The power of corporate branding in enhancing brand loyalty – The case of Mauritius telecom service provider

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper investigates the power of corporate branding in enhancing customer loyalty in the telecommunications sector in Mauritius and explores the influence of perceived brand values, brand associations, brand positioning/image, brand trust and brand presence on loyalty towards the telecom service provider with the aim of identifying possible predictors of loyalty towards the telecom service provider’s customers.

Design/methodology/approach: A sample of 300 customers were interviewed over a period of 3 weeks using a face to face interview.

Findings: The findings indicate that perception of brand trust is a good predictor of loyalty towards a telecom service provider. Key recommendations are discussed

Originality/value: To our knowledge, there have not been any studies that have specifically the influence of brand-related factors on loyalty in the telecom industry in Mauritius. This study therefore offers a unique opportunity to assess the power of corporate branding as a predictor of loyalty.

Keywords: Branding, Brand Loyalty, Brand values, Brand associations, Brand positioning/image, Brand trust
Background

There have not been any studies that have specifically investigated the influence of brand-related factors on loyalty in the telecom industry in Mauritius. However, branding has been attracting increasing attention and interest in today's hypercompetitive marketplace (Goldsmith, 2004; Alden et al., 1999; Kirmani et al., 1999). Increasing competition pressures have made loyalty and thus, profitability important goals for practitioners (Perrin-Martinenq, 2004). Enhancing brand loyalty is difficult when consumers’ choice is widening at an ever-increasing rate. It seems that brand loyalty will be even more difficult to gain in future. Decreasing brand loyalty is, undoubtedly, a constant threat to any business. Aaker (1996) and Keller (2001) have argued that a robust and trusted corporate brand is vital to the success of any organisation. There is a widespread well-grounded belief that a brand’s image strongly influences buying behaviour is widespread (Romaniuk and Sharp, 2003). Past studies have suggested that customer relationships can be strengthened by investigating and exploiting the emotional bond that exists between customers and the companies (Aaker, 1996 and Keller, 1993). In a similar vein, Keller (2001) has asserted that an organisation can use branding to set itself apart from the rest to show customers why they are better than the others when such a wide variety of choice is available to them and everybody seems to be pressed for time. In service organisations, the consumer’s brand perceptions of intangibles such as implied reliability, quality, and image of product innovation and expertise play a critical role in determining customer brand loyalty (Keller, 2001). Experience with a brand lowers perceived risk and enhances loyalty. It can be inferred that lack of experience with a brand leads to higher risk perceptions reducing the likelihood of that brand being tried by customers. It was found that brand attachment could explain loyalty (Aaker 1991; McQueen et al., 1993). Thus, its power of branding in enhancing consumer loyalty cannot be overlooked and underestimated.

Mauritius Telecom (MT)

The case of Mauritius Telecom (MT) is explored in this paper. Established in 1992, Mauritius Telecom (MT) stands out as the only telecommunications operator in Mauritius to offer a whole range of services and solutions through fixed lines, mobile and Internet, meeting the diverse communication needs of customers. Along the years, the company has become one of the leading enterprises in Mauritius with a turnover of Rs 7.1 billion for the year ending 31 December 2009. MT has more than 335,000 fixed telephone lines; 630,000 mobile subscribers; and 70,000 Internet subscribers (Source: Annual Report 2009) for a population of 1.2 million. In the year 2000, in anticipation of the total liberalisation, MT entered into a
strategic partnership with France Telecom to derive the maximum benefit from the knowledge, experience and technical expertise of its partner. MT has been enjoying monopoly privileges since its foundation. However, since January 2003, the telecommunications market was opened to full competition and MT, the historical operator and the former sole provider of fixed (land) line services is, thus, operating in a fully liberalised environment. This new environment is characterised by constant changes and intense rivalry. Competitors entering the fixed line (land-line) markets have increased dynamism in the industry; bringing about more offers; making more choices available for customers. In this situation, the chances of MT losing some of its customers are big. Customers that are unhappy with the service performance of MT will probably “vote with their feet” by switching operators or reducing their consumption of telecommunications products or services with MT. The growing level of competition in the telecommunications industry has prompted the author to study the effect of the perception of MT brand values, MT brand associations, MT brand positioning/image, MT brand trust and MT brand presence on (brand) loyalty towards MT.

