

Examining the role of consumer hope in explaining the impact of perceived brand value on customer–brand relationship outcomes in an online retailing environment

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the role of *consumer hope* in explaining the impact of *perceived brand value* on *customer–brand relationship* outcomes in the context of *online retailing*. We scrutinise the moderating impact of customer goal attainment on the relationship between consumer hope and customer–brand relationship outcomes. Data were collected from 418 online shoppers. The results indicate that three dimensions of brand value had a positive impact on consumer hope. Consumer hope was also positively related to customer–brand relationship outcome variables and the moderating role of customer goal attainment was supported. Theoretically, this model highlights the important role that hope can play in a customer–brand relationship in an online retail environment.

1. Introduction

In the past two decades, online purchasing has grown substantially, and technological advancements have made purchasing experiences considerably more time-efficient, transparent and easier (Rosqvist and Hiselius, 2016; Mortimer et al., 2016). Between 2007 and 2012, global online retail sales grew from US\$236 billion to US\$521 billion have been estimated to reach \$1248.7 billion in 2017 (Verma et al., 2016). With the growth and availability of e-commerce platforms worldwide, greater price transparency and faster delivery times, customers have become more conscious of the value of this channel (Denegri-Knott, 2006; Nedergaard and Gyrd-Jones, 2013). Accordingly, scholars and practitioners alike need to better understand the factors that improve the relationship between consumers and online retailers in order to enhance brand value and, accordingly, grow revenue and profit (Goswami, 2015; Kim et al., 2015). With multi-channel retail business models becoming more dependent upon online sales it is vital to understand the factors that impact online purchases and repurchase intentions (Chen et al., 2016; Darke et al., 2016; Stathopoulou and Balabanis, 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Malhotra et al., 2017).

Customer-perceived brand value has been identified as a significant

factor impacting consumer relations with the brands offered by online retailers (Li et al., 2012). To date, the majority of research has focused on the relationship between perceived brand value and loyalty outcomes, and various indices of brand performance (see for example, Giovanis and Athanasopoulou, 2018). Less studied are the putative mechanisms through which customer perceptions of brand value influence loyalty outcomes, such as satisfaction with, trust in and commitment to the brand. Addressing this gap is important; given the increasing proportion of time customers spend interacting with brands online in the hope that they will have positive relationship experiences.

A positive relationship between a brand and its customers in an online retailing context is important to drive long-term commitment; as such, retailers continue to make investments to enhance customers' perceptions of the value of the brands they sell (Kim et al., 2006). Yet, simply measuring customer perceptions of the value of the brand does not adequately predict affective customer outcomes, as these perceptions can be formed based on external stimuli, such as advertising, pricing, word-of-mouth (eWOM) or economic grounds. This focus on external stimuli may overlook the scope of positive emotions and does not offer a complete psychological explanation of the relationship between customers and brands (Uncles et al., 2003; Jang and Mattila,

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2005). It is critical to consider the role of customer positive emotions in an online setting given the fact different strategic branding directions may be required in cases where the customer is unable to touch, feel, and test the product (Liu et al., 2017). In contrast to in-store retailing, where the customer is able to physically engage with the product, they are likely to obtain a higher level of confidence in quality and product/brand evaluations (Grohmann et al., 2007), unlike found in an online context. This research responds to calls to explore other possible psychological mechanisms that better predict the value of the relationship between brand value and customer outcomes in an online retailing context, while setting the scene for further inquiry (Palmatier et al., 2007; Hajli, 2014; Hallak et al., 2017). We argue that *consumer hope* is worthy of attention because it provides insights into customers' perceptions of, and feelings toward, customer–brand relationship outcomes in an online retailing context (Raggio et al., 2014).

