

Does brand orientation contribute to retailers' success? An empirical study in the South African market



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ABSTRACT

Despite retailers investing considerable budgets in building and maintaining their corporate brands, very little research on the effect of brand orientation on their performance has been conducted. The main findings of this study among 196 respondents from the South African retail sector support the idea that values, norms, symbols and behavior are important elements of retailers' brand orientation. Building on insights from partial least squares path modeling, the findings emphasize the importance to a retail store's performance of agreed values and implemented norms being part of the everyday culture of all staff. Furthermore, the study shows that symbols of brand orientation and staff's brand-oriented behavior contribute significantly to a retailer's market performance.

1. Introduction

Research about achieving competitive advantages has a long tradition in business management. From a strategic perspective, various explanations of success can be identified. One school of thought analyses different strategic orientations (e.g., customer, service or entrepreneurship orientation) and – defining them as both a mind-set and a behavior and considering multiple internal and external factors – centers around the question which of these makes a company more successful. Brand orientation (BO) is one strategic orientation that is discussed widely in the marketing literature. BO has been described as an approach that focuses on brands as resources and strategic hubs (Melin, 1997; Urde, 1994, 1999). According to Schmidt et al. (2015), the core of BO is “building and living a clear brand identity” (p. 138).

BO is considered a major success factor in many industries, not only in the context of consumer goods, but also for business-to-business (B2B) companies and social businesses. Surprisingly, with the exception of Bridson et al. (2013) and Bridson and Evans (2004), there are hardly any studies that apply the concept of BO to the retail industry. This is worrying for at least two reasons: First, retailer brands are different from product or other corporate brands, and therefore, the application of well-established branding principles may not work in a retail environment (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Second, the aforementioned authors (Bridson et al., 2013; Bridson and Evans, 2004) adopt a behavioral and not a holistic perspective of BO. Therefore, there seems to be

an important research gap that needs to be closed.

In this sense, this paper aims to identify the cultural and behavioral building blocks of retail brand orientation (RBO) and the impact of RBO on retailers' market performance. This is done via a study within the South African retail market, a geographical region that, explicitly for retailing, is an international growth area (Hirsch, 2012) but strongly underrepresented in the international retailing literature. In fact, the arrival of Walmart and other international retailers, such as Zara, has increased competition within this market, with a resultant downward pressure on prices. Further factors that are influencing the perceived attractiveness of the South African market are the fact that the Internet has narrowed the time lag between international and local trends, the perception that the country is the gateway to the rest of Africa (The Economist, 2012) and the increasing support by the local emerging middle class and wealthy shoppers from other African countries. In this environment, the importance of retail brands as assets for sustainable advantage is more and more realized (JD Group, 2014).

The paper is organized as follows: initially, main lines in research about the more general concept of strategic orientations and, specifically, of BO are carved out and core dimensions of brand management in the retail industry are delineated. Subsequently, a conceptual model of RBO is developed, and corresponding hypotheses are discussed. We then describe the research method and present and discuss the findings of the study. The paper closes with the consideration of major implications from a theoretical and managerial perspective and a

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discussion of the limitations of the study. Areas of further research are suggested as well.

2. Literature review

2.1. Strategic orientations and brand orientation

The concept of strategic orientations implies that strategy is not always explicitly decided by management but also evolves through decision patterns and organizational learning (Mintzberg, 1989). Noble et al. (2002) understand them as guiding principles that influence not only the strategy-making but also the concrete behavior of a company. The literature offers a wide variety of different strategic orientations, for example, market or customer orientation (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990), innovation or technology orientation (Gatignon and Xuereb, 1997) and entrepreneurial orientation (Matsuno et al., 2002; Zhou et al., 2005), just to mention a few. BO is one of the strategic orientations that is now being more widely discussed (Balmer, 2013; Baumgarth et al., 2013; Gromark and Melin, 2013; O’Cass and Voola, 2011; Yin Wong and Merrilees, 2008). Different strategic orientations can be interrelated and may co-exist in one company at the same time (Urde et al., 2013).

Brand-oriented organizations value strong brands (Huang and Tsai, 2013). The concept of BO was introduced to the international marketing literature by Urde (1994, 1999), who defined it as “an approach in which the process of the organization revolves around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands” (Urde, 1999, p. 119). Hankinson (2001) argues that BO is “the extent to which organizations regard themselves as brands and an indication of how much (or how little) the organization accepts the theory and practice of branding” (p. 231). The perspective on brands as strategic assets (Itami and Roehl, 1991) and on brand management as a core competence (Low and Fullerton, 1994; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990) finds support from the field of resource-based strategy (Barney, 1991; Barney et al., 2001; Grant, 1991). The view that the brand is not an unquestioning response to the expectations of the customer (Urde, 1999) challenges the market-oriented paradigm that has been dominating marketing for decades by assigning greater emphasis to the organization’s internal conditions (e.g., its values). On this foundation, the concept of “corporate brand orientation”, introduced by Balmer (2013) and referring “to a category of institution where the corporate brand specifically acts as an entity’s cornerstone” (p. 723), gains importance. Santos et al. (2016) describe corporate brand orientation as “being distinct from the (implicit) product brand focus of the traditional brandorientation canon” and therefore demand “a more specific treatment of branding at the corporate and product level” (p. 72).

Following the widely recognized literature on market orientation, where most authors adopt a behavioral or a cultural perspective (Jones and Rowley, 2011), the concept of BO incorporates those two viewpoints as well (Bridson and Evans, 2004). Baumgarth (2009, 2010), conceptually similar to the existing market orientation model of Homburg and Pflesser (2000), uses Schein’s corporate culture framework (Schein, 2006) to explain the internal structure of brand orientation, which he divides into value based, normative and symbolic layers. Building on this, he suggests that a brand-oriented culture determines a brand-oriented behavior, which consists of activities of market research and control as well as of other activities of implementing the brand (Baumgarth, 2010). Schmidt et al. (2015) act on this idea and develop it further in the context of social businesses.