Study Objectives

The main objective of this research was to investigate the effect of perceived MT brand values, perceived MT brand associations, perceived MT brand positioning/image, perceived MT brand trust and perceived MT brand presence on (brand) loyalty towards MT. Various hypotheses were developed as shown below:

Research Hypotheses

H1 - The more positive the perceived MT brand values, the more loyal customers will be towards MT.
H2 - The more positive the perceived MT brand associations, the more loyal customers will be towards MT.
H3 - The more positive the perceived MT brand positioning/image, the more loyal, customers will be towards MT.
H4 - The more positive the perceived MT brand trust, the more loyal, customers will be towards MT.
H5 - The more positive the perceived MT brand presence, the more loyal customers will be towards MT.
Literature Review

Importance of Branding

A brand is the implied promise a company holds in the minds of audiences (Aaker, 1996). Petromilli et al., (2002) argue that it matters less what is in the corporate portfolio when the economy is expanding rapidly and all new products and emerging brands seem to offer prospects of contributing to the creation of shareholder value. Assessing the portfolio takes on a decidedly new relevance, however, when customers have less to spend and are scrutinizing every purchase, and looking harder to find the best partner and brand to fit their needs. The way consumers perceive brand is a key determinant of long-term business - consumer relationships. Branding is increasingly discussed during strategic planning session conversations among senior level decision makers and in boardrooms throughout the corporate world. That is because of the substantial impact a well-managed brand can have on the bottom line (Keller, 2001). Recent studies revealed that corporate brands are adored, venerated and coveted by customers and organisations alike, and, therefore, represent one of the most fascinating phenomena of the business environment in the twenty-first century (Olins, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Pauvit, 2000; Balmer, 2001a, b; Bickerton, 2000; Gray and Balmer, 2001; Hatch and Schultz, 2001; McDonald, et al., 2001; Newman, 2001; Simoes and Dibb, 2001; Balmer and Greyser, 2003). Their importance is irrefutable. Brands, in their various guises, are integral to our everyday existence (Sherry, 1995). There is an increasing realisation that corporate brands serve as a powerful navigational tool to a variety of stakeholders for a miscellany of purposes including employment, investment and, most importantly, consumer buying behaviour (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Corporate branding is generally perceived as: symbols associated with key values (DeChernatony, 1999; Tilley, 1999; Urde, 1999) ; As such, corporate brands are seen as a guarantee of quality, as an insurance against risk of poor performance or financial risk.

It can be inferred, corporate brands have a utility in several regards: they communicate the brand's values (often seen as a promise), they afford a means of differentiation from their competitors, and they enhance the esteem and loyalty in which the organisation is held by its stakeholder groups (Balmer, 2001b). McDonald, de Chernatony and Harris (2001) identified one of the reasons for the increased interest in corporate branding in the 2000’s as being the increased role of the services sector in the economy. Basically, corporate branding is a manifestation of the features that distinguish an organisation from its competitors. It is a reflection of the organisation’s ability to satisfy consumer’s needs namely: trust in the company to deliver a consistent level of product/service, quality of the product/service at a
reasonable price and the reduction of risk of making an unwise purchase decision (Bick, *et al.*, 2003).

**Brand Values**
The concept of brand values implies that what makes a brand a brand is its “personality” which distinguishes it from others and that the presence of this personality imparts some utility – however tangible – to the consumer. There is a strong body of research supporting the idea of brand personality as a source of value to the consumer (King, 1973). Brand values provide a promise of sameness and predictability (Keller, 2002/3). However, the promise of sameness and predictability is no longer a strong enough brand proposition to meet customer expectations, as Heinz conceded when it announced its intention to supply supermarkets with own-label baked beans (Kinox, 2004).