When a customer makes an online purchase the concept of hope is important; unlike in-store purchasing, online purchasing requires some level of hope that consumers' goals (e.g., the product will perform as indicated) will be attained (Raggio et al., 2014). Furthermore, a customer also needs to invest *energy* (e.g., information search, analysis, comparison) and seek *pathways* (secure transactions, installments, effective refund policy) to overcome the risk associated with purchase-related goals (Chiu et al., 2014). Hope allows customers to approach purchase-related problems with a mind set and action plan suitable for a successful transactional experience (Macinnis and De Mello, 2005), which is likely to increase the levels of satisfaction with, trust in and affective commitment to the brand purchased. The intensity of hope for an online purchase and the level of hope to attain purchase-related outcomes, such as satisfaction, trust, and commitment, are likely to depend on customers' *goal attainment*. Customers are likely to achieve their goals because goal attainment is characterised by a gain that is positively valenced and encourages customers to purchase the brand if the need arises to maximise the gain (Zaleski, 1988). Put simply, goal attainment enables customers to infer a positive outcome from further interactions with the brand offered by an online retailer, and therefore repurchase the brand again. Consumer psychology research has highlighted the moderating role of goal attainment on the relationship between emotional responses and well-being outcomes (Loock et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2017). This current study is the first to test the moderating role of goal attainment in the relationship between consumer hope and satisfaction, trust, and commitment.

Therefore, this research examines consumer hope in the context of online brand consumption. Specifically, this study develops and tests a model to examine the psychological mechanisms that help customers attain positive consumption experiences through the purchase of brands online. Although prior research has been undertaken on customer-perceived brand value, hope and satisfaction, trust and commitment separately (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Macinnis and De Mello, 2005; Hallak et al., 2017), this is the first study to test the inter-relationships of the constructs mentioned above using theories from relationship marketing and the positive emotion literature. While the model developed and tested in this study could potentially be useful for offline settings with some cautious, the limited empirical evidence from online settings has influenced the choice of research context. The following section reviews the literature that guides the conceptual model.

2. Theoretical background

The basis of our conceptualisation is the Affect Theory of Social Exchange (Lawler, 2001), which explains how consumer hope can clarify the impact of customers' perceptions of the value of a brand on the relationship quality between the exchange partners (i.e., customer and brand). According to the theory, the attainment of implicit or explicit benefits by participating partners of joint social exchange activities determines the nature and intensity of the emotional experience

(Lawler, 2001). For instance, when exchange results are non-beneficial to either or both partners, partners experience negative emotions such as sadness, shame, and regret. When exchanges are successful, for example, the online purchase of a brand benefits the exchange partners – customer satisfied with brand, retailer paid on time – both exchange partners experience positive emotions and the quality of the mutual relationship is strengthened (Raggio and Folse, 2006).

2.1. Hope

Previous studies have proposed expectation, desire, and self-efficacy as those mechanisms that can provide justification for a customer's motivation to minimise the risk and uncertainty associated with an online purchase. Among others, hope is one of the key cognition-focused emotional mechanisms that involve both *will* (motivation) and *way* (action plans) components in explaining customers' online purchase and repurchase behaviours. Hope is a frequently experienced emotion in daily life. Research on the psychology of hope has shown that hope requires individuals to employ successful agency (i.e., goal-directed energy) and pathways (i.e., plans to meet the goals) (Snyder et al., 1991; Rego et al., 2014). The cognition-focused emotional status of hope is deemed appropriate for this study given the focus on participants' levels of hope for successful performance of a particular task (i.e., purchase of a brand) or goal (Snyder, 2000). Snyder et al. (1991) state that the agency component of hope provides the *will power* to achieve goals, whereas the pathway component promotes *way power*, which is necessary for the production of alternative paths.

Some practical approaches for developing hope include setting challenging goals or planning for contingencies (Luthans et al., 2006). For instance, consumers hope that their purchase of a brand online will result in overall satisfaction, which may then lead to trust and commitment. In contrast, evidence shows that when customers lack the emotion of hope in the goal-attainment process they are more likely to withdraw their efforts prematurely or fail to attain the given objective, despite their belief in their capabilities (Youssef and Luthan, 2007; Snyder et al., 1991). Literature in psychology has viewed hope and expectation as two distinct constructs. Expectation refers to a desire which can be fulfilled without setting any definitive goal and without any related action tendency (Stajkovic, 2006). Some studies (Youssef and Luthan, 2007) have labelled "expectation" as "passive hope", as opposed to "active hope", which is consistent with the view that has been promoted by Snyder et al. (2002), as well as by this current study. Hope implies that a person knows about their goal, agency and ways to achieve it (Locke and Latham, 2002). Likewise, optimism is similar to the agency component of hope (Magaletta and Oliver, 1999), but does not consider pathways by which desired outcomes may be achieved (Snyder, 1994).