From a cultural standpoint, BO can be defined as a certain type of corporate culture or as a particular company mind-set. In a recent study, Osakwe (2016) conceptualizes a brand-oriented culture “as a cumulative deposit of brand building attitudes, brand norms, brand core values, and brand symbolic-artefacts” (p. 44). Schmidt and

Baumgarth (2015) define the culture of a brand-oriented organization as one that puts emphasis on the formation of a strong brand. Using the example of Apple, Baumgarth et al. (2011) argue that, in a brand-oriented culture, top management watches personally and intensely over the brand. Furthermore, they describe the brand promise of brand-oriented companies as consistent and congruent. In a qualitative study on social entrepreneurial organizations (SEOs), Schmidt and Baumgarth (2014) describe a brand-oriented culture as one that places great value on brand management, possesses individual and specific values, supports the employees in living the brand and has an outlined brand model or a written mission statement. In such a culture, measures of internal marketing (e.g., Greene et al., 1994; Papsolomou and Vrontis, 2006) and internal branding (e.g., King and Grace, 2008; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016) are commonly used. In the context of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Krake (2005) shows that a passion for the brand throughout the company is a very important factor and that, therefore, an active role of the entrepreneur to achieve brand recognition is a prerequisite. Baumgarth (2010), discussing norms of brand orientation, names them “explicit or implicit regulations and institutions (that) influence or determine the basic operations of brand management, such as formal integration of brand communications” (p. 657). Tangible symbols, such as logos, branded name tags, uniforms or stories, complement a brand-oriented culture (Baumgarth, 2010).

From a behavioral standpoint, the impact of BO on managerial practice is of interest (Hankinson, 2002). In relation to that, the idea of ‘living the brand’ has a strong link to the brand orientation concept (Baumgarth, 2010; de Chernatony et al., 2003; Ind, 2007; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007). Other examples of brand-oriented behaviors are measures of integrated marketing communication (Ewing and Napoli, 2005), the use of corporate design guidelines (Schmidt and Baumgarth, 2013) and the use of controlling instruments, such as the measurement of brand equity (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 1993). Schmidt and Baumgarth (2014), name brand management workshops and research about the brand, as further signs of brand-oriented activities. Bridson and Evans (2004) argue that a brand-oriented retailer may be more focused on creating an in-store experience, for example, through perfumed scents that re-affirm the brand’s personality, which can be seen as another brand-oriented activity.

From a performance perspective, the critical consideration is whether or not BO is associated with better corporate performance. Therefore, Schmidt et al. (2015) combine the cultural and behavioral perspectives and integrate them into a single model of brand orientation. Building on this conceptual work and analyzing Social Entrepreneurial Organizations (SEOs), they develop scales to measure the different aspects of BO and of other strategic orientations to quantify the influence of those constructs on performance indicators (Lückenbach et al., 2016). The results of their work indicate that SEOs that combine BO with market orientation achieve higher economic performance (Lückenbach et al., 2017). Studies in other contexts by Baumgarth (2009, 2010), Bridson and Evans (2004), Gromark and Melin (2013), Napoli (2006) and Yin Wong and Merrilees (2005, 2008) also demonstrate a positive relationship between BO and corporate performance.

2.2. Brand management in the retail industry

Historically, the focus of brand management research and practice within the retail industry has been on store brands (Raju et al., 1995; Semeijn et al., 2004), also known as house brands or private labels (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003). It used to be that customers purchased store brands, as opposed to manufacturer brands, due to price considerations with no loyalty dimensions (Corstjens and Lal, 2000; Steenkamp and Dekimpe, 1997; Uncles and Ellis, 1989) and that store brands were of lesser quality (Bellizzi et al., 1981; Cunningham et al., 1982). However, Dunne and Narasimhan (1999) some time ago noticed that the quality differential was diminishing and that manufacturer

brands had become more competitively priced to compete with store brands. During the same period, [Holbrook and Hughes \(1998\)](#) proposed that, to overcome the price-quality issue, store brands should be innovative. In doing so, differentiation will be created, which can lead to loyalty. More-recent research still considers low price as a determinant of store brand purchase with limited loyalty creation but suggests that enhanced awareness of store brands may be beneficial ([Abdullah et al., 2012](#)) and can provide opportunities for retail differentiation ([Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003](#)). Others suggest that store brands can no longer provide a competitive advantage for retailers because they are offered by an increasing number of outlets ([Kumar and Kim, 2014](#)).

With many retailers selling similar products in a highly competitive environment, the idea of using the retailer's corporate identity as a differentiator by projecting it through the retail outlets gained momentum ([Hosseini et al., 2014](#)). More and more retailers became aware of the importance of their retail brand, which was in line with the growing awareness that corporate brands are valuable assets for numerous companies across many industries (e.g., [Balmer, 1995](#)). The focus on the retail brand was also called a store-as-a-brand strategy ([Kumar and Kim, 2014](#)). The corresponding goal was to build up retail brand equity ([Ailawadi and Keller, 2004](#)). Customer-based retail brand equity can be defined as “the consumers’ overall assessment of a retailer as a strong, attractive, favorable, and unique brand” ([Weindel, 2016](#), p. 115). Today, there is substantial agreement that retail brands can contribute meaningfully to retailers’ performance (e.g., [Baldauf et al., 2009](#); [Grewal et al., 2009](#)), specifically by creating store loyalty ([Ene and Özkaya, 2014](#); [Martenson, 2007](#); [Osman, 1993](#)). In order to achieve this, the entire *gestalt* experience should manifest the retail brand identity, which includes the physical environment or “servicescape” ([Bitner, 1992](#)), store atmosphere ([Baker et al., 2002](#); [Thang and Tan, 2003](#); [Wirtz et al., 2007](#)), product quality ([Aaker, 2000](#); [Verbeke, 2000](#)), service or people aspects ([Newman and Patel, 2004](#); [Teller et al., 2006](#)) and convenience ([Chang and Tu, 2005](#); [Wood and Browne, 2007](#)).

Overall, brand-oriented retailers consider their corporate brand as a distinct asset ([Mitchell et al., 2012](#)), which transcends the traditional focus on the store or manufacturer brands offered or the retail store's location ([Jara and Cliquet, 2012](#)). In close alignment with the more general concept of corporate brand orientation, we therefore define retail brand orientation (RBO) as the mindset of a retail organization that values its corporate brand. Although it is obvious that RBO should support the retailer in satisfying consumers’ basic or rational needs ([Bridson et al., 2013](#); [de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2001](#); [Park et al., 1986](#)), RBO should also provide added value to customers ([Ailawadi and Keller, 2004](#); [de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998](#)), support them in their need for self-enhancement or ego-identification ([Holt, 2003](#); [Park et al., 1986](#)) and improve retail performance ([Bridson et al., 2013](#)). Adopting an RBO mind-set should therefore be beneficial to both customers and retailers, but it requires adequate resource allocation to develop superior products, service and servicescape.

