et al. (2017) was one of the few retailer brand equity studies confirming trust as an outcome of retailer brand equity in their consumer-based study of Swedish retailers. Gil-Saura et al. (2013) tested the relationship of consumer trust towards store equity. Despite their predictions and previous research (Lassar et al., 1995; Broyles et al., 2009) Gil-Saura et al.'s (2013) study did not support the existence of a relationship between trust and store equity. Their study included a few but arguably already strong Spanish-based retailers (e.g., Zara) and upon

reflection they proposed that trust may not be relevant across all cultural contexts (Gil-Saura et al., 2013). This is an interesting insight, and there may be cultural differences at play. This thesis, however, tested frontline employee perceptions of trust across multiple fashion retailers in Canada. Therefore, the results of this thesis reinforce previous work and provide supporting evidence of the positive relationship that exists between integrated retailer brand equity and trust, from the perspective of frontline retail employees.

H4: Retailer Trust (Trust) mediates the relationship between Integrated Retailer Brand Equity (IRBE) and Retailer Loyalty (Loyalty)

The study supports this hypothesis. The mediation analysis provided support that retailer trust partially mediates the relationship between integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty. The direct and indirect effects were analysed and following Zhao et al.'s (2010) types of mediation, this is categorized as 'complementary mediation', since the direct and indirect effects are both statistically significant. Thus, for IRBE → RL relationship, retailer trust serves as a complementary mediator. Higher levels of IRBE increase retailer loyalty directly but also increase retailer trust, which in turn leads to retailer loyalty. Therefore, almost three quarters (73.9%) of IRBE's effect on retailer loyalty is explained by retailer trust.

Hypothesis four refers to the sequential nature of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity; thus, suggesting it is a four-step process whereby consumer-based brand equity and employee-based brand equity lead to integrated retailer brand equity, which lead to retailer trust, and finally retailer loyalty. Earlier studies have presented retailer brand equity models as simplified parallel structures (i.e., one stage process) that only capture its outcomes (Aaker, 1991; Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a). Jinfeng and Zhilong (2009) suggested a two-stage process of retailer brand equity whereby store image attributes (i.e., convenience, institutional factors, physical facilities, perceived price, employee service) lead to retailer brand equity dimensions (i.e., associations, awareness, quality) and ultimately loyalty. Recent studies present retailer brand equity as a three-stage process (Troiville et al., 2019) whereby retailer specific dimensions (i.e., access, assortment, atmosphere, convenience, employees, product quality, product value, private brands) lead to retailer brand equity, which lead to attitude, loyalty and word of mouth. Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) four-stage retailer brand equity model, which aligns with Keller's (2001) four-step brand

resonance framework starts with awareness, which leads to the second stage of brand associations and consumer responses, which leads to a third stage of trust, and finally loyalty. The results of this thesis align with Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) four-stage retailer brand equity model, whereby retailer trust mediates the relationship between retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty.

Ultimately, retailers want to retain their consumers. This is manifested in the concept of loyalty, whereby a relationship is formed between the retailer and the consumer. Consumers demonstrate commitment to a retailer through their current and future patronizing behaviour (Oliver, 1997). Loyalty is viewed as a critical construct in retailing (Jones and Kim, 2011; Reinartz and Kumar, 2002; Troiville et al., 2019) for achieving market share (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1974) and creating a sustainable competitive advantage (Wright and Sparks, 1999). For consumers, loyalty to the retailer brand evolves over time and is enhanced through consistently positive experiences with the retailer (Iglesias et al., 2011). Similarly, loyalty from an employee to its employer also evolves over time and results from the perception of positive experiences with the employer (Alshathry et al., 2017). Trust manifests as an overall judgement or feeling about the retailer and facilitates building the relationship between the retailer and the consumer (Anselmsson et al., 2017). Considering loyalty evolves over time, trust needs to be present before the relationship between retailers and consumers, retailers and its employees, and loyalty can exist. Consumers place high value in the brands they trust (Lassar et al., 1995). Some scholars have incorporated trust as a dimension of retailer brand equity (Swoboda et al., 2009; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013) and others have used similar reputation dimensions (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000; Thang and Tan, 2003). Most recently, Anselmsson et al., (2017) demonstrated trust as a mediating factor between retailer brand equity and loyalty. However, retail scholars do not align on whether loyalty is a determinant or consequence of retailer brand equity. Earlier studies determined loyalty to be a determinant of retailer brand equity (Yoo et al., 2000; Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a). However, recent studies found loyalty to be a strong predictor or consequence of retailer brand equity (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017, Troiville et al., 2019). Few retailer brand equity studies incorporate the two dimensions of trust and loyalty into one study. The findings from this thesis, which demonstrate retailer trust as a mediating the relationships

between integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty illuminate the different roles trust and loyalty play in retailer brand equity, whereby trust precedes loyalty.

H1a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between CB-RBE and IRBE.

The study supports this hypothesis. The results of the multi-group analysis confirmed that patronizing frontline retail employees (i.e., defined as frontline employees who shop very frequently or frequently at their retailer) compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees (i.e., defined as frontline employees who shop occasionally, rarely, very rarely or never at their retailer) positively moderate the relationship between consumer-based retailer brand equity and integrated retailer brand equity. Regarding the relationship CB-RBE → IRBE, Group A's (PFREs) path coefficient was higher and statistically significant (PFRE: $\beta = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$; non-PFREs: $\beta = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$).

Although there is no precedent within the literature to draw upon, these findings could suggest that a frontline employee who shops at their retailer is going to be more familiar with it, thus will have stronger relationships with the dimensions that contribute to consumer-based retailer brand equity such as service quality, product quality, store image and price/value.

Hypotheses H2a-H4a are now addressed.

H2a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between EB-RBE and IRBE.

H3a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between IRBE and Retailer Trust.

H4a: Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) positively moderate the relationship between Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty.

The study does not support hypothesis H2a, H3a or H4a. Patronizing frontline retail employees (compared to non-patronizing frontline retail employees) do not positively moderate the relationship between EB-RBE and IRBE, IRBE and Retailer Trust, or Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty. The lack of moderation may have occurred for the following reasons. First, the three hypothesized moderating effects were not supported perhaps due to weaknesses in the theoretical underpinning. Employee patronage literature has identified and

advocated for the dual stakeholder, an employee who is also a consumer of their employer's products and/or services (Berry, 1981). However, the majority of studies to date have been conceptual and qualitative approaches (Lusch et al., 1996; Fram and McCarthy, 2003, 2004; Dabholkar and Abston, 2008; Williams and Connell, 2010; Abston and Kupritz, 2011; DeMotta and Sen, 2017). While the theory has advanced our understanding of the existence of this important dual stakeholder, its antecedents and outcomes, and the benefits of employee patronage to organizations (i.e., building competitive advantage), it has not yet offered insights into the measurement of patronizing frontline retail employees. Thus, these findings suggest the measurement of patronizing frontline employees warrants further exploration and attention.

Second, the selected measurement scale for this study, shopping frequency, measured behavioural patronage. Shopping frequency was used to segment frontline employees into two groups: 1) patronizing; and 2) non-patronizing. Employees were asked how frequently they shop at the retailer, since they began working there: 1) very frequently (e.g., every week), 2) frequently (e.g., several times per month), 3) occasionally (e.g., once per month), 4) rarely (e.g., several times per year), 5) very rarely (e.g., once per year), or 6) never. While this measure addressed behavioural aspects of retail patronage, it did not address attitudinal aspects. The majority of retail patronage literature focuses on behavioural measures (Blut et al., 2018), however, the addition of an attitudinal measure such as positive word-of-mouth (Lacey et al., 2007) could provide a more nuanced measure of employee patronage.

Third, the measurement scale may not have captured all patronage activity that is derived from employees. Merchandise discounts are very common in fashion retailing (Crittenden and Albaum, 2015). Many retailers even allow employees to extend their discounts to friends and family members. This benefit is particularly attractive to employees who may not have an interest in the products or services their retailers sell. For example, an employee works in a children's clothing store, they don't have any children, but their sister uses their discount to buy clothing for her own children. Therefore, in this sense, the employee discount is being used, shopping is occurring and ultimately the company is also benefiting from the revenue from these 'family and friends' purchases. However, even if the employee buys the products on behalf of their sister, they may not interpret this as their own shopping behaviour. To address this issue, additional questions could be included in the

survey to more fully define and capture the patronage activities of employees, including how much and how often their friends and family discounts are being used.

Fourth, the stratification of ‘patronizing’ and ‘non-patronizing’ frontline retail employees could be problematic. This arose from challenges that occurred during the sampling stage of the research. The original proposition of this research was to define PFREs as employees who ‘very frequently’, ‘frequently’ and ‘occasionally’ shop at their retailer, and non-PFREs as employees who ‘rarely’, ‘very rarely’ or ‘never’ shop at their retailer. However, this stratification strategy was problematic as Qualtrics was unsuccessful in fulfilling the quotas for frontline employees who ‘rarely’, ‘very rarely’ or ‘never’ shop at their retailer. This issue may have arisen because of fashion retailing’s common practice of providing merchandise discounts to their employees and/or frontline fashion retail employees’ propensity to shop at their retailer. Therefore, after the data was collected the stratification strategy was revised, whereby PFREs were redefined as shopping ‘very frequently’ or ‘frequently’ at their retailer and non-PFREs were redefined as shopping ‘occasionally’, ‘rarely’, ‘very rarely’ or ‘never’ at their retailer. To ensure an appropriate sample size was obtained to run the multi-group analysis within SmartPLS, the ‘occasionally’ category was moved to non-PFREs. Thus, the ‘occasionally’ grouping may have blurred the lines between these two groups and limited the opportunity to uncover distinct and significant differences.

6.4 Contributions to Knowledge

The goal of scholarly research is to make an original contribution to knowledge. There are three types of contributions: conceptual, methodological and empirical (Summers, 2001). Each type of contribution and theoretical contributions are described, along with a discussion of how this research contributes to knowledge.

6.4.1 Conceptual Contributions

Research contributions do not always fit tightly into one category (e.g., conceptual/theoretical, empirical or methodological). For example, it would be accurate to call this an ‘empirical’ study. However, it began with conceptual ideas about the role of frontline employees and their influence on the development of retailer brand equity. This led to the development of a conceptual framework that subsequently led to the development and testing of several hypotheses. Thus, drawing on MacInnis’s (2011) classification of

conceptual contributions, this research is better characterized as one that blends the conceptual with the empirical.

This thesis makes two key conceptual contributions. First, in referencing MacInnis' (2011) typology of conceptual contributions (refer to Section 3.4, Table 3), this research aligns with the specific conceptual goal of integrating. An integrating conceptual contribution is defined as seeing something in a new way through a holistic perspective. Thus, this research draws upon existing consumer-based retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity measures, which were previously differentiated phenomena, and integrates them into a new integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) framework (i.e., integrative framework). By combining internal and external perceptions of frontline employees, the proposed employee-based retailer brand equity model also produces novel perspectives. While other studies have acknowledged the existence of the employee-consumer, and retailer brand equity studies have mostly focused on the consumer perspective, previous retailer brand equity studies have not investigated the frontline retail employee as a stakeholder who holds both internal and external brand perspectives, and one who influences the development of retailer brand equity. Therefore, this study has made a conceptual contribution by enabling a broader understanding of employee-based retailer brand equity. This research also demonstrates that the conceptualization of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity is much more complex than previously suggested.