**Brand Associations**
They are anything that is linked in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991, p.109). Keller (1998) defines brand associations as informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory that contains the meaning of the brand for consumers. A brand can convey either a positive or a negative message about the product to the consumer (Kim and Chung, 1997, p.361). The underlying value of a brand is often based upon specific association of a “use context” such as heart attack prevention can provide a reason-to-buy which can attract customers. Such an association represents the product’s meaning to customers. Brand associations represent bases for purchase decision and for brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991). There are a host of possible associations that a firm can build in a brand. Product attributes (customer benefits) are an important class of associations, but there are others that can be important in some contexts (Aaker 1991, p. 114). Studies that have focused specifically on brand associations are those of Kim and Chung (1997); Till (1998) and; Chen (2001). According to Aaker (1991) there are at least nine brand associations. Brand associations are useful to marketers. Marketers use brand associations to differentiate, position, and extend brands, to create positive attitudes and feelings towards brands, and to suggest attributes or benefits of purchasing or using a specific brand. However, brand associations are of more use to the customer than the marketer (Aaker, 1991).

**Brand Positioning**
According to Hoek *et al.*, (2000), Firms position their brand using the organization’s attributes such as innovation, a drive for quality, and a concern for the environment. A firm can position its brand with respect to a competitor. They suggested that brands should
develop distinct images and that these images will attract specific consumer segment. Consequently, the consumer segment will see the brand as being valuable to them. Basically, in marketing an organisation, business leaders need to consider four components to develop its brand positioning in the supply chain:

- Its overall reputation.
- Product/service performance.
- Product and customer portfolio.
- Networks (Knox and Maklan, 1998b)

**Brand trust**

Many researchers (Fournier, 1995; Gurviez, 1996; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) support the importance of trust in developing positive and favourable attitudes, and resulting in a commitment to a certain brand as the maximum expression of a successful relationship between the consumer and the brand. Trust is a key variable in the development of an enduring desire to maintain a relationship in the long term, for example with a brand. The consideration of trust in the brand domain derives some important and interesting implications. It was proposed that the relationship between the brand and the consumer implies that the brand possesses some characteristics that go beyond its consideration as a mere product. The idea of looking at a brand as a person has already been suggested by authors such as Aaker (1991), Chernatony and McDonald (1998) and Fournier (1998). Trust is related to the ability and capacities attributed to a business to perform some activities and accomplish its obligations and promises. A wide variety of concepts have been used such as ability (Andaleeb, 1992; Mayer, et al., 1995), credibility (Ganesan, 1994) or reliability (Hess, 1995). Based on previous discussion it was argued that brand trust is a feeling of security held by the consumer that the brand will meet his/her consumption expectations. Rempel et al. (1985) suggest that trust evolves from past experience and prior interaction. This idea is also supported by other authors such as Ravald and Grönroos (1996), who consider that it develops through experience, and Curran et al. (1998) for whom trust is a state of being that develops over time. Brand trust exerts a stronger influence on customer commitment than does overall satisfaction (Délgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán 2001).

**Brand Loyalty**

The concept of brand loyalty has been extensively discussed in traditional marketing literature with the main emphasis on two different dimensions of the concept: behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. Oliver (1997) has presented a conceptual framework of brand loyalty that
includes the full spectrum of brand loyalty based on a hierarchy of effects model with cognitive, affective, conative (behavioral intent), and action (repeat purchase behavior) dimensions. A definition integrating this multidimensional construct has been given (Oliver, 1999) as: "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior."

**Research methodology**

**Sample Design**

A multi-stage sampling method was used to determine a number of respondents. Quota sampling alone proved to be insufficient, thus, a quota was drawn from the sampling frame and this quota was divided on the basis of age and gender of respondents. A sample of 300 participants was selected from both rural and urban regions. The survey was conducted in 17 sales outlet of MT and these outlets are located in different regions across Mauritius. This was essential to ensure a better representativeness of the main population. A judgment and quota sample of 300 was drawn from the sampling frame which was divided on the basis of gender and age to ensure the representativeness across the different categories. Paying strict adherence to age and gender criteria, 20 respondents was interviewed at each sales outlet.