Retail brands such as Walmart, H & M, Amazon, Ikea, The Home Depot, Aldi and Best Buy have succeeded in building remarkable brand value over time ([Interbrand, 2014](#)). This is also true for South Africa: The country's top five retailers, namely Shoprite, Massmart, Pick n Pay, Spar, and Woolworths, were ranked in the global top 250 retailers ([Deloitte, 2012](#)). Nevertheless, insufficient research has been undertaken to further understanding of the construct and degree of RBO. The study of [Bridson et al. \(2013\)](#), which focuses on the fashion retailing context, is one of the rare exceptions. According to their results, distinctiveness, functionality, augmentation, and symbolism are the four most important dimensions of a retailer's BO. One of the few studies conducted in the South African retail industry regarding BO concluded that there is a relationship between RBO and brand distinctiveness, but it also noted that in a highly competitive environment, brand-oriented retailers must simultaneously focus on understanding their target markets, building up meaningful relationships with their customers and

considering competitors’ strategies ([Zulu, 2015](#)). This finding aligns with the view of [Urde et al. \(2013\)](#), who propose that brand and market orientation are rather synergetic than alternative strategic options.

2.3. Market performance

Looking at past and present research about success factors, one can find countless approaches to measuring corporate performance. In the marketing literature, there are basically two ways that can be seen as common standards. The first is to use objective key performance indicators that could reflect market or financial performance. The second is to use subjective performance measures, for example, by asking respondents to rate their firm's performance compared with their nearest competitor ([Matear et al., 2002](#)) or to use a goal-oriented approach that focuses on the respondent's subjective evaluation of the importance of given goals and on his or her subjective evaluation of the company's achievement of these goals ([Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010](#)). With subjective performance measures, a researcher intends to overcome difficulties that could arise when asking managers to disclose sensitive information ([Pelham and Wilson, 1995](#)). Furthermore, relative approaches to performance measurement are useful to overcome difficulties in a heterogeneous sample ([van Egeren and O'Connor, 1998](#)), for example, when analyzing different sectors and sizes of firms ([Matear et al., 2002](#)). Subjective and relative approaches have been widely used in marketing and management research ([Chang and Chen, 1998](#)).

According to [Baumgarth \(2010\)](#), corporate performance can be measured in terms of the achievement of market-related and economic goals. Market performance can be defined as “the effectiveness of an organization's marketing activities” ([Homburg and Pflesser, 2000](#)) and can be measured by items pertaining to achieving increased awareness, creating a positive image, winning new customers, achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty, or attaining a desired market share ([Homburg and Pflesser, 2000](#); [Matear et al., 2002](#)). Typical measures of economic performance are turnover and profit ([Baumgarth, 2010](#)). Whereas BO has the obvious potential to affect market performance, its effect on economic performance can only be indirect ([Baumgarth, 2010](#)). The direct effect of market performance on economic performance has been confirmed by [Homburg and Pflesser \(2000\)](#), p. 457) and [Baumgarth \(2010\)](#), p. 662).

3. Conceptual model and hypotheses

The conceptual model developed by [Baumgarth \(2010\)](#) for the B2B sector, and further adapted by [Schmidt et al. \(2015\)](#) in the context of social businesses, forms the theoretical basis for the BO model in the retail industry as discussed later in this section and for its empirical testing in the study reported on here. The logic behind the model is based on three fundamental assumptions that are derived from the literature review: First, it separates the construct of BO into cultural and behavioral layers. Second, it uses Schein's corporate culture framework ([Schein, 2006](#)) and the approach of [Homburg and Pflesser \(2000\)](#) to explain the internal structure of the cultural layer of BO. Third, it divides the behavioral layer of BO into activities of analysis (e.g., monitoring the brand value) and activities within the scope of the marketing mix (e.g., measures of integrated marketing communications).

Our first two hypotheses concern the relationships within the cultural layer. We argue that a brand-oriented culture is one in which the brand is deeply embedded in the values of a company and its founders. Values can be defined as taken-for-granted, largely unconscious beliefs and behaviors ([Schein, 2006](#); [Thompson, 1990](#)). They form the core of culture and determine what people think ought to be done. For this reason, they influence the norms of BO, i.e., conscious strategies, goals and philosophies that represent the explicit and implicit rules of behavior (e.g., brand manuals, corporate design guidelines, codes of conduct). In an organization, these norms determine how the members represent the organization both to themselves and to others.

Furthermore, these norms of BO will determine what the business' specific symbols of BO look like. Symbols are the most apparent and visible element of culture. They include any tangible, overt or verbally identifiable element in an organization (e.g., logos, branded name tags, dress code, and store design). Therefore, and in line with the findings of Baumgarth (2010), we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. Values of RBO positively influence norms of RBO.

H2. Norms of RBO positively influence symbols of RBO.

The literature review of Schmidt et al. (2015) on strategic orientations shows that there is reason to believe that most strategic orientations can be conceptualized in a causal relationship in which culture shapes behavior. Specifically, Homburg and Pflesser (2000) have shown that a market-oriented culture has a positive impact on market-oriented behavior. In addition, Baumgarth (2009, 2010) has provided evidence of the positive influence of corporate culture on corporate behavior for the brand orientation construct. Therefore, we assume that all elements of a brand-oriented culture positively influence brand-oriented behavior. Hence, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H3. Values of RBO positively influence retailers' brand-oriented behavior.

H4. Norms of RBO positively influence retailers' brand-oriented behavior.

H5. Symbols of RBO positively influence retailers' brand-oriented behavior.

Considering symbols of RBO, they can be divided into internal symbols (e.g., invisible branding elements like stories about brand related behavior) and external symbols (e.g., visible branding elements like uniforms). The first can be defined as measures of internal branding with the goal to connect retailers' employees with the brand and to influence their brand-oriented behavior. This aspect is covered by H5. The latter are aimed directly at customers. Distinct from online retailing, customers of shop-based retailers must visit the stores themselves to have access to the products. In the stores, they encounter numerous brand touch points. Their in-store-experience, for example, the interior design of the shop or the aroma and ambience, will influence their perceptions of the store brand. This implies that, in contrast to values and norms of RBO which are rather abstract and not directly visible for customers, symbols of RBO not only influence brand-oriented behavior but are also directly linked to market performance. Therefore,

we propose the following relationship between the symbols of RBO and the market performance of a retail business:

H6. Symbols of RBO positively influence retailers' market performance.