Second, this thesis makes an advocating contribution. MacInnis (2011) defines advocating as speaking in support of a particular view. Given the lack of research on the frontline retail employee in relation to their dual-stakeholder role as employee and consumer and their contribution to retailer brand equity, this research advances the retailer brand equity, employee-based brand equity and employee patronage literature areas and advocates for more research in these areas. Given the growing power and influence of retailer brands, a scholarly understanding of retailer brand equity across stakeholders, especially the frontline employee, is essential to advance the retailer brand equity literature.

The retailer brand equity literature focuses largely on consumer perceptions of the brand. It is essential that retailers build relationships with a variety of stakeholders (Hult et al., 2011). The importance of consumers as a critical primary retail stakeholder is well documented in the retail academic literature (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993; Gil-Saura et al., 2013;

Anselmsson et al., 2017). However, retailers also build relationships with other primary stakeholders, their frontline employees, to increase consumer's willingness to pay (Homburg et al., 2009), consumer commitment (Jones et al., 2008) and the level of consumer satisfaction (Homburg and Stock, 2004). Henriques and Sadorsky (1999) refer to employees as the source of a company's success. Although there is a growing interest in employee-based brand equity (King and Grace, 2012; Tavassoli et al., 2014; Alshathry et al., 2017; Erkmen, 2018; Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020), the research to date does not closely examine different types of frontline employees in retailing.

Given the relationship between companies who value their employees and a company's competitive advantage and performance (Berman et al., 1999; Waddock and Graves, 1997), all types of retail employees warrant further research. The frontline retail employee should be prioritized because of their dual role as both consumer and employee. The proposed employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity framework also contributes in a conceptual way in that it offers comparisons two different types of frontline retail employees. The current lack of employee patronage literature has hindered the scholarly understanding of the dual stakeholder role of the frontline retail employee, their purchasing power and their influence on retailer brand equity.

6.4.2 Methodological Contributions

Methodological contributions differ from conceptual and empirical contributions in that they involve changes to the research design itself. For example, a methodological contribution may involve different sampling procedures, measurement approaches or new data analysis methods. The type of contribution is not as important as the significance of each contribution (Summer, 2001).

This thesis makes three methodological contributions. First, the specification, estimation and validation of its higher-order structural and measurement models draw upon very recent guidance in the literature regarding evaluation criteria (Sarstedt et al., 2019). The employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is specified and empirically validated as a type II reflective-formative higher-order construct using PLS-SEM. Despite their advantages, there are few PLS-SEM studies that utilize HCM models within the global academic marketing literature. While 2nd order HCMs are not very common, there are even fewer models that involve even higher levels of abstraction (i.e., 3rd or 4th order HCMs). Thus,

this study addresses this issue and makes a methodological contribution by specifying and empirically validating a 3rd order HCM to model employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity. This study advances the PLS-SEM methodology and the application of evaluation criteria and its interpretation on HCMs and introduces a 3rd order HCM model within the retailer brand equity domain, an important area of marketing literature. In Sarstedt et al.'s (2019) review of all PLS-SEM studies from 1998-2018 published in the *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* and *Australasian Marketing Journal*, they found seventy-two studies, of which only nineteen (26.39%) were specified as higher-order constructs. Further, they found only nine of the nineteen HCM studies used reflective-reflective type, and nine studies used reflective-formative type (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Sarstedt et al., (2019) outlined several advantages to using HCMs (i.e., 2nd or 3rd order constructs) vs. 1st order models. They note HCMs may contribute to model parsimony, limiting the band-width fidelity dilemma and the reduction of collinearity issues (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

The second methodological contribution includes following the most recently proposed methods for assessing the model's out-of-sample predictive power using PLSpredict (Sarstedt et al., 2019; Shmueli et al., 2019). Typical PLS-SEM analyses focus on the path model's explanatory power (Shmueli et al., 2019), but lack predictive power assessments (Musa et al., 2018; de Oliveira et al., 2018; Saayman et al., 2018). Even though the PLSpredict guidelines have only recently been published, determining the out-of-sample predictive power of the model adds value to the data analysis process because the results allow for drawing conclusions that affect business practices and have managerial implications (Hair et al., 2019).

The third methodological contribution is the use of the embedded two-stage approach for specifying and estimating the higher-order constructs. Even though the majority of HCM studies in the marketing literature use the two-stage approach (Sarstedt et al., 2019), few studies explicitly state or differentiate as to what type of two-stage approach they are employing. Interestingly, researchers have proposed the disjoint two-stage approach or the embedded two-stage approach but note both approaches lead to similar results (Cheah et al., 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2019). Thus, this study fully explains and describes the deployment of the embedded two-stage approach, which can serve to support other researchers who also choose this method of analysis and enable replication.

6.4.3 Empirical Contributions

Empirical contributions are primarily characterized by their inclusion of data or even the emphasis on data mining. Examples of empirical contributions include research that tests theoretical linkages, moderators, mediators or the psychometric properties of a scale (Summers, 2001). While there is no consensus among retail scholars on how retailer brand equity should be structured (Anselmsson et al., 2017), two of the most influential studies to date follow a parallel structure (Aaker, 1991; Arnett et al., 2003), many studies advocate the two-step process (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Jara and Cliquet, 2012; Choi and Huddleston, 2014; Swoboda et al., 2016) and few studies to date support a multi-step structure (Keller, 2003; Anselmsson et al., 2017). This thesis makes three key empirical contributions. The first empirical contribution is the advancement of the multi-step structure, whereby integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty are partially mediated by retailer trust. Second, this novel employee-based retailer brand equity model is investigated through the lens of frontline retail employees, including their internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) perceptions of the brand, which has not been empirically tested thus far in the internal brand management or brand equity literatures. Finally, the third empirical contribution of this research is the examination of the potential moderating effect of patronizing frontline retail employees (i.e., employees who shop and work at their retailer) on the relationships between CB-RBE, EB-RBE, IRBE, retailer trust and retailer loyalty in Canadian bricks and mortar fashion retailing. There is no research to date, to the author's knowledge, that segments frontline retail employees by their shopping frequency (i.e., patronizing frontline retail employees and non-patronizing frontline retail employees) in a fashion retailing context. By doing so, this research identifies a potentially important yet overlooked employee segment, patronizing frontline retail employees.

6.4.4 Theoretical Contributions

Theoretical contributions are an important outcome of research because they refine our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and elucidate the relationships and interrelationships (Sutton and Staw, 1995). A theoretical contribution must be both original and demonstrate utility for practice (Corley and Gioia, 2011) and it must be discussed in relation to existing theory (Ågerfalk, 2014). This study makes several theoretical contributions to the areas of retailer brand equity, employee-based brand equity and employee

patronage research. Early retailer brand equity models simply transferred Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) product-based models to a retailer-based context without strong rationale (Arnett et al., 2003; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Pappu and Quester, 2006a, 2006b) or clear theoretical contributions. Ailawadi and Keller (2004) suggested retailer brand equity is more multi-sensory and complex than product-based brand equity. To address this, recent conceptualizations of retailer brand equity (Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019) acknowledge retail's unique attributes thus making theoretical contributions. Yet, retailer brand equity studies are limited to the consumer view. Unlike retailer brand equity, the development of employee-based brand equity theory has been more rigorous from its inception in that key scholars (King and Grace, 2009, 2010; King et al., 2012; Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020) have drawn from organizational behaviour theories to advance the field. They undertook exploratory studies (King and Grace, 2009), tested organizational behaviour theories (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020) and validated measurement scales (King and Grace, 2010; King et al., 2012) to develop appropriate models to measure organizations internal brand building efforts. Similar to retailer brand equity, employee-based brand equity theories to date continue to rely on the perceptions of one-dimensional stakeholders (i.e., employees), and do not acknowledge the complex and nuanced nature of employees' social identity within their organizations. The employee patronage literature identified and defined the employee-consumer (i.e., dual stakeholder) who holds both internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) views of their organization, but it has not been operationalized in the context of retailer brand equity. Thus, this study extends and links employee patronage, retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity theories by introducing and operationalizing the dual stakeholder perspective. This research advances brand equity theory with the validation of an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model. This research is the first, to the author's knowledge, to bring together retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity streams through the theoretical lens of a dual stakeholder (i.e., employee-consumer), to identify and examine the factors that contribute to frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity. Theoretically, this research provides a deeper understanding of the frontline fashion retail employee, a dual stakeholder whose perceptions of their retailer's brand equity offer valuable insights into an organization's internal and external brand building strategies and activities. Finally, this study introduces the variable of retailer trust into the dual stakeholder retailer brand equity model to

extend our understanding of its mediating impact on the relationship between integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty.

6.5 Managerial Implications

Brand ranking lists (e.g., Interbrand's Best Global Brands and BrandZ™ Most Valuable Brands) reinforce the emerging power and influence of retailer brands and their usurping of product brand behemoths such as Coca-Cola from the traditional top ranks. As a result, brand equity researchers have shown interest in employees as critical stakeholders (King and Grace, 2010; Davcik et al., 2015) and retailers as brands (Burt and Davies, 2010; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; White et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019). Despite the growing power and influence of retailer brands, and industry's desire to measure their worth, the academic literature lags the industry in managing retailer brand equity. Further, White et al. (2013) determined that consumers perceive retailers as brands, which demonstrates that brand equity research has also not kept pace with industry practices. The findings of this thesis have important practical insights for retail management, namely measuring the true value of their organization, enabling marketing and human resources managers to work together to build a cohesive brand and guiding the allocation and prioritization of internal and external brand investments and activities. Thus, the findings from this study will assist managers in three ways.

First, retailers could benefit from adding this employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measurement into their portfolio of retailer metrics, to support a new way to periodically calculate and measure the retailer's true value creation.

Many retailers continue to use traditional financial performance metrics such as revenue, year-over-year growth and profitability, however, a recent report by Deloitte (2019) suggests retailers should find new ways to create and measure the true value they deliver to consumers and stakeholders. The report emphasizes the need for retailers to understand what drives value for different stakeholders by taking a holistic, more comprehensive and inclusive approach to measuring performance (Deloitte, 2019). Retailer brand equity is the result of different sources of value (Troiville et al., 2019), and can be derived from consumers' and employees' experiences with products, services and the retailer itself. Thus, adopting an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measure is one way to understand frontline employees' perceptions of the retailer brand and the true value they feel it delivers to

them. However, retailers should determine an appropriate portfolio of retailer metrics since “...no single metric reflects the challenges and value propositions of all retailers today” (Deloitte, 2019, p. 8).

Just as Troiville et al. (2019) observed that product brand equity does not parallel retailer brand equity, and that the measurement of retailer brand equity requires nuanced and retailer-specific dimensions, a more realistic approach to retailer brand equity measurement is to consider a variety of appropriate brand equity measures across multiple stakeholders (e.g., consumers, employees, suppliers) and retail contexts (e.g., price points, channels, product categories) (Davicik et al., 2015). The employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model proposed in this thesis could assist managers in measuring, monitoring and managing their frontline employees’ perceptions of their brand equity over time, using these measures to benchmark progress (i.e., across territories, stores) and making the appropriate adjustments, to support a more holistic approach to measuring and capturing the retailer’s true value creation.