Compared with studies on employee hope (Youssef and Luthan, 2007; Combs et al., 2010) in which the focus has been on hope's relationship with positive organisational behaviours and corporate social responsibility, there is limited research focusing on consumer hope. Previous studies have highlighted the role of hope in customer choices (Poels and Dewitte, 2008; Kim et al., 2012), or enhancing self-regulatory outcomes and ceasing maladaptive consumption practices (Macinnis and De Mello, 2005). Others have identified the positive relationship of hope with advertising and product evaluation and choice outcomes in medicines, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, healthcare and magazine brands (Macinnis and De Mello, 2005; Poels and Dewitte, 2008). Yet the role of hope in explaining the effects of the customer-perceived brand value on customer positive purchase experiences, such as satisfaction, trust, and commitment, have not been addressed (Poels and Dewitte, 2008; Kim et al., 2012). While studies show that customers' perceptions of the value of brands influence goal attainment (Oettingen et al., 2001), the understanding of which mechanism makes a brand successful in improving customer-brand relationship outcomes is limited especially in the online retailing context. The psychological

mechanism of consumer hope may answer when and how customers' perceptions are translated into a more specific relationship (from a customer point of view) and performance outcomes (from a brand point of view) both for customers and the brand.

2.2. Perceived value (quality, price, social and emotional)

Monroe (1979) defines value as the ratio of perceived benefits to perceived cost. Zeithaml (1988, p. 14) defines customer-perceived value as “a cognitive trade-off of sacrifices and benefits which are associated with consumption practices”. While early research on the concept has regarded perceived value as a uni-dimensional construct (Monroe, 1979; Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991), more recent research has shown agreement on its multi-dimensionality (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Ruiz et al., 2008; Leroi-Werelds et al., 2014). This study builds on the definition of Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and the operationalisation of four value types: *quality*, *price*, *social* and *emotional*. The scale's multiple value dimensions explain consumer choice better than does a scale of “value for money” with a single dimension (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Furthermore, unlike previous measures, Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) scale includes both rational (utilitarian) and emotional (hedonic) components. Finally, in contrast to other scales, this scale measures the perceptions of the value of brands prior to, as well as soon after, the purchase. The four dimensions of value and the predicted relationships with hope are explained in Section 3. Hypotheses development.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Customer-perceived brand value (quality, price, social and emotional) and hope

The customer-perceived value of *quality* is defined as the utility derived from the expected performance of a brand (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Previous research suggests that customers' perceptions of a brand's value that contribute to their overall well-being may have a positive impact on their level of motivation and behaviour towards the purchase of the brand (Bowly, 1977; Bretherton, 1985; Feeney and Noller, 1990). According to expectation theory, perception of quality may be created without actual experience with an online product/brand (Ha, 2006). In the context of online shopping where the product/brand is not physically available and cannot be felt or touched by the customer, perception of brand value (quality) may be generated through the interactivity, reliability, usability, content quality and the security of the online brand's platform (Chang and Chen, 2009). Scholars argue that the perceived brand value (quality) in an online transaction may affect the attitude of consumer towards a brand (Kim et al., 2004) and in particular, willingness to purchase which consequently may enhance consumers' psychological well-being. This argument is in line with Attachment Theory, which suggests that customer perceived brand value contributes in terms of promoting the physical and psychological well-being of a customer – which in turn improves their levels of motivation (will) and the number of alternatives (way) they undertake to attain their purchase-related goals (Feeney and Noller, 1990; Goldberg et al., 2013). As a customer experiences positive online purchase-related outcomes and perceives that the quality of the brand can improve their situation (physical and psychological well-being), they are likely to experience hope for continuing positive relationships between the brand and themselves. Thus, in the light of this argument, we hypothesise that:

H1. The customer-perceived brand value ‘quality’ has a positive impact on consumer hope in a purchase from an online retailer.