Generally, a review of the literature finds research supporting the positive impact of strategic orientations on different facets of corporate performance. For example, Homburg and Pflesser (2000) and Lumpkin and Dess (1996, 2001) show that the strategic orientations considered here have a positive impact on economic performance. Baumgarth (2009, 2010), in his study of B2B companies, empirically shows that BO has a direct positive effect on market performance and an indirect effect on economic performance. Bridson and Evans (2004) propose that "the more brand oriented the organization (is) the greater (is) its retail offer advantage". Thus, it is further hypothesized that:

H7. Retailers' brand-oriented behavior positively influences their market performance.

Fig. 1 shows the resulting retail brand orientation model and the corresponding seven hypotheses.

4. Methodology

4.1. Scale development

It was decided to use the BO scales developed by Lückenbach et al. (2016) for the context of social businesses and Baumgarth (2010) for the business-to-business context as a starting point. The reason for using the first scale is its appropriate approach to reducing the number of items and to identifying the most valid ones using the expert validation approach of Anderson and Gerbing (1991). Due to the turbulent and high-pressure nature of the retail business, it was expected that the respondents would not be willing to spend much time filling out a questionnaire. Therefore, a compact but still valid scale was needed. The latter scale was used due to its wide recognition in literature (Zarantonello and Pauwels-Delassus, 2015).

It goes without saying that the scope of brand management and, therefore, the nature of BO differ dramatically within different framing conditions, such as company size (e.g., small to medium-sized enterprises compared to large companies) or industries (e.g., retail

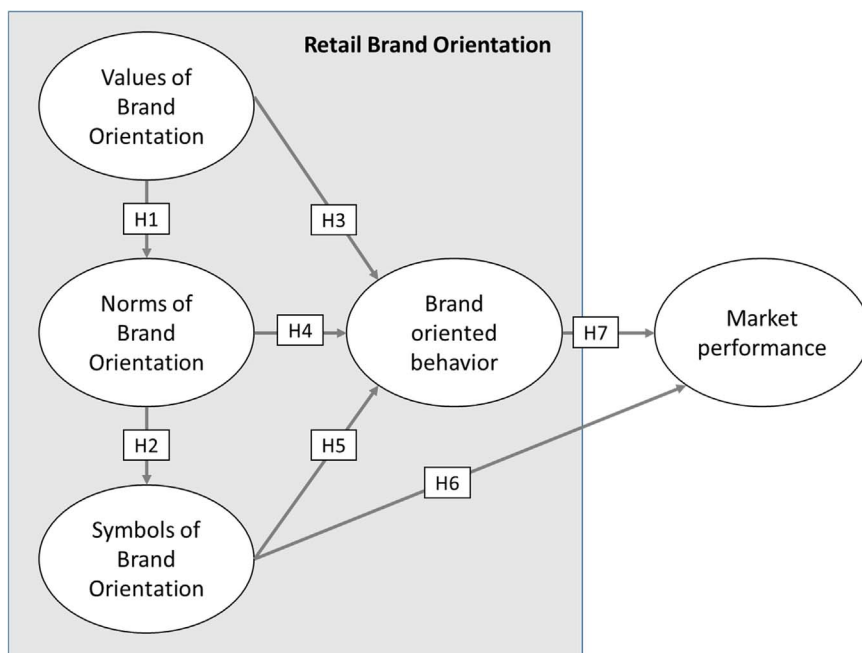


Fig. 1. A conceptual model of retail brand orientation and its influence on retailers' market performance.

Table 1
Composition of sample in terms of industry segments and corporate function.

Industry	Proportion (%)	Corporate Function	Proportion (%)
Cars, Motorcycles, Tires & Spare Parts	37.2	Owner	25.5
Clothing & Accessories	5.6	Top management with central responsibilities	39.8
Eye-wear	0.5	Middle management with central responsibilities	12.8
Food & Restaurants	2.0	Lower management with central responsibilities	1.5
General Merchandise	4.1	Area or regional management	2.0
Gifts, Cards, Books	1.0	Store manager	8.2
Health & Beauty	2.0	Part of the store's management team	3.6
Hi-Tech & Electronics	3.1	Employee within a store	2.0
Home & Decoration	6.6	Others	1.5
Jewelry	3.6		
Pharmacy	2.6		
Shoes	1.0		
Specialty Food	1.0		
Sporting Goods	1.0		
Supermarket	9.2		
Toys	0.5		
Other	15.8		
Total	96.9	Total	96.9

industry compared to a business-to-business environment). Taking this into account, a total of six qualitative interviews with experts from different retail segments and from academia, including a marketing manager, a regional manager, a store manager, an industry representative, a lecturer and a professor, were conducted in the months of March and April 2016 to adapt the measurement models proposed by Lückenbach et al. (2016) and Baumgarth (2010) to the realities of the retail business. In these interviews, which lasted approximately 25–45 min, the nature of RBO was discussed, and, where appropriate, the specific situation of retailing in South Africa was debated. Appendix A shows the original scales, our main findings from the qualitative study and the final items of RBO that were used in this study.

The results of the expert interviews influenced the final measurement model of the RBO constructs, the performance indicator and the data collection instrument. Taking into account the qualitative responses, this study uses 18 items for the measurement of the four RBO constructs (values, norms, symbols, behavior) and six items for the measurement of the retailers' market performance (see Appendix B).

4.2. Data collection and sample

Data to test the model were collected via an online questionnaire from respondents in the South African retail sector. Using a commercial database that was supplemented by participants in a university training course on retail management, 2476 emails that contained a link to the survey were sent out to retail managers with a market-oriented function (e.g., marketing or store management). To increase the response rate, the following measures were adopted (Baumgarth, 2010):

- personalized e-mail invitation;
- short questionnaire (only 27 items to measure BO construct and market success);
- mostly closed questions;
- two reminder e-mails; and
- summary of the results as an incentive to participate.

The survey was administered in the field between May and June 2016. Of all invited people, 202 respondents completed the survey. To eliminate all missing values, which is mandatory for an analysis with the method described in Section 4.3, first, cases with more than one-quarter of missing values among the four brand orientation constructs and the performance items were deleted. As a result, only 13 cases with missing data remained in the sample, most of them just containing one missing variable. Therefore, no sophisticated approaches to the treatment of missing values, as described, for example, by Gold and Bentler

(2000), were needed, and it was decided to replace in a second step any remaining missing values by mean values across the affected item. As a result, 196 questionnaires were usable and analyzed, which is a response rate of 7.9%.