Goodwill is an important part of the business valuation. If a retailer were to acquire or merge with another organization, the issue of goodwill (i.e., how to value the organization’s intangible assets) would arise. Goodwill is the difference between what a company pays for the organization and its fair value of net identifiable assets. Therefore, goodwill represents the financial value of aspects of the organization that are difficult to measure, such as brand equity, loyalty, trust and reputation. Being able to calculate an accurate and credible goodwill value is important to retailers because this calculation represents the premium the acquiring organization is willing to pay over the fair value of the company’s tangible assets. Therefore, if the retailer’s brand was deemed to be highly valuable, it’s overall financial value will increase. The employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model offers retailers a practical tool to assist in determining a financial value on their goodwill component of the balance sheet.

In practice, fashion retailers could annually deploy this employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measurement tool in house or via third party service providers (i.e., marketing agencies, consultants). Managing this in house is a realistic option for retailers who are becoming increasingly savvy and innovative when it comes to adopting new digital technologies to collect and manage consumer data. For example, global fast-fashion retailer H&M launched their loyalty program in Europe in 2017 followed by the United States in

2019, and now has more than 35 million members worldwide (Howland, 2019). Managing a loyalty program of this size, which includes an initial sign-up offer, earning points for every dollar spent, personalized offers such as birthday discounts, shopping events, digital receipts, special access to limited collections and discounts with partnering company Drybar (Howland, 2019), requires sophisticated data management capabilities. Gartner recently reported that retailers are investing heavily in digital technology to meet consumer expectations and predict and drive results (Gartner, 2018). In fact, retail tech spending was estimated to reach \$203.6 billion in 2019 (Gartner has not yet updated this figure) and retail now surpasses most other industries regarding investment into technology (Gartner, 2018), providing further evidence that many retailers today have the data analysis skills and capabilities to measure and monitor their brand equity in house. Measuring and monitoring their employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity is aligned with retailers' needs to better capture and measure the true value they are creating with stakeholders.

Second, adopting an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measure could encourage and enable marketing and human resource managers to work together to build a cohesive brand.

Just as retailers must develop relevant strategies to attract and retain consumers (Troiville et al., 2019), retailers must also develop relevant strategies to attract and retain employees. Harvard Business Review published an article entitled 'Why (and How) HR Needs to Act More Like Marketing' (Schaefer, 2016). The article advised companies to "...compete for talent the way companies compete for customers." In retail, frontline employees not only represent a source of talent, they play an important role in creating powerful corporate brands (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Levy et al., 2017), representing the brand to outside constituents (Aurand et al., 2005), influencing the consumer's experience, and delivering the retailer's implied brand promise (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). Not only are employees said to be the source of company success (Henriques and Sadorsky, 1999), their power is untapped by marketers (King and Grace, 2009). Therefore, frontline employees represent a valuable source of insights for both human resource and marketing managers. From a management perspective, marketing managers are typically responsible for building external brand strategies to attract the right consumers and strengthen the 'consumer brand' and human resource managers are responsible for building internal brand management strategies to attract the right employees and strengthen the 'employer brand'. Yet, this begs

the question, “Do marketing managers and HR managers always work together to build one cohesive retailer brand?” A study by i4cp entitled ‘Reimagining Talent Acquisition: Mastering Employer Brand’ surveyed more than 540 professionals and found that HR and marketing departments collaborate on brand strategy in fewer than one-third (27%) of companies (Lykins, 2018). Yet, high-performance organizations are six-times more likely to have their HR and marketing departments collaborating with each other, and 1.5-times more likely to share the responsibility of building and managing the employer brand together (Samdahl, 2019). Understanding and leveraging their frontline employees’ perceptions of the different dimensions of the retailer brand offers retailers significant opportunities for marketing and human resource managers to work together to build one cohesive and holistic retailer brand. While marketing managers may be more interested in the consumer-based brand equity dimensions and HR managers may be more interested in the employee-based brand equity dimensions, management must acknowledge that all dimensions contribute to their retailer brand equity. Thus, the employee-consumer integrated brand equity model, when operationalized as a measurement tool can enable and encourage two previously disparate and/or siloed departments, human resources and marketing, to work together and develop common brand building goals.

Third, the employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model can guide and inform the allocation and prioritization of internal and external brand investments and activities.

In increasingly fierce markets (Verhoef et al., 2018), retailers must build their brand equity in order to differentiate from competitors, increase their market share and enhance the power of their name (Troiville et al., 2019). To build their brand equity, retailers typically focus on consumer-centric activities such as tailoring their product assortments, building up their portfolio of private label brands, innovating store formats and designs and creating exceptional consumer experiences (Deloitte, 2020). However, it’s more important than ever for retailers to have tools that guide and inform the allocation and prioritization of internal and external brand investments and activities. Through a hierarchy of importance this thesis identifies the key drivers that frontline employees perceive as key in building employee-based integrated retailer brand equity. The findings are helpful to retailers in determining what marketing and human resources activities and investments should be prioritized with different stakeholders.

Frontline employees of the fashion retailers in this study ranked the dimensions of retailer brand equity in the following order (most to least important): 1) service quality, 2) product quality, 3) brand allegiance, 4) price/value, 5) skills development, 6) brand consistent behaviour, 7) resume power, 8) brand endorsement, 9) internal advancement, 10) store image, and 11) work demands. The use of importance rankings on the various brand equity dimensions, tracked and managed over time, could help managers to pinpoint exactly where resources and investments need to be allocated across the brand.

In this research, frontline employees perceived service quality to be most important. It considered reliability of customer service; after sales service; and friendly, knowledgeable, respectful and honest sales associates. These results could inform the retailer's investment into service quality by focusing on customer service training, development of store associates and policies, and the consistent delivery of them by frontline employees.

Product quality, the second most important factor overall considered quality of products, consistency of quality of products and trendiness of products. Product quality can be difficult for retailers to manage especially if they do not own and/or manufacture their own private label brands and products. Lululemon, for example, is a fashion retailer that has built a portfolio of its own private label brands. They have a higher level of control over the quality of their brands and products in comparison to Nordstrom, for example, who develops some of their own private label brands but mainly purchases branded products from other manufacturers.

Frontline employees' desires to maintain the relationship with their employer (as measured by brand allegiance) was the strongest employee-based factor in the development of retailer brand equity and third strongest factor overall. Frontline retail employees' internal (i.e., as employees) perceptions of brand allegiance considered their desire to stay working with the retailer, desire to stay working there for five years, willingness to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the retailer successful, pride in the retailer, reputation of the retailer, and feeling like they fit in the workplace. This speaks to the importance of developing relationships with their frontline employees, by ensuring frontline employees' ideas and opinions are solicited and heard, and effective employee engagement and retention strategies are in place. Retailers can prioritize brand allegiance by deploying employee

retention initiatives and rewards/incentives programs, ensuring transparency of communications and investing into worker satisfaction.

Price/value considered whether the products are of good value, if the prices are acceptable, and if the products are a 'good buy'. These results suggest that the retailer's brand needs a strong level of service quality and product quality, with price/value being a tertiary concern. In support of this strategy, Troiville et al. (2019) argue branding strategies, not low prices, delivers more value to consumers.

Skills development was the second most important employee-based factor for frontline employees and fifth most important factor overall. This could inform when and how often retailers conduct staff training. According to the 'State of Workplace Training in Retail' report (Axonify and Ipsos, 2017) 76.0% of frontline employees said they want training that supports the development of skills for the future. However, 31.0% of all frontline employees said they do not receive any formal training, and for those who do receive training 27.0% said the training is boring and/or not effective. Thus, an opportunity exists for retailers to review their current training strategies and develop relevant and engaging training programs that help frontline employees build skills for the future (Taylor, 2019). Training programs could include the development of technical skills (i.e., how to properly operate the point-of-sales systems), product knowledge skills (i.e., understand the performance benefits of certain fabrics or the ingredients in a lipstick) and soft-skills (i.e., how to make good decisions and build strong customer relationships); skills that not only contribute to the retailer's goals but also the employee's overall professional development.

Brand consistent behaviour describes frontline employees' willingness to demonstrate unprescribed employee behaviours that align with the retailer's values. Brand consistent behaviour considered understanding the retailer's brand values, demonstrating behaviours that align with the retailer's values, having values that align with the retailer's values, considering the impact of their communications on the retailer's brand, and learning about the retailer's brand. What frontline employees *do* (as measured by brand consistent behaviour), especially when they are interacting with consumers, should be of utmost concern to retailers because these behaviours are linked to productivity (Deluga, 1994). Further, consumers judge retailers by these interactions. Thus, brand consistent behaviour is akin to the concept of brand ambassadorship. Schade (2008) defines a brand ambassador as an employee who

represents the brand in all facets of their life. King et al. (2012) describe the ultimate portrayal of employee-based brand equity as an employee who acts as an informal brand ambassador. Foster et al. (2009) describe a brand ambassador as an employee that fully embraces and internalizes its employer's brand values. Brand ambassadors are also willing to recommend the brand to others (Schade, 2008).

Resume power, which ranked lower in overall importance, refers to the employees' belief that by having the retailer listed as a place of employment on their resume, it will strengthen their resume (DeLVecchio et al., 2007). Resumes are defined as documents that summarize the job seeker's personal and professional experiences, accomplishments to a prospective employer (Ross, 2010). Resume power, however, can enhance resumes and make the job candidate stand out from the competition (Morgan, 2014). For resumes to have 'power', the job seeker must have professional experiences with companies with strong brand equity. In the context of this thesis, resume power considered working for the retailer is a resume builder, having this retailer's name on their resume makes them stand out among other applicants for future jobs, having the retailer's brand on their resume adds credibility, and having the retailer's brand on their resume makes them highly regarded by recruiters at other firms. Thus, resume power can benefit both employees and retailers (assuming the retailer has achieved strong brand equity); employees can position themselves for better jobs in the future, and retailers can attract higher quality candidates. Furthermore, the strength of a retailer's brand can not only be leveraged in the traditional sense by attracting consumers and building loyalty with existing consumers but it can also be leveraged via resume power to assure frontline employees their current work is worthwhile and knowing it will also be valued by their next employer.

Brand endorsement, located fourth from the bottom, refers to employees' positive external communications about their employer (King et al., 2012). In this thesis it considered if the employee says positive things about their retailer, if they would recommend their retailer as an employer, and if they enjoy talking to others about the retailer where they work. While brand consistent behaviour refers to what employees *do*, brand endorsement refers to what employees *say* about their employer. Thus, brand endorsement is similar to the marketing concept of word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth manifests in conversations and can be especially credible coming from an employee of the organization. Frontline employees may express their opinions and ideas about their employer informally through direct conversations

with colleagues, friends and family or through social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Twitter or Instagram. Although retailers may look to mitigate and manage negative employee word-of-mouth by reviewing their employees' posts on professional networking websites such as LinkedIn or the employer review website Glassdoor, companies recognize the power of the employee voice. More recently, organizations recognize the importance of having a strategy in place to encourage and engage their employees to speak authentically and positively about them, without a heavy hand (Martin et al., 2015). Thus, although frontline employees placed less importance on brand endorsement relative to the other internally focused retailer brand equity dimensions, retailers must actively measure and manage their brand equity to understand how to prioritize every dimension.