The customer-perceived value of *price* is defined as the utility derived from the product or brand due to the reduction of its perceived short-term or long-term price, or consistent low price (Sweeney and

Soutar, 2001). This perceived gain due to price reduction or very low price (in comparison with benefits received) is likely to influence customers' willingness and ability to purchase (and repurchase) the same brand. In other words, the perception of price value assures they enjoy additional utilities without incurring any extra cost. This additional utility is a positive disconfirmation, meaning that higher levels of consumer hope and greater reductions in perceived risk are experienced (Hallowell, 1996), resulting in comfort in a relationship with the brand (Jones and George, 1998). In an online purchase, when a customer perceives the existence of functional value, such as price in a certain brand, multi-faceted aspects of confidence are formed about the brand's online distributor or retailer. Confidence with a particular online brand nurtures a sense of safety with the desired price that a customer expects and will generate the motivation to transact online. This motivation constitutes considering alternatives to achieve purchase-related goals in an online setting. Therefore, we hypothesise:

H2. The customer-perceived brand value ‘price’ has a positive impact on consumer hope in a purchase from an online retailer.

The customer perceived *social* value of the brand is defined as the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self-concept (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The utility derived from the brand's ability to enhance social self-concept helps customers to attain goals related to their social status. Customers' perceptions of this type of utility lead to a general sense of confidence about desired outcomes in their personal lives and social status. This general confidence leads to more positive goal-specific thoughts (e.g., the expectancy of goal outcome). These goal-specific thoughts, in turn, engender the emotional response of hope as well as positive behaviours, which enable the customer to remain engaged in active social interactions (Snyder, 2002). Consequently, hope for an improved social self is more likely to be experienced, which ultimately affects the outcomes of the customer–brand relationship in terms of satisfaction, trust and commitment (e.g., cognitive and psychological adjustment). The advancement of online purchasing platforms has had a significant impact on consumers' social communication mode. For example, in the online environment, many clothing brands have shifted the value creation focus to enhancing customers' sense of identity and belonging (Rowley, 2009; Salonen et al., 2014). Consequently, online brands have tried to strengthen the social interaction among and between consumers and vendors to enhance the relationship between consumers and products. At the other end, customers are expected to purchase clothes in the hope of obtaining social identity and social self. Based on this argument we present the third hypothesis:

H3. The customer-perceived brand value ‘social’ has a positive impact on consumer hope in a purchase from an online retailer.

The customer-perceived *emotional* value of the brand is defined as the utility derived from the feelings that a product generates (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). In online transactions, emotional value seeking consumers effectively engage in interacting with brands and viewing product information in the online platforms (Yoo et al., 2010; Hsin Chang and Wang, 2011). Through these interactions, consumers try to provoke amusement, enjoyment, and hedonic benefits (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2011). Hence, the perception of value (in the form of emotions) develops gradually in consumers' mind. Positive affect or feelings that result from the customer's perception of the value of the online brand may stimulate an action tendency. Although it is occasionally inhibited for personal and social reasons, the inherent action tendency of hope is characterised by emotional and physiological states, which improve the perceived capacity to initiate and sustain movement along a pathway until the goal is reached. This positive emotional state further compels a customer to engage in the two inter-related cognitive processes of hope: agency thinking and pathways thinking. The positive emotional state of the customer improves the perceived capacity to initiate and sustain movement along the purchase process of the brand until purchase-

related positive outcomes are achieved. On the other hand, pathways thinking involves the production of plausible routes to relationship outcomes as well as a sense of confidence in these routes (Snyder, 2002). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H4. The customer-perceived brand value ‘emotional’ has a positive impact on consumer hope in a purchase from an online retailer.