Possible non-response bias, which occurs “when individuals who respond to a survey differ systematically from those that were invited to participate but did not respond” (Menachemi, 2011, p. 5) and which can be a pervasive problem especially in electronic surveys (Menachemi, 2011; Rezaei, 2015), was assessed in the following way: First, the sample was divided into two halves, whereby a specific respondent was allocated to one of the two groups dependent on the date and time when he or she accessed the questionnaire for the last time. The first group was labeled as the early returns, the second one as the late returns. Second, the responses in the RBO and market performance items were compared between the two groups. The rationale for this is the hypothesis that late respondents' opinions are representative of non-respondents' opinions (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). The findings of *t*-tests ($p > 0.05$) did not show any significant difference between the two groups. This provides reasonable evidence that non-response bias is not a significant problem in the response data set.

More than 60 per cent (61.2) of all interviewees stated that they had more than ten years of experience in the retail industry, whereas less than six per cent (5.7) had less than two years. Two-thirds of the respondents (65.3 per cent) were either owners of a retail business or belonged to top management, and respondents came from a wide range of different retail sectors, including supermarkets (9.2 per cent), home & decoration (6.6 per cent), clothing & accessories (5.6 per cent), general merchandise (4.1 per cent) and jewelry (3.6 per cent). Nevertheless, it is striking that 37.2 per cent of the respondents represented just one sector, namely, cars, motorcycles, tires and spare parts. To determine whether this affected the overall results, another series of *t*-tests were conducted whereby belonging to one of the two groups – a member of this specific sector versus a member of one of the other sectors – served as the grouping variable and the construct indicators served as test variables. A significant difference between the two groups ($p > 0.05$) was detected for five out of the 24 variables, providing at least some evidence that the dominance of the segment cars, motorcycles, tires and spare parts in the data set may be a limitation of this study. Table 1 provides an overview of the sample's composition in terms of the respondents' corporate function and industry background.

4.3. Research method

IBM SPSS Statistics version 23 was used for descriptive statistics.

Considering the RBO constructs, this study draws on a composite measurement model (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988; Henseler et al., 2016). According to Henseler (2017), composite measurement assumes a specific relation between the indicators and a construct that cannot simply be described as a cause-effect relationship but should rather be interpreted as a prescription of “how the ingredients should be arranged to form a new entity” (p. 3). Analogous to this, this study regards the RBO constructs (values, norms, symbols, behavior) as composites made up of each one's indicators. Hence, to estimate the model coefficients and to test the hypotheses, partial least squares path modeling (PLS) was used, as implemented in ADANCO 2.0 (Henseler and Dijkstra, 2015). However, because it is a common standard in performance measurement (Baumgarth, 2010), a reflective measurement model was used to measure market performance. This decision was also in line with recommendations from Jarvis et al. (2003) and Coltman et al. (2008), who suggested relying on reflective target constructs and formative success driver constructs when using structural equation modeling (SEM) (also see Ringle et al., 2011).

The reasons for choosing, with PLS, variance-based over covariance-based structural equation modeling (e.g., LISREL) are the following (Baumgarth, 2010; Reinartz et al., 2009):

- Rather small sample size
- Focus of this study is on theory development
- The assumption of multi-normality is not fulfilled by most of the variables
- Formative measurement is dominating, but formative (BO constructs) and reflective (market performance) measurement is used within one model

Specifically, among variance-based SEM techniques, PLS was used because it is known as one of the most advanced methods (McDonald, 1996) and has been called a “silver bullet” (Hair et al., 2011).

5. Results

The two-step-approach to the evaluation of a SEM generally consists of separate assessments of the measurement models and the structural model (Hair et al., 2011). This study's construct measurements generally meet the common standards with regard to reliability and validity. When assessing the formative measurement models, none of the 18 weighting values is below 0.1 (13 are above 0.2), which demonstrates that the corresponding variables contributed considerably to the explanation of the variance of the latent variables (Baumgarth, 2010). Bootstrapping shows that all but one of the indicator weights are significant at a five per cent level. Since the loading of this indicator is significant at a one per cent level, there is no reason to drop it, and there is sufficient empirical support to keep all the indicators (Hair et al., 2011). Additionally, multicollinearity is not a problem: The variance inflation factors (VIFs) proposed for testing by Henseler (2017) range between 1.20 and 2.38 and are therefore below the recommended threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2011). Considering the reflective measurement model, both Cronbach's Alpha (0.89) and Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (0.90), which is considered to be the better indicator (Chin, 1998), are above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunally and Bernstein, 1978) or 0.8 for more advanced stages of research (Gelhard and Delft, 2015). Indicator reliability is only partly supported: Four of the six performance indicator loadings, which should be higher than 0.70, fulfill this criteria (Hair et al., 2011), but the other two, with values of 0.68 and 0.66, are very close to the threshold. A sufficient degree of convergent validity is demonstrated by an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.57, which is above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009), indicating that the performance variable explains more than half of its indicators' variance. Discriminant validity can generally be confirmed by the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), which “postulates that a latent

Table 2
Fornell-Larcker Criterion (squared correlations; AVE in the diagonal).

Construct	Values of BO	Norms of BO	Symbols of BO	Brand-oriented behavior	Market performance
Values of BO	0.6824				
Norms of BO	0.6403	0.7362			
Symbols of BO	0.6692	0.7007	0.6830		
Brand-oriented behavior	0.4754	0.4583	0.4430	0.4098	0.5745
Market performance					

Table 3
Item loadings and cross-loadings.