**Data collection and Analysis**

The information necessary to carry out the empirical study was collected through face-to-face interviews accompanied using a questionnaire over a period of three weeks. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 13.0) was employed for the data analysis. As most of the data were collected using Likert scales, tabulation was straightforward. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all survey items namely mean scores and standard deviation. Moreover, some statistical tests namely correlation and multiple regression analyses were used to test the significance of the results and to analyse the relationships and associations among different variables respectively. To determine the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable, bivariate analyses were first reported and then, multivariate analysis was reported. Multiple regression analysis was employed to more thoroughly test the first five hypotheses. The rationale behind this was to investigate about the predictors of the dependent variable (Hem et al., 2003).

**Survey Findings**
A positive correlation is observed between overall evaluation of MT brand values and overall evaluation of (brand) loyalty towards MT. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is significant (.505), supporting \( H_1 \). We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis \( H_0 \) (P-value < 0.05) and conclude that there is a statistically significant linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. Similarly, a strong positive correlation between overall evaluation of MT brand associations and overall evaluation of (brand) loyalty towards MT is revealed. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is significant (.650), supporting \( H_2 \). We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis \( H_0 \) (P-value < 0.05). There is a statistically significant linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

Moreover, there is a positive correlation between overall evaluation of MT brand positioning/image and overall evaluation of (brand) loyalty towards MT. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is significant (.616), supporting \( H_3 \). We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis \( H_0 \) (P-value < 0.05). There is a statistically significant linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. A positive correlation between overall evaluation of MT brand trust and overall evaluation of loyalty towards MT is also revealed. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is highly significant (.738), supporting \( H_4 \). We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis \( H_0 \) (P-value < 0.05). There is a statistically significant linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. Therefore, a positive correlation between overall evaluation of MT brand presence and overall evaluation of loyalty towards MT is revealed. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is slightly significant (.333), supporting \( H_5 \). We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis \( H_0 \) (P-value < 0.05). There is a statistically less significant linear relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. To more thoroughly test the above five hypotheses, the authors employed multiple regression analysis as suggested by Hem \textit{et al.} (2003). The findings for this analysis are shown \textbf{Tables VI to Table IX} (See Appendix).

Information about the quantity of variance that is explained by the predictor variables is provided in \textbf{Table VI}. \( R \) is the multiple correlation coefficients between all of the predictor variables and the dependent variable. In the above model, the value is .747, which indicates that there is a great deal of variance shared by the independent variables and the dependent variables. \( R \) Square is the amount of variance explained by the given set of predictor variables. In the model, the value is .558, which indicates that 56% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables.
The ANOVA table that describes the overall variance accounted for in the model is shown in Table VII. Put another way, this $F$ statistic tests whether the R square proportion of variance in the dependent variable accounted for by the predictors is zero. If the null hypothesis were true, then that would indicate that there is not a regression relationship between the dependent variable and the predictor variables. But, instead, it appears that the five predictor variables in the above model are not all equal to each other and could be used to predict the dependent variable, overall evaluation of loyalty towards MT, as is indicated by a large $F$ value and a small significance level.

Information about the effects of individual predictor variables is presented in Table XIII. There are two types of information in the Coefficients table: coefficients and significance tests. The coefficients indicate the increase in the value of the dependent variable for each unit increase in the predictor variable. For example, comparing the unstandardized coefficient of overall evaluation of MT brand trust (.607), with the unstandardized coefficient of the variable, overall evaluation of MT brand values (0.44), it appears that perception of MT brand trust is a greater predictor of (brand) loyalty towards MT than is perception of MT brand values. However, to get a more accurate picture, we need to examine the standardized coefficients, or Beta coefficients. Beta coefficients are based on data expressed in standardized, or $z$ score form. Thus, all variables have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one and are thus expressed in the same units of measurement. Examining the Beta coefficients for MT brand trust, MT brand values, MT brand associations and MT brand presence, we can see that even when these five variables are expressed in the same scale, MT brand trust is still the best predictor of loyalty towards MT.