Internal advancement occupies the third last in importance. It is considered if they can advance their career at the retailer, if there are desirable positions to grow into, if there are opportunities for better and higher positions, and that management listens to their opinions and ideas. Although it may be assumed that every employee wants to advance their career within their organization, the results of this study suggest this may not always be the case. Employees take on jobs for different reasons; perhaps it is to advance to higher levels within the organization, but jobs also play a functional role by 'paying the bills', for example. The retail industry's high turnover rate may impact internal advancement. With a 76.0% annual average turnover rate of part-time retail employees (Korn Ferry, 2019), they are likely not working at the retailer long enough to advance to higher levels. High turnover in retail has been attributed to a younger-than-average workforce (Hurst and Good, 2009) and boundary spanning positions that require communicating with diverse constituents leading to high levels of role conflict and ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964). Employees may also view 'jobs' and 'careers' as two different concepts. Perhaps there are frontline retail employees who view working in retail as an interim 'job'; one that happens *before* they launch their 'real career'. Even though there are many opportunities to advance to better and higher positions in retail, such as management or head office positions, it is possible that many frontline retail employees do not understand their company's structure. Perhaps they are not aware of the internal opportunities or they have been socialized to believe that working in retail is not a 'career'. Indeed, there are prevailing misconceptions that working in retail is not a career (Coulter, 2013; Gunn et al., 2020). Gunn et al. (2020) identified five sources which produce influential messages about perceptions of careers in retail: part-time retail work experience;

educational institutions; parents; retail industry/practitioners; and media. Thus, their study points to retailers themselves being partly responsible for these negative perceptions. Although internal advancement was relatively less important than other retailer brand equity dimensions, retailers could provide career-pathing opportunities to frontline employees, which could in turn improve the relevance and meaningfulness of this factor to frontline employees. In doing so, it could also have positive implications on other areas of retailer brand equity, such as brand allegiance, brand consistent behaviour, skills development, resume power and brand endorsement.

Store image holds the second least importance, ahead of work demands. It considers atmosphere, interior, and selling an assortment of well-known brands. Skandrani et al. (2011) explored the effect of store atmospherics on frontline employees' attitudinal and behavioural reactions in fashion retailing. They concluded that retailers should consider employees' responses to store atmospherics (i.e., music, crowding, product display, assortment, in-store social relationships) because they could inhibit service quality. Even though store image may hold less importance in the minds of their frontline employees' external perceptions of the brand, this suggest that if a retailer ignores store image, it could negatively impact important factors such as service quality that represent the retailer brand's top priority.

Finally, work demands hold the least importance when it comes to frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity. Work demands considered whether the retailer sets high performance standards for its employees, if the employees work harder or longer hours than at other retailers, and if the employees are given their preferred hours. Dabholkar and Abston (2008) proposed a conceptual framework that highlights the employee's dual role as employee and consumer. In the firm-controlled portion of their framework, they include employees' perceptions of fairness, which are similar to work demands. Bettencourt and Brown (1997) define the concept of perceptions of fairness as "the 'rightness' of outcomes, procedures and interactions within the firm" (p.40). Bettencourt and Brown (1997), Babin et al. (2000) and Paulin et al. (2006) found employees' perceptions of fairness (i.e., perceptions of supervision, pay, ethical climate) positively influenced job satisfaction. Although frontline retail employees' perceived work demands to be the least important of all retailer brand equity dimensions, they may simply perceive work demands as 'basics'. In other words, employees may simply expect work demands to be present in retail jobs. As previously mentioned, the two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) also applies

here. The results suggest that work demands may not differentiate the retailer brand from others, but retailers may experience other negative consequences if they were to entirely neglect work demands from their brand building efforts.

This thesis showcases the important contributions frontline employees make in co-creating retailer brand equity, and how these investments can be allocated and prioritized. Furthermore, by segmenting frontline employees into smaller groups (i.e., by shopping frequency characteristics), retailers can discover their differences and how each group perceives retailer brand equity. In this research, both PFREs and non-PFREs value all four consumer-based retailer brand equity factors. However, PFREs place the highest value on the employee-based factors of brand allegiance, skills development and brand consistent behaviour, and non-PFREs place the highest value on brand allegiance, resume power and brand consistent behaviour. Knowing how different employee groups perceive their retailer's brand, will equip retailers with rich insights to adapt their retail brand strategies accordingly. Retailers have the opportunity to segment their employees into groups relevant to their business, the questions they want to answer and the current challenges they face. For example, employees could be segmented according to demographics (e.g., age, gender, education, job title, pay), geography (e.g., the store location where they work, where they live), psychographics (e.g., personality, socio-economic class) and behaviours (e.g., shopping frequency, loyalty, job performance indicators, customer service ratings). This thesis illuminates the opportunity for retailers, particularly in bricks and mortar fashion retailing, to consider the importance of frontline employees, integrate them into their brand building efforts and divide their frontline employees into smaller groups and use these insights to potentially enhance their employees' perceptions of their retailer brand. This could enable managers from all areas of the organization to positively contribute to the achievement of organizational goals.

6.6 Limitations

The current study reveals that there is much more to be learned about frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity. This, like any study, is not without limitations. This study has at least six limitations that restrict its interpretation and generalizability.

First, this research was conducted with frontline employees working at Canadian fashion retailers. Thus, the choice of country (i.e., Canada), industry (i.e., retail), retail sector (i.e., fashion) and stakeholder group (i.e., frontline employees) may not be generalizable to other countries, industries, retail contexts or stakeholder groups. The research also only took place in urban metropolitan cities; therefore, the results would not be generalizable to retailers in rural settings.

Second, the data collection took place within the time period from January – February 2019. Therefore, causal links cannot be determined. Further, the use of cross-sectional data (which does not monitor employee-based retailer brand equity over time) limits the ability to draw future inferences about lagged effects.

Third, the measures used to represent the dimensions of consumer-based and employee-based retailer brand equity used existing scales from the literature, however, they were combined in a new way. Thus, these measures may be applicable to other fashion retailers in Canada but not all retail sectors (e.g., grocery, electronics).

Fourth, the endogenous (i.e., dependent) variables (i.e., retailer trust and retailer loyalty) and exogenous variables (i.e., service quality, product quality, store image, price/value, brand allegiance, brand endorsement, brand consistent behaviour, skills development, resume power, internal advancement, work demands) were self-reported measures. There is some concern among academics with using self-reported measures. There is the risk that the frontline employees in this study may have over- or under-reported their perceptions due to the influence of social desirability (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone, 2002). The use of Likert scales may also produce common method biases. Several measures were taken to mitigate these limitations; however, they cannot be fully eliminated.

Fifth, this research focused on fashion retailing, and it may be because of the very nature of fashion retailing and its' propensity to offer employees' merchandise discounts that it was challenging to find frontline employees who did not shop at their retailers. As a result, the definition of non-patronizing frontline retail employee was adjusted from the original definition of "an employee who works at the retailer but does not shop at the retailer" to the revised definition of "an employee who works at the retailer and occasionally shops at the retailer".

Finally, the analysis was conducted at the frontline employee level vs. the organizational level. There are always trade-offs in research. The goal of this research was to understand frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity; therefore, the unit of analysis was appropriate for the research questions. However, the trade-off is that analysis at the organizational level was not possible.

6.7 Future Research

Overall, the research finds support for this novel measure of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity that considers the internal and external perceptions of frontline employees. While the study adequately addressed the key research questions, it also presents opportunities for further research. From a theoretical perspective, this new conceptualisation of employee-based retailer brand equity includes eleven dimensions, a mediating variable (retailer trust) and one outcome variable (retailer loyalty). Thus, replicating this model with other retail sectors (e.g., home furnishings, electronics, grocery), comparing sectors, or conducting comparative studies of two or more countries (e.g., Canada vs. USA) could be valuable opportunities to add knowledge to the literature. Conducting the study over time with one retailer could also provide valuable managerial and operational insights into the workings of retailer brand equity. Future research in this area could add, remove or replace specific dimensions according to the retail sector or type of stakeholder being examined. However, there is a risk that adding dimensions may reduce the parsimony and lead to non-significant results (Troiville et al., 2019).

The proposed employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity framework could be operationalized across a variety of countries (e.g., Canada vs. United States), price segments (e.g., premium, discount), product types (e.g., fashion, food), stakeholders (e.g., head office employees, warehouse personnel, vendors) and geographic regions (e.g., North America, Europe). However, given retail's diversity, finding an appropriate retailer brand equity model to fit every situation will continue to be a challenge for retail scholars searching for 'one' unified measure of retailer brand equity.

Finally, another area of future research would be to include organizational performance data such as sales revenue, profit, market share or customer satisfaction scores in addition to employee brand perceptions and apply the performance data as dependent variables in the

model. Thus, this model could examine frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity and their effect on key retailer performance metrics.

6.8 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, this thesis has taken a dual-stakeholder perspective of frontline retail employees and examined their perceptions of their retailer's brand as both employees and consumers. Through the development of an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity measure, this study complements the existing but limited employee patronage literature, contributes to the internal brand management literature and advances retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity literatures. A novel employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model was developed, drawing on theory from brand equity, internal brand management theory and stakeholder literature areas. The model offers a new way for retailers to measure, monitor and manage their brand equity over time, while providing the opportunity to monitor the factors that influence frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity. The model also offers the opportunity for retailers to discover differences between types of frontline retail employees by segmenting them by characteristics, for example, patronizing frontline retail employees and non-patronizing frontline retail employees. By integrating internal and external brand perceptions into one model, it offers a more holistic view of employee-based retailer brand equity, its antecedents and outcomes. The findings from this research provide useful insights for both scholars and managers. It is of particular relevance to retail practitioners given an increasingly competitive environment, retailers' growing influence, their struggle to attract top talent, their desire to build powerful brands and create value for all stakeholders.