Indicator	Values of BO	Norms of BO	Symbols of BO	Brand-oriented behavior	Market performance
VBO_topmgt	0.6827	0.5860	0.5762	0.5362	0.5449
VBO_differentiated	0.7631	0.6229	0.6433	0.6317	0.5932
VBO_invest	0.7574	0.6389	0.6295	0.6063	0.5491
VBO_heritage	0.8713	0.7126	0.6985	0.7199	0.5699
VBO_all	0.8252	0.6758	0.6128	0.6810	0.5253
NBO_rules	0.6229	0.7969	0.7175	0.6673	0.5231
NBO_defined	0.5249	0.6708	0.5841	0.5816	0.4018
NBO_responsibility	0.7673	0.8900	0.7381	0.7396	0.6159
NBO_cdguidelines	0.6203	0.7539	0.6593	0.6207	0.5742
SBO_elements	0.5789	0.6120	0.6928	0.5673	0.4431
SBO_stores	0.6869	0.7341	0.8615	0.7272	0.5594
SBO_meetings	0.5574	0.6124	0.7389	0.6096	0.5243
SBO_stories	0.6165	0.6575	0.7502	0.6017	0.5048
BOB_imagead	0.4922	0.5914	0.5825	0.6805	0.4669
BOB_teach	0.7395	0.6900	0.6681	0.8287	0.4724
BOB_staff	0.7335	0.7470	0.7280	0.8917	0.5771
BOB_research	0.4005	0.4723	0.4329	0.5486	0.4301
BOB_live	0.6539	0.6536	0.6937	0.7998	0.4886
MS_awareness	0.5941	0.5877	0.5889	0.5020	0.8364
MS_newcustomers	0.4580	0.4649	0.4471	0.4359	0.6762
MS_loyalty	0.5016	0.4982	0.5137	0.4564	0.7435
MS_satisf	0.5091	0.5038	0.4739	0.4555	0.7118
MS_marketshare	0.4841	0.4516	0.4008	0.4602	0.6583
MS_image	0.5779	0.5616	0.5781	0.5886	0.8930

construct shares more variance with its assigned indicators than with another latent variable in the structural model” (Hair et al., 2011, p. 146). In the present study, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion is met (see Table 2). Additionally, the cross-loadings (see Table 3) support the idea of sufficient discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2011).

The assessment of the global model shows satisfactory results as well. Although PLS has traditionally been criticized for the lack of well-defined global quality indices (Esposito Vinzi et al., 2010), both the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and the geodesic discrepancy (dG) quantify how strongly the empirical correlation matrix differs from the implied correlation matrix (Dijkstra and Henseler, 2015). The good model fit of the model in discussion is supported by an SRMR for the saturated model of 0.047 (a cut-off threshold of 0.08 has been suggested by Hu and Bentler, 1999) and a geodesic discrepancy (dG) of 0.45, which, as proposed, turns out to be below the value for the 95th percentile (0.47).

When evaluating structural models, a major point of departure should be the assessment of nomological validity (Henseler, 2017), which concerns how well the research findings fit with existing theory (Lückenbach et al., 2017). Path models, which are sufficiently well known through prior research, should be strong and significant (Cronbach and Meehl, 1955). The RBO model shows modest to strong but highly significant path coefficients between all constructs ($\beta = 0.28 - 0.86, p < 0.011$). Adding to this, the squared multiple correlation coefficients of all constructs can be described as moderate to substantial

Table 4
Structural model estimates.

Construct/Effect	R ²	Path coefficients	Indirect effect	Total effect	Cohen's f ²	Sig.
<i>Values of BO</i>	–					
Values → Norms		0.83		0.83	2.15	0.000
Values → Symbols			0.71	0.71		
Values → Behavior		0.31	0.48	0.79	0.12	0.000
Values → Market performance			0.53	0.53		
<i>Norms of BO</i>	0.68					
Norms → Symbols		0.86		0.86	2.79	0.000
Norms → Behavior		0.32	0.26	0.58	0.09	0.000
Norms → Market performance			0.53	0.53		
<i>Symbols of BO</i>	0.74					
Symbols → Behavior		0.30	–	0.30	0.10	0.000
Symbols → Market performance		0.43	0.09	0.52	0.11	0.000
<i>Brand-oriented behavior</i>	0.77					
Behavior → Market performance		0.28		0.28	0.05	0.010
<i>Market performance</i>	0.47					

(R² = 0.47 – 0.77), and therefore, adequate nomological validity is verified.

Assessing the significance and relevance of the structural model relationships, the study demonstrates a robust and highly significant effect of values of RBO on norms of RBO ($\beta = 0.83$, $p < 0.000$), as well as of norms of RBO on symbols of RBO ($\beta = 0.86$, $p < 0.000$). Cohen's f^2 , which in both cases far exceeds the threshold of 0.35, indicates that this effect is a strong effect (2.15 / 2.79). These findings support H1 and H2. Values ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.000$), norms ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.000$) and symbols ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.000$) of RBO also have a highly significant effect on brand-oriented behavior. Cohen's f^2 only proposes a weak effect (0.12 / 0.09 / 0.10). Nevertheless, the results support H3, H4 and H5. Finally, the results also support H6 and H7: Symbols of RBO ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.000$) and brand-oriented behavior ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.010$) both have significant but weak effects on retailers' market performance, with Cohen's f^2 of 0.11 and 0.05, respectively. Overall, the model explains 47 per cent of the variance in market performance. Table 4 provides a detailed overview of the model results.

6. Discussion

6.1. Theoretical and managerial implications

So far, the field of BO has been widely disregarded within retail management. Of the 76 articles about BO that were identified in the systematic literature review conducted by Anees-ur-Rehman et al. (2016), only three were published in retail journals. Hence, the objective of this study was to provide further insights into the nature of the RBO concept and its contribution to market performance within the field of retailing. In line with studies focusing on other industries (Baumgarth, 2010; Lückenbach et al., 2017), the research results explained in this article confirm both the basic structure of the RBO model (values, norms, symbols, behavior) and the positive connection between BO and market performance in the retail industry. The study focused on a different set of retailers in a different location, which adds to a more holistic view of RBO. Though it is obvious that, apart from BO, various other factors, such as the overall management quality, the specific location of a shop or general economic conditions, may influence the market performance of a retailer, those who are struggling for improved market performance in difficult, turbulent competitive environments would thus be encouraged by these findings to put more effort and resources into establishing a strong brand orientation across their entire store networks.

The main findings show that a strong relationship exists between the values and norms as well as between norms and symbols of RBO. In other words, having strong values influences norms, and strong norms ensure the establishment of a strong set of symbols. The findings

emphasize the importance to a retail store's performance of agreed values and implemented norms being part of the everyday culture of all staff and of the positive store image created by symbols.

It is important to note that the implementation of such an integrated approach to brand orientation requires initiatives and activities that extend beyond traditional marketing. Internal marketing and continuous communication throughout the company and between all levels of management and staff are needed to inculcate the values defined by the founders and/or management, and to establish the norms that will guide the activities and behavior of all staff in the company. Decisions on the required symbols and how they will be applied requires the involvement of all departments and all levels, including marketing, human resources, the supply chain and the store networks. Such implementation cannot be solely a head office-driven, top-down approach; it must also be agreed upon and committed to by the entire store management and network.