In addition to the coefficients, the table also provides a significance test for each of the independent variables in the model. The significance test evaluates the null hypothesis that the unstandardized regression coefficient for the predictor is zero when all other predictors' coefficients are fixed to zero. This test is presented as a $t$ statistic. Examining the $t$ statistic for the variable, overall evaluation of MT brand trust, we can see that it is associated with a significance value of .000, indicating that the null hypothesis, that states that this variable's regression coefficient is zero when all other predictor coefficients are fixed to zero, can be rejected.

Testing of H1: H1 postulates that the more positive the perceived brand values, the more loyal customers will be towards MT. It can be seen that perception of MT brand values has an insignificant effect on (brand) loyalty towards MT ($\beta = .064; P > 0.05$). The relationship between MT brand values and (brand) loyalty towards MT is positive but very weak. Hence, H1 did not gain support.
Testing of H2: H2 postulates that the more positive the perceived brand associations, the more loyal customers will be towards MT. It can be observed that perception of brand associations has an insignificant effect on (brand) loyalty towards MT (β = .129; P > 0.05). The relationship between MT brand associations and (brand) loyalty towards MT is positive but weak. Hence, H2 did not gain support.

Testing of H3: H3 postulates that the more positive the perceived brand positioning/image, the more loyal customers will be towards MT. It can be seen that perception of brand positioning/image has an insignificant effect on (brand) loyalty towards MT (β = .069; P > 0.05). The relationship between MT brand positioning and (brand) loyalty towards MT is positive but very weak. Hence, H3 did not gain support.

Testing of H4: H4 postulates that the more positive the perceived brand trust, the more loyal customers will be towards MT. Here, a significant positive main effect of perceived brand trust on (brand) loyalty towards MT is seen (β = .691; P < 0.05). The relationship between MT brand trust and (brand) loyalty towards MT is positive and highly significant. Hence, H4 is supported.

Testing of H5: H5 postulates that the more positive the perceived brand presence, the more loyal customers will be towards MT. Here, an insignificant effect of MT brand presence, on (brand) loyalty towards MT is seen (β = -.148; P > 0.05). Hence, H5 did not gain support.

The model proposed earlier (See Figure II) gain only partial support from the above in-depth analysis. It can be graphically depicted as follows:

![Figure II – Predictor of Residential Customers’ Loyalty towards MT](image)

From the above model, it can be seen that loyalty towards MT depends on residential customers’ positive perception of MT brand trust.
Discussion and Conclusions

From the research findings and multivariate analyses, it was found that perception of MT brand trust ($\beta = .691$) is an important predictor of loyalty towards Mauritius Telecom. Based on the research findings and multivariate analyses, MT must, therefore, sustain and improve perception of MT brand trust. The following is, therefore, recommended:

**Actions focused on MT employees or the service staff**

Employees play a crucial role in the service delivery. In fact, for customers, the employees are the brand or the company (O’Cass & Grace, 2003). Hence, these employees affect the experience customers have with the corporate brand and the customers’ overall satisfaction. On the other hand, an individual or an organisation attributes a trust image to a brand based on his/her experience with that brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemá, 2001).

**Skills Enhancement**

It follows from the above discussion that to be able to sustain and improve the perception of trust with the MT brand, service staff must be provided with the right skills to enhance the customer consumption experience. Thus, employees must be provided with the following skills through continuous training namely: relationship building skills, interpersonal skills, listening skills, customer care skills, problem solving skills as well as product knowledge so that employees can advice customers on how to make the most out of the product or service bought. These training are essential because service staff, being frontliners, have the prime opportunity to form friendships and relationships with customers and friends are usually perceived as being trustworthy and dependable. This will essentially help to sustain and improve the trust image towards the corporate brand and help in detecting loopholes and appropriate measures can, thus, follow. These are essential because employees are a critically important constituent of the service brand and are ultimately responsible for delivering its promise.