In closing, one of the first pieces of advice I received from my supervisor was, "remember, this is not your life's work; it's the start of your life's work." I have thought about this piece of advice on many occasions, both to remind me of the scope of this research but also of the new questions that remain unanswered and the research opportunities that remain unexplored. While this research addressed some of the previously unanswered questions posed by other scholars in this field, the work on frontline retail employees is not complete, and further research on employee-based retailer brand equity needs to be pursued. Although my DBA journey is near the end, my investigation into frontline employees and their influence on retailer brand equity has just begun

Appendix A: Summary of Retailer Brand Equity Literature

Authors	Name of Concept	Country	Perspective	Retail Sector	Antecedents of RBE	Number of RBE Dimensions	RBE Dimensions	RBE Consequences
Arnett et al., (2003)	Retailer Equity	USA	Consumers	Fashion	Not specified	5	Awareness, Service Quality, Product Quality, Loyalty, Price/Value	Shopping Intentions
Pappu and Quester (2006a)	Retailer Equity	Australia	Consumers	Department and Specialty Stores	Not specified	4	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality, Loyalty	Not specified
Pappu and Quester (2006b)	Retailer Equity	Australia	Consumers	Department and Specialty Stores	Not specified	4	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality, Loyalty	Customer Satisfaction
De Carlo et al. (2007)	Retailer Equity	USA	Consumers	Restaurants	Not specified	2	Store/Brand Image, Familiarity	WOM, Store Evaluation
Haelsig et al., (2007)	Retail Brand Equity	Germany	Consumers	Grocery, clothing, DIY, electronics, furniture	Service, Value/Price, Assortment, Advertising, Store Design	5	Loyalty, Trust, Likability, Willingness to Recommend, Differentiation	Not specified
Baldauf et al. (2009)	Retailer-Perceived Brand Equity	Austria	Retail Managers	Ceramic Tiles	Marketing Mix Activities: supplier image, price levels, price deals, promotion, product-country-image	4	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality, Loyalty	Brand Profitability Performance
Jinfeng and Zhilong (2009)	Retailer Equity	China	Consumers	Hypermarkets	Convenience, perceived price, physical facilities, employee service, institutional factors	3	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality,	Loyalty
Swoboda et al. (2009)	Retail Brand Equity	Germany	Consumers	Grocery, clothing, DIY, electronics and furniture	Service, value/price, assortment, advertising, store design	5	Loyalty, Trust, Likability, Willingness to Recommend, Differentiation, Consumer Involvement (moderator)	Consumer involvement (moderator)
Allaway et al. (2011)	Retail Brand Equity	USA	Consumers	Supermarkets	Not specified	9	Service Quality, Product Quality, Price/Value, Assortment, Layout, Store Service, Patronage Reward Programs, Location, Community Involvement	Fanaticism, Loyalty

Authors	Name of Concept	Country	Perspective	Retail Sector	Antecedents of RBE	Number of RBE Dimensions	RBE Dimensions	RBE Consequences
Das et al. (2012)	Retailer Equity	India (Kolkata)	Consumers	Department Stores	Retailer Personality: sophistication, dependability, empathy, authenticity, vibrancy	4	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality, Loyalty	Not specified
Samu et al. (2012)	Retailer-Based Brand Equity	USA, Canada	Retailers / Franchise Owners	Not specified	Brand Building Activities	1*		Retailer Community Identification
Jara and Cliquet (2012)	Retail Brand Equity	France	Consumers	Hypermarkets	Awareness	5	Perceived Quality, Service Quality, Price/Value, Personality, Store Service	Purchase Intention
White et al. (2013)	Retailer Brand Equity	USA	Consumers	Not specified	Service quality, e-service quality, retail design, retail ambiance, retail social (employees), website design, website ambiance, website social (customization)	1**		Not specified
Gil-Saura et al. (2013)	Retailer Equity	Spain	Consumers	Grocery, clothing, furniture	Not specified	4	Awareness, Price/Value, Store/Brand Image, Trust	Consumer satisfaction (mediator), loyalty
Swoboda et al. (2013a)	Store Equity	Europe (60 countries)	Consumers	DIY (one retailer)	Not specified	1***		Store Accessibility, Loyalty
Swoboda et al. (2013b)	Store Equity	Europe (30 countries)	Consumers	DIY (one retailer)	Store Attribute Perceptions	1***		Store Loyalty
Dabija et al. (2014)	Retail Brand Equity	Romania	Consumers	Fashion, sporting goods, shoes	Assortment, Ambiance, Price, Communication, Service, Location	1****		Not specified
Choi and Huddleston (2014)	Retailer Equity	USA	Consumers	Hypermarket (Meijer)	Not specified	3	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality	Loyalty
Das (2015)	Retailer Equity	India (Kolkata)	Consumers	Department Stores	Store Attributes: store ambiance, product price, product style and variety, service quality of the store, advertisement, WOM, general attitudes towards retailer, store name and carried brand name, sales persons and other customers in store	4	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality, Loyalty	Not specified

Authors	Name of Concept	Country	Perspective	Retail Sector	Antecedents of RBE	Number of RBE Dimensions	RBE Dimensions	RBE Consequences
Çifci et al. (2016)	Retail Brand Equity	Turkey, Spain	Consumers	Fashion, grocery	N/A	6	Awareness, Atmosphere, Employees, Ideal Self-Congruence, Brand Identification, Lifestyle Congruence	Brand satisfaction, Brand loyalty
Swoboda et al. (2016)	Retail Brand Equity	Germany	Consumers	Grocery, clothing, DIY, electronics and furniture	Not specified	5	Service Quality, Price/Value, Assortment, Layout, Communication	Intentional Loyalty
Londoño et al. (2016)	Brand-Retailer-Channel Equity	Scotland	Consumers	Drug Retailer	Not specified	4	Awareness, Associations, Perceived Quality, Loyalty,	Purchase Intention
Anselmsson et al. (2017)	Retailer Brand Equity	Sweden	Consumers	Grocery, furniture (interior design)	Awareness	4	Customer Service, Product Quality, Pricing Policy, Physical Store	Trust (mediator), Loyalty
Troiville et al. (2019)	Retailer Brand Equity	USA, UK, France	Consumers	Grocery	Not specified	8	Product Quality, Price/Value, Assortment, Access, Atmosphere, Convenience, Private Brands, Employees	Attitude, Loyalty, WOM

*Sami et al. (2012) *New items were developed, based on a direct approach to measuring brand equity. No reference.*

**White et al. (2013) *Used Yoo and Donthu's (2001) unidimensional overall brand equity measure.*

***Swoboda et al. (2013a,b) *Used Verhoef et al. (2007) retail brand equity scale: strong, well-known, favourable, unique*

****Dabija et al. (2014) *Four items, no reference.*

Appendix B: Summary of Employee-Based Brand Equity Literature

Authors	Name of Concept	Country	Perspective	Industry	Empirical	Antecedents of EBBE	Number of EBBE Dimensions	EBBE Dimensions	EBBE Consequences
Miles and Mangold (2004)	Employee Branding Process	USA	Employees	Not specified	No	Formal Internal Sources (human resource management systems, public relations systems), Informal Internal Sources (co-worker influence, organization's culture, leadership/management), Formal External Sources (public relations, advertising), Informal External Sources (customer feedback, WOM)	2	Psychological contract (employee perceptions), Employee brand image	Turnover, Employee satisfaction, Service quality, Customer retention, Word-of-mouth communication
Cardy et al. (2007)	Employee Equity	USA	Employees	Not specified	No	Human resource management (policies/actions), Employee assets (people), Non-employee assets (intangible and tangible firm assets besides people)	3	Value (compensation/benefits, work/life balance, work environment), Brand (employee perception of organization, celebrations, ethics), Retention (socialization/training, benefits/privileges based on seniority, employee development, performance appraisal)	Satisfaction, Commitment, Retention, Performance
DelVecchio et al. (2007)	Firm's Brand Equity	USA	Prospective Employees	Alcoholic Beverages, Sunglasses (Business-to-Business)	Yes	Internal opportunity, Skill development, Work ethic, Resume power	1*		Internal opportunity, Skill development, Work ethic, Resumer power, Job appeal, Salary requirement
Burmann, Jost-Benz and Riley (2009)	Identity-Based Brand Equity	Germany	Employees & Buyers (consumers)	Corporate, product and service brands	No	Not specified	2	Brand identity (employees' perceptions), Brand image (consumers' perceptions)	Behavioural brand strength, Financial brand equity, Potential brand equity
King and Grace (2009)	Employee-Based Brand Equity	Australia	Employees	Service-based organizations	No	Not specified	3	Internal brand management (information generation, knowledge dissemination, openness, the 'H' factor), Employee brand knowledge effects (role clarity, brand commitment), EBBE benefits (brand citizenship behaviour, employee satisfaction, intention to stay, positive employee word of mouth)	Not specified

Authors	Name of Concept	Country	Perspective	Industry	Empirical	Antecedents of EBBE	Number of EBBE Dimensions	EBBE Dimensions	EBBE Consequences
Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010)	Internal Brand Equity	Germany	Employees, Management	Business-to-Business	Yes	Internal brand commitment, Internal brand knowledge, Internal brand involvement	3	Loyalty, Intra-role behaviour, Extra-role behaviour	Customer Based Brand Equity (External Brand Equity)
King and Grace (2010)	Employee-based brand equity	Australia	Service Employees	Service-based organizations	Yes	Openness, Information generation, Knowledge dissemination, 'H' factor	2	Role clarity, Brand commitment	EBBE Benefits (brand citizenship behaviour, employee satisfaction, employee intention to stay, positive word of mouth)
Tsang et al., (2011)	Hotel Brand Equity	Hong Kong	Hotel employee	Hospitality	Yes	Not specified	3	Brand Image, Brand awareness, Perceived quality	Employee commitment, Employee engagement, Employee identification, Service quality
King, Grace and Funk (2012)	Employee Brand Equity	Australia	Service Employ	Service based organizations	Yes	Role clarity, Brand commitment	3	Brand endorsement, Brand consistent behaviour, Brand allegiance	Not specified
King et al. (2013)	Employee Brand Equity	China	Employees and managers	Hotels	Yes	Brand oriented support, Brand oriented recruitment, Brand oriented training, Employee brand understanding, Brand-building behaviour	3	Brand endorsement, Brand consistent behaviour, Brand allegiance	Not specified
Gelb and Rangarajan (2014)	Employee-Brand Equity	USA	Employees	Service-based organizations	Yes (qualitative)	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Brand ambassadors, Brand differentiators, Recruiting tool
Tavassoli et al., (2014)	Employee-Based Brand Equity	USA	Executive level employees	Top companies in S&P 1500 index	Yes	Not specified	1**		Executive Compensation, Self-Enhancement, Uncertainty Reduction, Strength of Identification
Poulis and Wisker (2016)	Employee-based brand equity	UK, UAE	Employees	Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) firms	Yes	Perceived Environmental Uncertainty	3	Brand endorsement, Brand consistent behaviour, Brand allegiance	Firm Performance
Erkmen (2018)	Employee brand equity	Turkey	Employees	Hotels	Yes	Internal communication, External communication, Company brand as experienced by employees	3	Brand knowledge, Role clarity, Brand commitment	Not specified
Boukis and Christodoulides (2020)	Employee based brand equity	Europe	Frontline employees	Hotels, restaurants, banks, travel agencies, airlines	Yes	Internal market orientation, Brand leadership	2	Brand knowledge, Brand identification	Internal (brand value dissemination), External (customer orientation)

* *DelVecchio et al. (2007) conceptualized firm's brand equity as a unidimensional measure, combines awareness and perceived quality into one measure, and where perceived quality reflects a global brand evaluation (Aaker and Keller, 1990, Smith and Park, 1992).*

** *Tavassoli et al., (2014) conceptualized employee-based brand equity as a unidimensional measure, as brand strength, and used the Brand Asset Valuator (BAV) industry measure*