Overall, the results support the need for 'living the brand' via top management commitment, investment in branding, talking regularly about the brand and ensuring all staff are committed to what the brand stands for. Clear rules of brand-oriented behavior should be implemented as well. Additionally, managers should ensure correct, accurate and strong use of visible symbols such as corporate logos and signs, uniforms, colors, etc., in their stores. The retail store should be an exhibition of the retail brand. This is essential for consistency across the entire network of stores, as it is only through consistency of values, norms and symbols throughout the company that acceptable brand orientated behavior will be achieved, and it is only through such consistent brand-oriented behavior that superior market performance can be achieved. It should be remembered that many customers select a retailer not because of its products but because of their assessment of the people in the company and the service provided. Issues such as skills, attitudes, overall design and style, communication, and speed of response are critical, and consumers' perceptions of all of these are established by the values, norms and symbols that define the retail brand and influence the behavior that customers experience in the store.

Last but not least, the study also contributes generally to the field of brand management by proposing a valid scale for the measurement of brand orientation in the context of the retail industry, which could be useful for retail management scholars and practitioners.

6.2. Limitations of the study and areas of further research

Despite this study's contributions, several limitations exist. First, although there are no reliable data about the distribution of South African retailers over different retail sectors, mainly due to the large number of unregistered small and micro retailers (W & RSETA, 2013),

the self-selected sample may not be representative of the South African retail industry. Some sectors (e.g., cars, motorcycles, tires and spare parts) were probably overrepresented, while others were underrepresented. Future studies that want to address the RBO of South African retailers should build on a more precise, representative sample of the industry. Second, the relevance of our findings could be tested for retailers outside South Africa by a replication study. A project like this could also consider comparing retailers that follow different brand management strategies, e.g. focusing on manufacturer brands or on own product brands. Third, retailing is a broad field that can be divided into sub-categories (Zentes et al., 2012), each of which may follow different strategies and have different customs, rules and regulations. For example, a fashion retailer and a food retailer may not have too many things in common, and the brands of both companies may serve very different functions. Weindel (2016) has shown that “the most influential factors when building retail brand equity differ for retailers in different retail sectors” (p. 124). Hence, a study that is as broad as the one represented here can only partly explain RBO. In this regard, RBO may mean very different things in different retail sectors, which could imply that the relevant constructs need to be measured differently. Therefore, a) there is a need for sector-specific studies, and b) future studies may also generate valuable insights about RBO if a construct like “brand importance” in the sector was controlled for (e.g., brand relevance in category; Fischer et al., 2010). Fourth, approximately 60 per cent (59.2) of participants were B2C retailers that earned more than 50% of their revenue with private consumers. Future studies should address what role RBO plays in B2B environments, for example, wholesalers selling to retailers. Fifth, with a focused perspective on the concept of RBO and its consequences, the study analyzed only one strategic orientation and did not consider the simultaneous pursuit of multiple strategic orientations, which is suggested as one of ten major research recommendations for the advancement of the literature on brand orientation by Anees-ur-Rehman et al. (2016; also see Schmidt et al., 2015 and Lückenbach et al., 2017). Future studies in the RBO context should broaden their scope and analyze the impact of different strategic orientations on retailers’ success. Sixth, the effect of RBO on only market performance and not on financial performance has been

analyzed in this study. Even if a positive influence of market performance on financial performance can be suspected (Baumgarth, 2010), it is unclear how strong the indirect influence of RBO on financial performance is in the retail industry. Seventh and last, mainly the brick and mortar side of retailing has been considered in this study. Because the in-store and online shopping behaviors of consumers might differ (Degeratu et al., 2000), the role of RBO could differ as well within the two settings. Hence, the question of how RBO affects online retailing could be of special interest for further consideration (Anees-ur-Rehman et al., 2016).

6.3. Conclusion

Knowledge about retail brand equity is scarce (Weindel, 2016). Previous research in other industries has shown that BO has a positive impact on a company’s economic success as well as its non-economic objectives. Despite retailers investing considerable budgets in building and maintaining their corporate brands, very little research on the effect of RBO on the performance of retailers has been conducted, and none in South Africa. The study described in this article confirms the basic structure of the RBO model, which implies that brand-oriented values influence brand-oriented norms, the latter influence brand-oriented symbols, and all of the aforementioned constructs influence brand-oriented behavior. Even more relevant is the identification of the positive connection between RBO and market performance in the South African retail industry: According to the results, brand-oriented symbols and brand-oriented behavior influence retailers’ market performance significantly. Based on the results of the study, theoretical and managerial implications were discussed. Additionally, the study proposed several starting points for further research that arose directly from the study’s limitations.

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Appendix A. Towards the development of a comprehensive scale of RBO (retail brand orientation)

Items of BO	Baumgarth (2010)	Lückenbach et al. (2016)	Insights from the interviews	Final items of RBO
Values	In our company, brand decisions are discussed and decided at the top management level	./.	Interviewees talked extensively about the top management making brand-related decisions.	In our company, brand decisions are discussed and decided at the top management level
	Our brand is differentiated toward the brands of our competitors	./.	Many examples were given about competing retailers whose brands differ from each other.	Our brand is differentiated from the brands of our competitors
	We take care that our brand positioning remains essentially the same over a long time period	./.	Continuity of brand positioning was not mentioned as an indicator of RBO.	./.
	We take care that our branding is constant over a long time period	./.	Continuity of branding was not mentioned as an indicator of RBO.	./.
	We also invest in our brand in times of scarce financial resources	./.	One interview partner recommended that in order to achieve a high RBO, management needs to manage the brand as “the most important and enduring investment”.	We also invest in our brand in times of scarce financial resources
	./.	It is important to our founders what we stand for	Unlike Baumgarth who focuses on management, Schmidt et al. stress	In our company, we are aware of our heritage and have a clear