**Inculcating a shared understanding of the corporate brand values**

A shared understanding of the corporate brand’s values must be inculcated in employees, along with a strong commitment to encourage brand supporting behaviour. Some authors such as de Chernatony (2001); Keller (1999); Tosti and Stotz (2001) have highlighted the importance of internal brand building as a process to align staff’s behaviour with brand
values. This is of particular relevance for services brands where a key challenge is to overcome the variability at the ‘moment of truth’ (Norman, 1984). Employee behaviour that is aligned to service brand values allows for a consistent transfer of the brand’s promise across all contact points between customers and the company. Staff who understand how their service brands’ values are best executed enhance the trust image held by customers. Thus, workshops and seminars should be organized to align service staff’s behaviour with the corporate brand values.

**Trusting and empowering employees for better service delivery**

By trusting and empowering employees, MT can increase employee’s commitment and identification with the brand values. Committed employees are more likely to do a better job. They will be more concerned about customers’ overall satisfaction. They will be keener to help customers solve any problem that they could have with the product. They will be more willing to give advice to customers on how to make the most of the products purchased. This will, in turn, enhance customers consumption experience which will, in turn, affect the trust image held towards MT. Empowering service staff is also essential because they are the people who are directly responsible for delivering the brand promise and customers’ overall satisfaction. They will manage the “Moment of Truth” better. It follows from the above discussion that the employees plays a crucial role in influencing customer overall satisfaction and enhancing the perception of brand trust. Thus, employees or service staff must be managed through innovative ways to be able to sustain the trust image held by customers.

**Carefully Controlled Communications**

Communications such as advertising, publicity and word-of-mouth, need to be carefully controlled so that messages regarding the brand are consistent with the customer’s experience with the brand. Communications, such as that controlled by MT (e.g advertising), can be effectively used to tangibilise the service offering but, in doing so, must depict an accurate representation of the service experience so that expectations of the brand will not exceed the actual experience. Word-of-mouth communications and non-paid publicity, on the other hand, is more difficult for MT to control; however, all attempts must be made to manage such communications. For example, positive word-of-mouth can be stimulated by offering incentives to existing customers to recommend the service to others, while negative word-of-mouth can be diffused by crafting sound service recovery policies that encourage customers to complain when there is a problem. This type of policy outlines means of compensating customers who complain of a mediocre quality of service. The following methods namely
price reduction, reimbursement, free services, etc. can be made available to the personnel to enable them to compensate the customers at their own discretion.

**Integrated Customer Feedback Systems**

MT should implement an integrated customer feedback system to manage complaints, customer satisfaction and service recovery. This will enable the company to collect, analyse and disseminate the various types of feedback coming into the firm and guide customer-focused learning and continuous improvement. This will help to enhance the perception of brand trust.

**Improving the Service Design**

MT needs to pay special attention to improving the service design. The service delivery must be carefully designed so that both the process and the interaction between the employee and customer are carefully crafted to reflect a strong and consistent brand image. MT should design its core service delivery to provide the utmost benefit to customers. In order to do this, MT must determine what its customers’ primary needs are regarding the service. For example, survey results reveal that the provision of innovative and quality products seems to be one of the respondent’s needs. Moreover, the service employees need to understand the role required of them in the service delivery process. This can be achieved by communicating the service standards and providing “scripts” to employees in order to alleviate possible confusion. Service employees must be equipped with the tools needed to adapt to the individual needs of customers and cope with the unexpected. MT should also explore ways of providing the customer with value for money. It must, therefore, discover what creates value for its customers, and tailor the offering accordingly. This will help to show the customer that MT values them as a customer of MT products.