Appendix C: Summary of Research Design

Research Design Stage	Summary of Approach
Background and Theoretical Lens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>What internal and external factors influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?</i> 2. <i>Do patronizing frontline retail employees' (PFREs') perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) in bricks and mortar fashion retailing?</i> • Theoretical lens: internal realist ontological and a positivist epistemological perspective.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key gaps within the brand equity literature: “The rise of the retailer as a brand is one of the most important trends in retailing...” (Rios and Requelme, 2008, p. 736); Christodoulides et al.'s (2006) call for incorporating the views of multiple stakeholders when developing a total brand equity measure; and Davcik et al.'s (2014) call for further research in the area of stakeholder value and “...the role and importance of brand equity to organizations” (p. 13). Few retailer brand equity studies address fashion retailing (Swoboda et al., 2016).
Research Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a measure of employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity using a dual stakeholder theoretical lens. • Examine frontline retail employees' internal and external perceptions of retailer brand equity, identifying the factors that influence frontline employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity in bricks and mortar fashion retailing and determine if and how patronizing frontline retail employees' perceptions of retailer brand equity differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test eight hypotheses to empirically substantiate the existence of the proposed relationships within the proposed employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model.
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is developed using structural equation modelling. The model is conceptualized as a multi-step process whereby the exogenous variables CB-RBE and EB-RBE lead to IRBE, IRBE leads to RT, which acts as an exogenous and endogenous variable, and RT leads to the ultimate endogenous variable RL.
Sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frontline employees of fashion retailers in major metropolitan centres in Canada • 18+ years of age; English speaking • Qualtrics Online Sample Data • Goal: approximately 300
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey deployed via Qualtrics online survey software • Qualtrics Online Sample data to recruit qualified respondents given discrete screening criteria
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics Form A was approved via RSIS in October 2018.
Unit of Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals (frontline employees working at fashion retailers, who offer both internal and external perspectives of the retailer's brand)
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct literature review • Develop research questions • Develop preliminary research model and propositions • Develop survey • Deploy pilot study • Refine model and develop research hypotheses • Conduct expert panel session • Refine Survey • Confirm Qualtrics Online Sample data collection dates and define qualifying criteria

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploy online survey via Qualtrics (data collection) • Inspect data • Follow Hair et al.'s (2014) 8-Step Systematic Procedure for Applying PLS-SEM and analyzing data • Interpret results and draw conclusions
Practicalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and deploying an online survey to a sample of English-speaking frontline employees, 18 years or older, and currently working at fashion retailers in major metropolitan centres across Canada. Selected several pre-validated measures from the literature to develop the questions in an inferential-type online survey.
Contributions: Conceptual / Theoretical, Methodological, Empirical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Takes an integrative view of employee-based retailer brand equity, by combining frontline employees' internal (i.e., as employees) and external (i.e., as consumers) perceptions of retailer brand equity into one model. 2. Given the lack of research on the frontline retail employee in relation to their dual-stakeholder role as employee and consumer, this research advances the retailer brand equity, employee-based brand equity and employee patronage literature areas and advocates for more research in this area. • Methodological: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model is specified and empirically validated as a type II reflective-formative higher-order construct (also referred to as hierarchical component model HCM) using PLS-SEM. 2. Contributes to PLS-SEM literature by following the most recent methods for assessing the model's out-of-sample predictive power using PLSpredict (Sarstedt et al., 2019; Shmueli et al., 2019). 3. This study is one of few retailer brand equity models to fully explain and describe the deployment of the embedded two-stage approach which can serve to support other researchers

	<p>on a similar endeavour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empirical: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This research validates an employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity model and identify eleven integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) dimensions (four are consumer-based and seven are employee-based) and a multi-step structure whereby retailer trust mediates the relationships between integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty. 2. This is the first retailer brand equity model that focuses on frontline employees and integrates their internal and external perceptions of the brand into one model. 3. This is the first retailer brand equity model to compare different employee characteristics, thus examining the moderating effect of patronizing frontline retail employees on the relationships between consumer-based retailer brand equity, employee-based retailer brand equity, integrated retailer brand equity, retailer trust and retailer loyalty in Canadian bricks and mortar fashion retailing. • Theoretical: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This study extends and links employee patronage, retailer brand equity and employee-based brand equity theories by introducing and operationalizing the dual stakeholder perspective. 2. Theoretically, this research provides a deeper understanding of the frontline fashion retail employee, an employee-consumer stakeholder whose perceptions of their retailer's brand equity offer valuable insights into an organization's internal and external brand building strategies and activities. 3. This study introduces the variable of retailer trust into the dual stakeholder retailer brand equity model to extend our understanding of its mediating impact on the relationship between integrated retailer brand equity and retailer loyalty.
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Research Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EDAMBA Doctoral Student Conference: July 2017• Academic Conference Presentations: EIRASS July 2018 (Madeira, Portugal); RARCS July 2019 (Tallin, Estonia)• Ryerson Retail Research Colloquium Presentations: February 2016; March 2019• Rotman/Henley Colloquium Presentations: July 2015 (Henley), July 2016 (Rotman), June 2018 (Rotman), November 2018 (Rotman), November 2019 (Rotman)• DBA thesis defence: November 5, 2020
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Appendix D: Initial and Revised Survey Items

Consumer-Based Survey Items

Construct	Initial Survey Items	Revised Survey Items
Product Quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a high likelihood that products bought at the retailer where I work will be of extremely high quality. 2. Overall, the retailer where I work sells high quality merchandise. 3. The retailer where I work sells products of consistent quality. 4. When shopping at the retailer where I work, I expect to see high quality merchandise. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a high likelihood that products bought at the retailer where I work will be of high quality. 2. Overall, the retailer where I work sells high quality products. 3. The retailer where I work sells products of consistent quality. 4. Overall, the retailer where I work sells trendy products.
Store Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work has a good reputation. 2. The retailer where I work offers a very good store atmosphere. 3. The retailer where I work has an interior that is visually appealing. 4. The retailer where I work offers very convenient facilities. 5. The retailer where I work is easily accessible. 6. The retailer where I work offers very good variety of products. 7. The retailer where I work sells well-known brands. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work has a nice store atmosphere. 2. The retailer where I work has an interior that is visually appealing. 3. The retailer where I work offers convenient facilities (e.g., washrooms, parking...) 4. The retailer where I work has a good location. 5. The retailer where I work offers a good variety of products. 6. The retailer where I work sells well-known brands. 7. The retailer where I work offers consumers opportunities to provide feedback. 8. The retailer where I work listens to consumer feedback.
Price / Value	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Merchandise at the retailer where I work is a very good value. 2. The prices at the retailer where I work are acceptable. 3. I would consider the merchandise at the retailer where I work to be a good buy. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The products at the retailer where I work are good value. 2. The prices at the retailer where I work are acceptable. 3. The products at the retailer where I work are a good buy.
Service Quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work offers very reliable consumer service. 2. The retailer where I work offers very good after sales service. 3. The sales associates where I work are friendly. 4. The sales associates where I work are knowledgeable. 5. The sales associates where I work are professional. 6. The sales associates where I work are honest with consumers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work offers reliable consumer service. 2. The retailer where I work offers good after sales service. 3. The sales associates where I work are friendly with consumers. 4. The sales associates where I work are knowledgeable about the products they sell. 5. The sales associates where I work are respectful to consumers. 6. The sales associates where I work are honest with consumers.

Appendix D: Continued

Employee-Based Survey Items

Construct	Initial Survey Items	Revised Survey Items
Internal Advancement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel that I would be able to advance in my career at the retailer where I work. 2. There would be a lot of desirable positions within the retailer where I work that I may be able to grow into. 3. There would be many opportunities at the retailer where I work for advancement to better and higher positions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel that I can advance my career at the retailer where I work. 2. There are a lot of desirable positions that I may be able to grow into at the retailer where I work. 3. There are many opportunities for advancement to better and higher positions at the retailer where I work. 4. I believe management listens to my opinions and ideas.
Skills Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working for this retailer, it is likely that I will develop skills that will make me attractive to other companies. 2. The experience that I gain working for this retailer would make me more marketable to other firms the next time I go on the job market. 3. The training and exposure I receive by working at this retailer will allow me to get an even better job at another company in the future. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By working for this retailer, it is likely that I will develop skills that will make me attractive to other companies. 2. The experience that I gain at this retailer would make me more marketable to other firms the next time I go on the job market. 3. The training and exposure I receive at this retailer will allow me to get an even better job at another company in the future. 4. I believe the retailer where I work is helping me develop valuable skills
Resume Power	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working for this retailer is a definite resume builder. 2. Having this retailer's brand name on my resume makes me stand out among other applicants for future jobs. 3. Having this retailer's brand on my resume will lend credence to my abilities when searching for another job. 4. Working for this retailer is likely to make me highly regarded by recruiters at other firms. 	No changes
Work Demands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Standards for performance for employees at the retailer where I work require that employees spend a lot of time and effort at their jobs. 2. I am expected to work long hours at this retailer. 3. Employees at the retailer where I work, work harder and/or longer hours than employees at other retailers in order to achieve high performance goals. 4. As an employee of this retailer I have to work long hours in order to achieve expected results. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work sets high performance standards for its employees. 2. I am expected to work long hours at this retailer. 3. Employees at the retailer where I work, work harder and/or longer hours than employees at other retailers. 4. I must work long hours to achieve expected results at the retailer where I work. 5. I am expected to work on holidays. 6. I am always given the hours that I want. 7. It is difficult to have work/life balance when working at this retailer.
Brand Endorsement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I say positive things to others about the retailer where I work. 2. I would recommend the retailer where I work to someone who seeks my advice. 3. I enjoy talking to others about the retailer where I work. 4. I talk positively to others about the retailer where I work. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I say positive things to others about the retailer where I work 2. I would recommend the retailer where I work to someone who seeks my advice 3. I enjoy talking to others about the retailer where I work 4. I use social media to say positive things about the retailer where I work 5. I use social media to say negative things about the retailer where I work
Brand Allegiance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I plan to stay working with this retailer for a while (King et al., 2012; King et al., 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016). 2. I plan to work for this retailer for 5 years from now. 3. I would turn down an offer from another retailer if it came tomorrow. 4. I am willing to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the retailer I work for successful. 5. I am proud to be a part of the retailer I work for. 6. I really care about the reputation of the retailer I work for. 7. I feel like I really fit in where I work. 	No changes
Brand Consistent Behaviour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand promise of the retailer I work for. 2. I consider the impact on my retailer's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation. 3. I am always interested to learn about my retailer's brand and what it means to me in my role. 4. My values are similar to those of the retailer I work for. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I understand the brand values of the retailer I work for 2. I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand values of the retailer I work for 3. I consider the impact on my retailer's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation 4. I am always interested to learn about my retailer's brand and what it means to me in my role 5. My values and beliefs are similar to those of the retailer I work for

Appendix D: Continued

Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty Survey Items

Construct	Initial Survey Items	Revised Survey Items
Retailer Trust	1. I have total confidence in the retailer where I work. 2. The retailer where I work has never let me down. 3. The retailer where I work has a good reputation.	1. I have confidence in the retailer where I work. 2. The retailer where I work has never let me down. 3. The retailer where I work has a good reputation. 4. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider my individual well being. 5. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider the community's well-being
Retailer Loyalty	1. I consider myself to be a loyal consumer of the retailer where I work. 2. When buying fashion, the retailer where I work is my first choice. 3. I will not buy from other fashion retailers if I can buy the same item at the retailer where I work. 4. Even when items are available from other retailers, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 5. I would recommend the retailer where I work to my friends to shop there.	1. I consider myself to be a loyal consumer of the retailer where I work. 2. When buying fashion, the retailer where I work is my first choice. 3. I will not buy from other fashion retailers if I can buy the same item at the retailer where I work. 4. Even when items are available from other retailers, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 5. Even when items are available from other retailers at lower prices, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 6. I would recommend the retailer where I work to my friends to shop there.