			the importance of the founders of a business. This perspective was also shared by some of our interview partners: They mentioned that a retailer who wants to build up a strong brand must “consider its heritage”. It also seems that not all retailers have a clear picture of what their brand stands for. In the opinion of our interview partners, this is a prerequisite of RBO.	picture of what our brand stands for
	./.	We are convinced that our brand is a large part of the success of our social business	The perspective that a brand is a major success factor for a business was not explicitly mentioned in the interviews.	./.
	./.	The employees of our social business understand that our brand is not only a task for marketing but a task for all employees and departments	Retail is not only about products and price, but it is also a people business. Our interview partners pointed out how important it is that “employees understand that the brand is the most important asset” and that they identify with the brand. They referred to people as “part of the brand, they should live and breathe the brand”.	The employees of our retail business understand that our brand is not only a task of marketing but a task for all employees and departments
Norms	We check regularly that the corporate design guidelines of our brand are adhered to	In our social business, there are explicit and comprehensive rules and guidelines for compliance of the brand positioning and corporate designs	Our interview partners told us a lot about internal rules that have been developed centrally and need to be followed on a local level. They did not explicitly mention design guidelines but referred to rules, standards and concepts that even determined how a sign in a store had to look.	In our retail business, there are explicit and comprehensive rules and guidelines to ensure compliance with brand positioning and corporate designs
	In all brand communications, we pay explicit attention to the integration of all communication methods	Our social business is organized in a way that ensures that the brand is complied with in regards to form and content. We follow an integrated communication. Our communication is monolithic	We did not receive any information about the importance of integrated communications in retail and decided not to include a corresponding item.	./.
	Our company has a detailed written specification of the brand positioning	We have defined in writing for all employees our philosophy, our mission and/or our brand positioning.	It was not mentioned explicitly that the brand positioning must be written down, but the importance of the existence of a clear brand positioning was stated various times. We decided to include Lückenbach et al.’s item because the term brand may sometimes in retail be confused with the terms philosophy or mission.	We have defined, in writing, our philosophy, our mission and/or our brand positioning for all employees
	Our company has managers who have clear responsibility for the brand	./.	Though this was not mentioned in the interviews, it seems logical to us that RBO is stronger if there is someone who is explicitly responsible for the brand.	Our company has managers who have clear responsibility for the brand
	Brand managers have the competence and authority to succeed with the positioning of our brand internally	./.	This was not at all mentioned in the interviews.	./.
	We check regularly whether or not our brand is different from the profiles of competing brands	./.	This was not at all mentioned in the interviews.	./.

	./.	./.	The possible influence of store management on the brand depends on several factors (e.g., company culture, size of the retail chain) and may vary between companies. But the following may be more or less the same for all retailers: One central task of store managers is to make sure that norms get implemented at the local level.	Our store managers make sure that corporate design guidelines (e.g., store design) get implemented at the local level
Symbols	Our employees display visible branding elements during every customer contact (e.g., name badge with logo, uniforms) Our stands at trade fairs reflect our brand	The employees of our social business can be clearly identified as staff members by their uniforms, dress style, emblems or similar elements Our buildings are designed in a way that everyone immediately feels the philosophy of our social business	Frequently, our interview partners mentioned branded staff uniforms as signs of RBO. Baumgarth's item makes no sense in the retail context. The most important buildings in retail are the stores. Therefore, a corresponding item has been included.	Our employees display visible branding elements during every customer contact (e.g. name tags with logo, uniforms) Our stores are designed in a way that everyone immediately feels the positioning of our retail brand
	We conduct regular meetings about the status-quo of our brand	We meet regularly internally to analyze and discuss the status and development of our brand	We did not receive too much information about internal meetings and their importance with regard to RBO. We simply assume that retail is a more action driven business – there might not be too much time to frequently meet internally. But, at least one of the interviewees mentioned that a high RBO also goes hand in hand with “discussing internally how to measure and improve brand value”.	We conduct regular meetings, formal or informal, about the status-quo of our brand
	“Stories” in our company reflect the positioning of our brand	In our social business one likes to tell stories of the development and importance of our brand	It was explicitly mentioned how stories told by “older and experienced employees” symbolize what the brand stands for. <i>Additional comment:</i> Some of the interview partners proposed that retailers with a high degree of RBO would focus on branding goods with their own name; others disagreed. Therefore, private label brands were not considered to be an indicator of RBO.	Stories in our company reflect the positioning of our brand
Behavior	We invest in image advertising	We practice systematic communication to enhance the brand awareness and to improve our image	We learned that a retailer with a high RBO wants his name to be known and invests in advertising.	We invest in image advertising
	We teach our employees about the brand	./.	Staff behavior seems to be of major importance to achieve a high RBO.	We teach our employees about our brand
	We instruct new employees about the positioning of our brand	./.	One of the major tasks of store management is to recruit the right people at the local level and to advise and train them properly.	Our store managers make sure that the appearance and behavior of our staff is aligned with our brand positioning
	We regularly conduct market research studies of our brand	We analyze regularly, supported by market research, the popularity and image of our social business. The brand strength is a central controlling and control quantity	According to the interview partners, activities of brand analysis may not play a major role in retail. Retail may concentrate more on traditional customer satisfaction surveys. But at least	We regularly conduct market research studies of our brand

	in our social business	one interview partner mentioned the importance of measuring how the brand is perceived, and another talked about important key performance indicators.	
./.	./.	From the interviews, we learned that a high RBO goes along with the idea of living the brand in the single stores.	In our retail company, our brand is lived in every single store
./.	We have professionally developed our brand name and logo and had it registered as a trademark	All larger retail chains have professionally developed and registered trademarks. The item of Lückenbach et al. may be important to measure BO at social businesses but less so for retailers.	./.

Appendix B. Final measures

Values of BO	In our company, brand decisions are discussed and decided at the top management level. Our brand is differentiated from the brands of our competitors. We also invest in our brand in times of scarce financial resources. In our company, we are aware of our heritage and have a clear picture of what our brand stands for. The employees of our retail business understand that our brand is not only a task of marketing but a task for all employees and departments.
Norms of BO	In our retail business, there are explicit and comprehensive rules and guidelines to ensure compliance with brand positioning and corporate designs. We have defined, in writing, our philosophy, mission and/or our brand positioning for all employees. Our company has managers who have clear responsibility for the brand. Store managers ensure that corporate design guidelines (e.g., store design) get implemented at the local level.
Symbols of BO	Employees display visible branding elements during customer contact (e.g., name tags/logo, uniforms). Our stores are designed in a way that everyone immediately feels the positioning of our retail brand. We conduct regular meetings, formal or informal, about the status-quo of our brand. Stories in our company reflect the positioning of our brand.
Brand-oriented behavior	We invest in image advertising. We teach our employees about our brand. Store managers make sure that appearance and behavior of staff is aligned with brand positioning. We regularly conduct market research studies of our brand. In our retail company, our brand is lived in every single store.
Market performance	Among our target groups, the awareness of our retail brand is high. We constantly win new customers. Our customers show a high loyalty towards our retail brand. Our customers show a high satisfaction with our retail brand. Our market share is high. The image of our retail brand is positive.

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