**Consistency in Product Quality and Flow of Innovative Products and Services**

MT should ensure that there is consistency with regards to product quality and that it regularly introduces new products and services. To achieve this, the concept of “Unique Organisation Proposition” has been suggested. The concept of unique organization proposition (UOP) (Maklan and Kinox, 1997) can provide the modeling tool with which marketers can bridge the gap to customer value and enhance brand trust. The UOP integrates a company’s core business processes into a visible set of credentials that add value through the supply chain. The best metaphor for the visible UOP is that of a cable sheath that envelops, holds and directs individual strands or wires, each representing a core business process that potentially adds customer value and boost brand trust. The sheath is the visible
embodiment of the organisation’s reputation, the performance of its goods and services, brand and customer portfolios and the network of relationships that it has developed.

**Service Guarantee**

Another way by which MT can enhance the perception of trust is by offering service guarantee. The latter is an excellent tool of differentiating itself from competitors - A guarantee of customer satisfaction will provide MT with a potential competitive advantage.

**Creation & Promotion of New Brand Personalities**

However, emphasis on existing brand personalities solely might not be adequate to project the image of unconditional trustworthiness. Thus, the following new brand personalities should be created namely trustworthy and friendly to project the desired personality characteristics in the light of the new competitive environment. If MT exhibits the following the personality characteristics namely: trustworthiness, dependability, friendliness, and reliability and it will be easier to enhance and sustain the perception of trust. Both the new and the existing personality factors must be emphasized in the brand communication programs.

**Developing a New Brand Value**

Brand personality is determined largely through the values and beliefs a brand has and other personality characteristics it develops. Trustworthiness is a value that MT should develop and emphasis in its brand communication programs. By developing this value, MT should try to position itself as an operator of choice in the minds of its customers in the light of the new competitive arena.

**Brand Repositioning**

Following the above logic, MT should position itself as a friend or trusted partner to its customers. In fact, one important relationship for many brands is a friendship link characterized by trust, dependability, understanding and care. For instance, MT should position itself as follows: “MT is there for its customers”, “MT treats its customers with respect”, and “MT is someone like you” (customers). MT should position itself as a trustworthy friend. It should emphasise the following personality characteristics in its brand communication programs namely: approachable, caring, helpful, modest, easy going and interested. In fact, customers are less likely to be friend of a company that has the following personality characteristics namely sophisticated, arrogant, self-centered, distant and disinterested. Customers make judgements about companies in personality terms (Aaker, 1996). They might say: “I don’t think that this company is very friendly” or “I feel uneasy
when I go into that branch” MT needs to work harder at managing the personality aspect of the corporate brand as this has important implication on brand trust. The above actions should help to develop a brand essence (Brand essence is the lasting impressions that defines the personality qualities of a company) of a trusted and friendly company. The above recommendations will most probably help MT to sustain and improve the perception of brand trust, brand positioning and brand presence, which are the main predictors of loyalty towards as per research findings and the multivariate analysis.

Conclusions

This study was set out to examine whether a positive perception of MT brand values, MT brand associations, MT brand positioning/image, MT brand trust and MT brand presence can be considered as an explanation/predictor of loyalty among MT customers. The findings show that brand trust is a good predictor of loyalty towards Mauritius Telecom. Our discovery suggests that an important part of maintaining and perhaps building a brand’s market share might be how far people trust the brand and how the latter is positioned or present in their mind. The results have substantive implications for MT brand and marketing managers. In fact, brand trust provides a means of assessing the effectiveness of branding activities that is directly related to customer retention. It therefore, follows from the above that MT should focus on building brand trust among its customers. Besides, if MT has the objective of building and keeping long-term relationships with its customers, it needs to complement its communication and value proposition with other activities. In this sense, honest communication and information about the brand, shared values, brand reputation and non-opportunistic behaviour from the part of MT may enhance brand trust. The primary role of advertising or brand communications should be to develop and maintain brand trust rather than seeking to convince/persuade people or change attitudes. Of course, our research has documented a statistical association, consistent across varying conditions; as well as a causal relationship. It is also possible that some other factors cause either loyalty or disloyalty. Nevertheless in the light of the present competitive arena, the variables, brand trust is satisfactorily useful to predict level of customer loyalty or defection. This research should form the basis for future work. It is suggested to carry out a longitudinal study to evaluate the degree of brand detachment over a longer time span. If MT does not sustain brand trust by taking appropriate ongoing measures, this can lead to brand detachment. In fact, brand management strategies that fail to reinforce or cultivate consumer commitment, or that does not keep pace with changing consumer needs, may leave consumers open to attractive alternatives (Perrin-Martinenq, 2004).
As discussed earlier, the authors argue that without reference to the customer value proposition, systems improvements does not increase customer value, differentiate the company’s offering or enhance profitability. Maklan and Kinox, (1997) prescribed the unique organization proposition (UOP) as a more appropriate tool for directing company processes since customer value is created throughout the whole organization and the supply chain. MT challenge is, therefore, to ensure that the UOP creates more customer value than other its competitors and that this customer value can be sustained overtime. Creating and managing UOP requires a different skill-set to those normally present in brand marketing departments. The conventional marketing and brand-building approach, characterized by a narrow, product focused selling proposition no longer adds sufficient customer value. The marketing task must be to move from brand engineering to UOP architecture. MT must relegate its traditional brand engineering tools, such as advertising and promotion, to an appropriate place in the overall UOP architecture and focus on the bigger issue of what creates customer value and enhance brand trust.

Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research
This research is subject to some limitations. First, the sample size was restricted to 300 due to costs and time reasons. Thus, the extent to which the results can be generalized to the whole population is questionable. Second, this study has been conducted in the absence of full competition. A better appreciation of the situation could be obtained in the presence of all the competitors in the local market. For instance, Mahanagar Telephone (Mauritius) Ltd is not fully operational. Third, although respondents agreed to participate in the survey, the reliability of their responses is still largely questionable.

Directions for Future Research
Future research can focus on investigating the perception of MT, the corporate brand among its staff and on measuring brand detachment over time.
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Appendix
Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

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<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 24 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 years or more</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I: Customers Sample Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Evaluation of MTBrand values</th>
<th>Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall of (Brand) Loyalty towards</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table II - Results of Correlation between Overall Evaluation of MT Brand
Values and Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT Customers

### Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Associations</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT</td>
<td>.650**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Positioning/Image</td>
<td>.616**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table III - Results of Correlation between Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Associations and Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT-Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Positioning/Image</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT</td>
<td>.616**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table IV - Results of Correlation between Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Positioning/Image and Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT-Customers
Table V - Results of Correlation between Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Trust and Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Trust</th>
<th>Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Trust</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation (Sig. 2-tailed)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation (Sig. 2-tailed)</td>
<td>.738**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table VI - Results of Correlation between Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Presence and Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Presence</th>
<th>Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Presence</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation (Sig. 2-tailed)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Evaluation of (Brand) Loyalty towards MT</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation (Sig. 2-tailed)</td>
<td>.333**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table VII - R values-Residential Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summary</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.747*</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>.550</td>
<td>.426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Positioning/Image, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Presence, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) values, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Trust, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Associations
### ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>67.257</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.451</td>
<td>74.098</td>
<td>.000a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>53.371</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120.628</td>
<td>299</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Positioning/Image, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Presence, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) values, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Trust, Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Associations

b. Dependent Variable: Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Loyalty

### Table VIII - Results of ANOVA-Residential Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficientsa</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.260</td>
<td>2.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) values</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Associations</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Trust</td>
<td>.607</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Presence</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Evaluation of MT (Brand) Positioning/Image</td>
<td>-.197</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>-.148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Overall Evaluation of MT Brand Loyalty

### Table IX - Summary of Unstandardised and Standardised Coefficients- Residential Customers

#### About the authors

Jayraj Roodurmun is a part-time lecturer in Marketing and Management in the faculty of Law and Management at the University of Mauritius. He is currently employed at Mauritius Telecom as Senior Relationship Management. He is also doing his PhD in the field of branding and destination loyalty. His areas of interest include Destination marketing and branding, service recovery and trust. Jayraj Roodurmun can be contacted at: jay1806@orange.mu.

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