Appendix E: Common Rater Effects and Solutions

Source of Common Rater Effect	Definition	Issue Importance Rating: Evidence from Pilot Study and Expert Judge Session	Improvement Area Applied to Current Study
Consistency Motif	“..try to maintain consistency in their responses.” (Podsakoff et al., 2003, p.882)	High: Some areas of survey feel repetitive, especially with 6-point Likert scaled questions.	Included additional attention checks throughout survey. This issue is already somewhat addressed through the assurance of anonymity.
Implicit Theories	“...assumptions concerning the co-occurrence of rated items.” (Berman and Kenny, 1976, p.264)	Low: May not be clear where the ‘consumer’ and ‘employee’ perspectives are required in different parts of survey.	Break survey into discreet sections: demographics, employment information, consumer-based questions, employee-based questions, other demographics.
Social Desirability	Respond to questions in a socially acceptable way. (Podsakoff et al., 2003)	Low: Respondents may be embarrassed to provide low hourly wages.	Assure anonymity; do not make the compensation questions the focus of the survey.
Leniency Biases	“...attribute socially desirable traits...to someone	Medium: This may be an issue, since they are asked to	Include a variety of closed ended and some open-ended questions. Review open-ended

	they know,” (Podsakoff et al., 2003, p.882)	rate their employer, although not a person, they could ‘personify’ their employer brand.	response to ensure a balance of perspectives
Acquiescence	“...yea-saying or nay-saying...” (Podsakoff et al., 2003, p.882)	High: Some scales are weak and need to be reviewed.	Improve scale items and ensure they are strong academically tested ones.
Mood State	Positive or negative affectivity. (Podsakoff et al., 2003)	Medium / Average: survey duration for pilot study 14.28 minutes; could be too long.	Decrease average duration, ensure ease of use and functionality. Or, obtain data over different time periods. For example, deploy survey to 100 respondents at a time, wait a week, and deploy to next 100 and repeat. This could be effective if specific current/world events are impacting respondents’ moods.
Transient Mood State	Impact of respondents’ mood on the way he/she answers questions. (Podsakoff et al., 2003)	High: Introduction is dull; provide a more interesting and visually appealing introduction to the survey to capture their interest and attention.	Decrease average duration, ensure ease of use and functionality. Counterbalance question order of consumer and employee perceptions, without sacrificing logical flow of survey.

Appendix F: Final Survey

Section Description	Questions
<p>Introduction</p> <p><i>Note: in compliance with the University of Reading Ethics Committee.</i></p>	<p>Welcome to this survey on fashion retail in Canada. The purpose is to find out how front-line retail employees influence retailers' brands.</p> <p>The survey may take about 15 minutes to complete.</p> <p>You have been approached because you currently work as a store-level employee at a fashion retailer in Canada.</p> <p>This research forms part of my Doctor of Business Administration academic qualification at Henley Business School at the University of Reading, in the United Kingdom. Responses are strictly confidential and individual respondents will not be identified by name or organization in the final report. This survey has been subject to ethical review in accordance with the procedures specified by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. By completing and returning the survey it will be understood that you are 18 years or older and that you give consent for your responses to be used for the purposes of this research project.</p> <p>Many thanks,</p> <p>Janice Rudkowski</p> <p>Email: janice@helianthusinc.ca</p>
<p>Qualifying / Screening Criteria Questions</p> <p>The (disqualify) was not included in the</p>	<p>1. How old are you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Under 18 (disqualify) <input type="radio"/> 18-24 <input type="radio"/> 25-29

<p>survey itself. This is a note to indicate the disqualifying criteria.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 30-39 ○ 40-49 ○ 50-59 ○ 60 and over <p>2. Are you currently working as a <i>front-line employee</i> at a <i>fashion retailer</i> in Canada? (A frontline employee is someone who works in a store and directly deals with consumers on a regular basis.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes ○ No (disqualify) <p>3. What types of products does the retailer where you work <i>primarily sell</i>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clothing / apparel ○ Accessories (e.g., handbags, belts, scarves, sunglasses...) ○ Cosmetics ○ Jewellery ○ Shoes ○ Other (disqualify) <p>4. Where do you currently live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Metro Vancouver Area (includes Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey etc.) ○ Greater Edmonton Area (includes Edmonton, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Leduc etc.) ○ Greater Calgary Area (includes Calgary, Okotoks, Cochrane etc.) ○ Greater Toronto Area (includes Toronto, Burlington, Mississauga, Brampton, Markham, Oshawa etc.) ○ Greater Ottawa Area (includes Ottawa, Nepean, Kanata etc.) ○ Other (disqualify) <p>5. How long have you worked for this retailer?</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Less than three months (disqualify) ○ 3-6 months ○ 6-12 months ○ 1-2 years ○ 2-4 years ○ 4-6 years ○ More than 6 years <p>6. What is your current employment status?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Full-time (30 hours or more each week) ○ Part-time (less than 30 hours per week) ○ Temporary, seasonal, occasional (disqualify)
Current Shopping Frequency	<p>7. Since you began working for this retailer, how frequently do you shop there?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Very frequently (every week) ○ Frequently (several times per month) ○ Occasionally (once per month) ○ Rarely (several times per year) ○ Very Rarely (once per year) ○ Never <p>8. Please comment on why you do or do not shop at the retailer where you work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open ended text/essay box
Current retailer and job title information	<p>9. What is the name of the retailer where you currently work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Select from dropdown list ○ Other (textbox) <p>10. If other, what is the name of the retailer where you currently work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open ended text/essay box <p>11. What is your current job title?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sales Associate

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cashier ○ Assistant Store Manager ○ Store Manager ○ Other (please specify) (open text box)
<p>Current Total Compensation Information</p>	<p>12. What is your <i>primary form of compensation</i> at the retailer where you currently work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hourly wage ○ Sales commissions ○ Salary ○ Other (please specify) (open text box) <p>Skip Logic:</p> <p>13. What is your current hourly wage? (Please input numbers only. For example, input 14 for \$14.00/hour)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open ended text box <p>14. Approximately, what is your current total monthly take home pay? (Please input numbers only. For example, input 2000 for \$2000.00/month)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open ended text box <p>15. What benefits do you currently receive from the retailer where you work? Please select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wages ○ Health benefits (e.g. dental, vision...) ○ Disability insurance (short term and/or long term) ○ Life insurance ○ Pension plan ○ RRSP matching ○ Cash bonus ○ Sales commissions ○ Employee discounts ○ Flexible working hours

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Extra time off (unpaid) ○ Extra time off (paid) ○ Training and development courses ○ Tuition subsidies ○ Profit sharing ○ Stock options ○ Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (open ended text box)
<p>Job Information at Start of Employment</p>	<p>16. Think back to when you first started working for this retailer, what was your <i>employment status</i> at that time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Full-time (30 hours or more per week) ○ Part-time (less than 30 hours per week) ○ Temporary, seasonal or occasional ○ Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (open text box) <p>17. Think back to when you first started working for this retailer, what was your <i>job title</i> at that time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sales Associate ○ Cashier ○ Assistant Store Manager ○ Store Manager ○ Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (open text box) <p>18. Think back to when you first started working for this retailer, what was your <i>primary</i> form of compensation at that time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hourly wage ○ Commission ○ Annual salary ○ Other (please specify) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (open text box) <p>19. What was your approximate monthly take home pay, at</p>

	<p>that time? (Please input numbers only. For example, input 2000 for \$2000.00/month)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open text box
<p>Shopping Behaviour and Impact on Employer Choice</p>	<p>20. Think back to <i>before</i> you worked for this retailer, how frequently did you shop there?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Very frequently (every week) ○ Frequently (several times per month) ○ Occasionally (once per month) ○ Rarely (several times per year) ○ Very Rarely (once per year) ○ Never <p>21. Please comment on why you did or did not shop at the retailer before you started working there.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open text box <p>22. How much did your experiences as a consumer (before working at this retailer) influence your choice to work there?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To a great extent ○ Somewhat ○ Very little ○ Not at all <p>23. Please explain how your experience as a consumer (before working at this retailer) influenced your choice to work there?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open ended text box
<p>Measurement scale for all constructs</p>	<p>Scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Mostly Agree ○ Slightly Agree ○ Slightly Disagree ○ Mostly Disagree

	○ Strongly Disagree
<p>Retailer Loyalty Definition: their likelihood of shopping there, and not anywhere else, and recommending to others. (Arnett et al., 2003)</p>	<p>RETAILER LOYALTY: Please reflect on your current shopping behaviours at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I consider myself to be a loyal consumer of the retailer where I work. 2. When buying fashion goods, the retailer where I work is my first choice. 3. I will not buy from other fashion retailers if I can buy the same item at the retailer where I work. 4. Even when items are available from other retailers, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 5. Even when items are available from other retailers at lower prices, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 6. I would recommend the retailer where I work to my friends to shop there.
<p>Retailer Trust Definition: Trustworthiness image of a retailer (Anselmsson et al., 2017)</p>	<p>RETAILER TRUST: Please reflect on your current shopping behaviours at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have confidence in the retailer where I work. 2. The retailer where I work has never let me down. 3. The retailer where I work has a good reputation. 4. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider my individual well being. 5. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider the community's well-being
<p>Store Image Definition: consumer perceptions of the</p>	<p>STORE IMAGE: Please reflect on your current shopping behaviours at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p>

<p>physical store, appearances and its associations (Anselmsson et al., 2017)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work has a nice store atmosphere. 2. The retailer where I work has an interior that is visually appealing. 3. The retailer where I work offers convenient facilities (e.g. washrooms, parking...). 4. Please select “strongly disagree” for this statement. 5. The retailer where I work has a good location. 6. The retailer where I work offers good variety of products. 7. The retailer where I work sells well-known brands. 8. The retailer where I work offers consumers opportunities to provide feedback. 9. The retailer where I work listens to consumer feedback.
<p>Product Quality Definition: Consumers perceptions of the quality of the products sold by the retailer (Anselmsson et al., 2017)</p>	<p>PRODUCT QUALITY: Please reflect on your current shopping behaviours at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a high likelihood that products bought at the retailer where I work will be of high quality. 2. Overall, the retailer where I work sells high quality products. 3. The retailer where I work sells products of consistent quality. 4. Overall, the retailer where I work sells trendy products.
<p>Service Quality Definition: consumers perceptions of the quality of services the retailer delivers (Anselmsson et al., 2017)</p>	<p>SERVICE QUALITY: Please reflect on your current shopping behaviours at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work offers reliable consumer service. 2. The retailer where I work offers good after sales service. 3. The sales associates where I work are friendly with consumers.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The sales associates where I work are knowledgeable about the products they sell. 5. The sales associates where I work are respectful to consumers. 6. The sales associates where I work are honest with consumers.
<p>Value/Price Quality Definition: consumers perceptions on the relationship between what they get (benefits, goods, services) and what they paid (Levy et al., 2017)</p>	<p>VALUE/PRICE QUALITY: Please reflect on your current shopping behaviours at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The products at the retailer where I work are good value. 2. The prices at the retailer where I work are acceptable. 3. The products at the retailer where I work are a good buy.
<p>Internal Advancement Definition: employee's perception that they can advance their career within their organization (DelVecchio et al., 2007)</p>	<p>INTERNAL ADVANCEMENT: Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel that I can advance my career at the retailer where I work. 2. There are a lot of desirable positions that I may be able to grow into at the retailer where I work. 3. There are many opportunities for advancement to better and higher positions at the retailer where I work. 4. I believe management listens to my opinions and ideas.
<p>Skills Development Definition: employee's perception that they can develop valuable professional</p>	<p>SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By working for this retailer, it is likely that I will develop skills that will make me attractive to other