3.2. Consequences of hope

3.2.1. Customer overall satisfaction

Overall satisfaction refers to a customer's general level of cognitive response, based on all of their experiences with the brand purchased from an online retailer (Oliver, 1993; Zhu et al., 2015). Inherent in most satisfaction models is that when a customer's perceived benefits increase in comparison to their perceived associated efforts, the customer feels satisfied (Snell et al., 2013). Similarly, satisfaction is said to be related to the confirmation of expectations (Agnihotri et al., 2016). In an online context, factors determining the level of perceived benefits from a certain brand may include convenience, perceived risk, product information and positive emotions. Positive emotions can contribute towards customers' perceptions that their benefits exceed the perceived cost associated with their purchase (Buck, 2004), resulting in a higher level of satisfaction. In the online context, where product brands are not tangible elements, consumers' positive emotions influence their assessment about online platforms' informativeness, effectiveness, and entertainment. This assessment determines the quality of consumers' experience with the online brand and if the expectations have been fulfilled (Mazaheri et al., 2012). Equity Theory (Hatfield et al., 1978) also provides support for the argument that agency and pathway components of hope have a positive impact on overall customer satisfaction. Equity Theory assumes that exchange partners (customers and the online retailer) seek to maintain an equal ratio between their inputs to the relationship and the benefits they receive (Hatfield et al., 1978). In a relational exchange, a customer's perceptions of the relative anticipated gains and costs of the exchange are important. Thus, we hypothesise that:

H5. Consumer hope has a positive impact on overall customer satisfaction with a brand offered by an online retailer.

3.2.2. Customer trust

Customer trust is defined as a customer's confidence in a brand's reliability and integrity (Redman et al., 2011). A brand's reliability and integrity are demonstrated through qualities such as being consistent, competent, honest, fair, responsible and helpful (Dholakia, 1997). Attribution theorists suggest that hope is related to the attribution of a positive outcome (a goal) to some external agent (the online retailer) (Zaleski, 1988). Such attributions lead to the desire in a customer to build and maintain trust in an online retailer offering a brand. These attributions form if the customer perceives that the brand from an online retailer acts with goodwill and portrays positive behaviour toward them (Delgado-Márquez et al., 2015). Prior empirical research repeatedly demonstrates that emotional responses elicited by the perceptions of value or benefits from a brand play a major role in customers' evaluations of, decisions about and attitudes toward the brand (Willemyns et al., 2003; Schoorman et al., 2007). In the context of online relationships between brands and consumers, the level of positive emotional responses would also be determined by the quality of interaction and communication with the online platforms. If the online retailer is capable of enhancing communication in terms of the quality and relevance of information and responsiveness, then it is more likely that consumers will obtain positive emotions because of their awareness of the benefits they may gain. This results in a higher level of trust in the brand. Customers who experience higher levels of hope toward an online brand should also experience higher levels of trust. Based on

this discussion, we hypothesise:

H6. Consumer hope has a positive impact on customer trust in a brand offered by an online retailer.

3.2.3. Customer commitment

Customer commitment can take multiple forms, such as affective, normative and continuance commitment (Meyer et al., 1997; Buch, 2015). This study focuses on affective commitment since it is more likely to be consistently associated with constructive attitudes and behaviours than continuance and normative commitment (Evanschitzky et al., 2006). The prevailing theoretical perspective for explaining how consumer hope increases affective commitment employs the basic tenets of Social Exchange Theory (Cook et al., 2013): individuals (i.e., customers) reciprocate what they hope to receive from the other exchange partner (i.e., their online retailer that offers a brand) (Ellemers et al., 1999; Fredrickson, 2001). In the hope of receiving a benefit from a brand, customers feel a desire and willingness to reciprocate that benefit, which further cultivates the emotion of hope to maintain a valued relationship with the brand (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). The affective response of hope to purchase a brand and receive a benefit from the online retailer then motivates customers to ‘think well of’, and ‘do well for’, the retailer (McCullough et al., 2004). Online retailers offer a variety of features via their online platforms to inform customers about the possible benefits, availability, and specification of brands. Some platforms also allow online customers to share their experiences with the brands or start dialogues with other customers who have used a specific brand. Therefore, online customers are provided with the chance to obtain product knowledge from both the online brands, as well as other customers. This leads to consumers' tendency to reciprocate the benefits attained from the relationship with online brands. This mutually beneficial relationship is likely to result in affective commitment and encourages future actions (Raggio and Folse, 2006; Dipietro et al., 2008; Buch, 2015). The following hypothesis encapsulates this reasoning:

H7. Consumer hope has a positive impact on customer affective commitment to the brand offered by an online retailer.