<p>skills within their organization (DelVecchio et al., 2007)</p>	<p>companies.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The experience that I gain at this retailer would make me more marketable to other firms the next time I go on the job market. 3. The training and exposure I receive at this retailer will allow me to get an even better job at another company in the future. 4. I believe the retailer where I work is helping me develop valuable skills
<p>Work Demands Definition: Employee's perception that the organization is demanding of its employees (DelVecchio et al., 2007) (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003)</p> <p>Note: DelVecchio refers to this as Work Ethic.</p>	<p>WORK DEMANDS: Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work sets high performance standards for its employees. 2. I am expected to work long hours at this retailer. 3. Employees at the retailer where I work, work harder and/or longer hours than employees at other retailers. 4. I must work long hours to achieve expected results at the retailer where I work. 5. I am expected to work on holidays. 6. I am always given the hours that I want. 7. It is difficult to have work/life balance when working at this retailer. 8. I am given high sales quotas from management, that are sometimes not achievable.
<p>Resume Power Definition: employee's perceptions that working for this organization will strengthen their resume</p>	<p>RESUME POWER: Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working for this retailer is a definite resume builder. 2. Having this retailer's brand name on my resume makes me stand out among other applicants for future jobs.

(DelVecchio et al., 2007)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Having this retailer's brand on my resume gives me credibility when searching for another job. 4. Working for this retailer is likely to make me highly regarded by recruiters at other firms.
<p>Brand Endorsement Definition: positive external communications by the employee regarding their employer (King, Grace and Funk, 2011) <i>Note: question 6 is a reverse scale item</i></p>	<p>BRAND ENDORSEMENT: Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I say positive things to others about the retailer where I work 2. I would recommend the retailer where I work to someone who seeks my advice 3. I enjoy talking to others about the retailer where I work 4. I use social media to say positive things about the retailer where I work 5. Please select “strongly disagree” for this statement 6. I use social media to say negative things about the retailer where I work
<p>Brand Allegiance Definition: the desire by the employee to maintain the relationship with their employer (King, Grace and Funk, 2011)</p>	<p>BRAND ALLEGIANCE: Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I plan to stay working with this retailer for a while 2. I plan to work for this retailer 5 years from now 3. Please select “strongly disagree” for this statement 4. I would turn down an offer from another retailer if it came tomorrow 5. I am willing to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the retailer I work for successful 6. I am proud to be a part of the retailer I work for 7. I really care about the reputation of the retailer I work for

	8. I feel like I really fit in where I work
<p>Brand Consistent Behaviour Definition: employee behaviours that not necessarily prescribed, but are consistent with the brand values of the organization (Burmam et al., 2009a)</p>	<p>BRAND CONSISTENT BEHAVIOUR: Please reflect on your current role as a front-line employee at the retailer where you work, when answering the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I understand the brand values of the retailer I work for 2. I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand values of the retailer I work for 3. I consider the impact on my retailer's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation 4. I am always interested to learn about my retailer's brand and what it means to me in my role 5. My values and beliefs are similar to those of the retailer I work for
Merchandise Discounts	<p>37. Do you receive an employee discount at the retailer where you currently work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <p>Skip Logic (if yes):</p> <p>38. Describe the employee discount policy and your thoughts on the policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Open ended text box <p>39. Are you required to wear company clothing/merchandise to work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <p>Skip logic (if yes):</p> <p>40. What do you think about your company's policy on having to wear company clothing/merchandise to work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Open ended textbox

Demographics	<p>41. What is your gender?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Other <p>42. What is your marital status?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Single <input type="radio"/> Married / living together <input type="radio"/> Separated / divorced <input type="radio"/> Widowed <p>43. What is the <i>highest level of education</i> you have completed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Did not complete high school <input type="radio"/> High School Diploma <input type="radio"/> Trade/Technical/Vocational School <input type="radio"/> Some community college (not completed) <input type="radio"/> Community College Diploma or Certificate <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's degree <input type="radio"/> Master's degree <input type="radio"/> Professional degree <input type="radio"/> Doctoral degree
Personal Info.	<p>Would you be willing to provide additional feedback on this survey via a brief telephone call or in-person interview? If so, please enter your contact information below.</p> <p>First Name</p> <p>Last Name</p> <p>Email Address</p> <p>Telephone Number</p>
End of Survey / Thank you	<p>Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and making a valuable contribution to this research project.</p>

Appendix G: List of Expert Judges

Reviewed survey via in-person expert panel session:

Mr. Eric Tang, Executive Vice President and Managing Director, Porter Novelli Canada

Dr. Susan Murray, Human Capital and Leadership Consultant, Clearpath Leadership

Dr. Walid Hejazi, Associate Professor, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto

Reviewed survey and provided feedback via email:

Dr. Kathryn Newton, Assistant Professor, Marketing, Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University

Appendix H: Assessment of Normality for Variables

	No.	Missing	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness
loyal_1	1	0	4.511	5	1	6	1.289	0.665	-0.910
loyal_2	2	0	4.364	4	1	6	1.406	-0.229	-0.639
loyal_3	3	0	4.096	4	1	6	1.409	-0.411	-0.522
loyal_4	4	0	4.431	5	1	6	1.399	-0.201	-0.695
loyal_5	5	0	3.681	3	1	6	1.625	-1.091	0.045
loyal_6	6	0	4.633	5	1	6	1.154	1.833	-1.116
trust_1	7	0	4.891	5	1	6	1.139	2.895	-1.531
trust_2	8	0	4.722	5	1	6	1.189	1.373	-1.143
trust_3	9	0	4.958	5	1	6	1.067	2.828	-1.423
trust_4	10	0	4.693	5	1	6	1.252	1.109	-1.122
trust_5	11	0	4.562	5	1	6	1.253	0.555	-0.902
image_1	12	0	4.658	5	1	6	0.943	2.851	-1.014
image_2	13	0	4.661	5	1	6	0.973	1.829	-0.827
image_3	14	0	4.534	5	1	6	1.142	0.781	-0.763
image_5	15	0	4.668	5	1	6	0.955	1.076	-0.464
image_6	16	0	4.645	5	1	6	0.897	1.388	-0.442
image_7	17	0	4.565	5	1	6	1.053	1.684	-0.941
image_8	18	0	4.760	5	1	6	1.080	1.122	-0.811
image_9	19	0	4.751	5	1	6	1.100	0.963	-0.797
product_1	20	0	4.933	5	1	6	1.051	2.366	-1.277
product_2	21	0	4.927	5	1	6	1.047	1.660	-1.144
product_3	22	0	4.923	5	1	6	0.999	2.655	-1.277
product_4	23	0	4.981	5	1	6	1.045	2.055	-1.210
service_1	24	0	5.086	5	1	6	0.930	3.472	-1.394
service_2	25	0	4.949	5	1	6	0.981	1.665	-1.040
service_3	26	0	5.198	5	1	6	0.853	2.623	-1.199
service_4	27	0	5.038	5	1	6	0.886	2.438	-1.101
service_5	28	0	5.163	5	1	6	0.913	3.309	-1.393
service_6	29	0	5.089	5	1	6	0.948	2.432	-1.241
price_1	30	0	5.051	5	1	6	1.032	1.720	-1.155
price_2	31	0	5.000	5	1	6	1.087	0.702	-0.974
price_3	32	0	4.997	5	1	6	1.065	1.427	-1.110
advance_1	33	0	4.457	4	1	6	1.361	0.013	-0.700
advance_2	34	0	4.332	4	1	6	1.482	-0.384	-0.620
advance_3	35	0	4.422	5	1	6	1.463	-0.377	-0.671
advance_4	36	0	4.431	5	1	6	1.310	0.354	-0.801
skills_1	37	0	4.773	5	1	6	1.162	0.778	-0.899
skills_2	38	0	4.869	5	1	6	1.138	0.691	-0.916
skills_3	39	0	4.722	5	1	6	1.151	0.704	-0.842
skills_4	40	0	4.827	5	1	6	1.100	0.873	-0.884
work_1	41	0	4.981	5	1	6	1.093	1.157	-1.068
work_2	42	0	4.073	4	1	6	1.458	-0.703	-0.253
work_3	43	0	3.780	4	1	6	1.463	-0.825	-0.038
work_4	44	0	3.859	4	1	6	1.531	-0.949	-0.094
work_5	45	0	4.112	4	1	6	1.429	-0.473	-0.442
work_6	46	0	4.236	4	1	6	1.492	-0.694	-0.439
work_7	47	0	3.294	3	1	6	1.528	-0.817	0.246
work_8	48	0	3.553	3	1	6	1.434	-0.640	0.093
resume_1	49	0	4.594	5	1	6	1.271	0.155	-0.705
resume_2	50	0	4.498	4	1	6	1.294	-0.247	-0.543
resume_3	51	0	4.530	5	1	6	1.271	0.056	-0.668
resume_4	52	0	4.393	4	1	6	1.300	-0.350	-0.452
endorse_1	53	0	4.978	5	1	6	1.083	2.266	-1.291
endorse_2	54	0	4.850	5	1	6	1.215	1.490	-1.224
endorse_3	55	0	4.626	5	1	6	1.198	0.569	-0.793
endorse_4	56	0	3.955	4	1	6	1.663	-0.886	-0.461
endorse_6 R	57	0	4.719	6	1	6	1.721	-0.461	-0.994
allege_1	58	0	4.687	5	1	6	1.268	0.788	-0.953
allege_2	59	0	3.895	4	1	6	1.646	-1.026	-0.250
allege_4	60	0	3.946	4	1	6	1.498	-0.734	-0.222
allege_5	61	0	4.700	5	1	6	1.110	0.702	-0.666
allege_6	62	0	4.780	5	1	6	1.175	1.233	-1.038
allege_7	63	0	4.834	5	1	6	1.190	1.419	-1.115
allege_8	64	0	4.920	5	1	6	1.121	2.125	-1.293
consist_1	65	0	5.045	5	1	6	0.971	2.735	-1.267
consist_2	66	0	5.029	5	1	6	0.983	2.234	-1.151
consist_3	67	0	4.885	5	1	6	1.096	1.662	-1.117
consist_4	68	0	4.792	5	1	6	1.124	1.383	-1.035
consist_5	69	0	4.808	5	1	6	1.137	1.138	-0.942

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