3.3. The moderating role of customer goal attainment

A goal can simply be seen as what an individual is consciously trying to achieve. More formally, it can be defined as an object which is consciously anticipated to be acquired, owned, displayed (i.e., products, brands) or targeted for a positive outcome (Elliot and Murayama, 2008). Implicit in this definition are two aspects. First, an individual's efforts should be conscious and, second, there should be some target – not necessarily realistic – which is anticipated to give a sense of achievement if attained (Latham and Locke, 2006). There has been a growing research focus on the association between consumer hope and brand-related performance (Kim et al., 2012). However, there seems to be a need for further research to identify the contingencies that facilitate the transformation of a customer's positive emotions, such as hope, into customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment.

Customer goal attainment as a social resource is likely to positively moderate the relationship between hope and satisfaction, commitment, and trust in the online shopping context. Research in psychology has addressed the moderating effect of goal attainment in studying the antecedents to well-being. For example, research identifies goal attainment as a key factor that diminishes the negative effect of goal conflict on well-being (Kehr, 2003). In online shopping transactions, customer goal attainment may be fulfilled via the online platforms that facilitate the effectiveness and efficiency of customer's tasks such as the purchase of an online brand. Higher levels of customer goal attainment resulting from purchasing and using a particular brand cause a high sense of achievement, resulting in a high level of intrinsic motivation.

The will component of hope encourages the customer to take favourable action (e.g., purchase or repurchase) for their own sake rather than the desire for some external reward. As a result, the customer is likely to experience higher levels of satisfaction, trust, and commitment. On the other hand, customers with low levels of, or without, goal attainment would have little sense of achievement, which may consequently result in less/no hope. The absence of hope is likely to hinder the process of the cultivation of customer satisfaction with, trust in, and commitment to the brand. Hence, we hypothesise that:

H8. Customer goal attainment positively moderates the relationship between consumer hope and overall customer satisfaction in a purchase from an online retailer.

H9. Customer goal attainment positively moderates the relationship between consumer hope and customer trust in a purchase from an online retailer.

H10. Customer goal attainment positively moderates the relationship between consumer hope and customer affective commitment in a purchase from an online retailer.

Bringing these hypotheses together, a model is proposed to describe the impact of customer-perceived brand value on consumer hope. This research further highlights the mediating role of consumer hope in the relationship between customer-perceived brand value and customer satisfaction, trust and affective commitment. This model is presented in Fig. 1.

4. Methodology

To enhance the speed of response and connect with a relevant audience (online shoppers), an online survey was employed (Schaefer and Dillman, 1998). The data was collected in 2016 from consumers who were screened to ensure they were online shoppers. An Australian market research company was employed to collect data from its panel, along with the guidelines to keep it as representative of Australian parameters as possible. For instance, the demographic profile of our sample (48.8% Male, 51.2% female) is closely aligned to Australian population data, (48.4% Male, 51.6% Female) The data was not collected for a specific brand as the primary aim of the study was to develop and test a model to examine the psychological mechanisms that help customers attain positive consumption experiences through the purchase of brands from online retailers (not a specific brand). However, in order to improve customers' focus on their choice of brands, the research team designed two screening questions, which conditioned respondents to consider their choices of brands, and their attitudinal and emotional responses to those brands, rather than their perceptions of general products;

- 1) Have you purchased a branded product online in last 30 days?
- 2) Which category type does that last brand that you purchased online fall under?

The market research company forwarded an email invitation to respondents explaining the nature of the study and the ethical considerations, together with an embedded URL link to the online survey. In order to reflect the context of the study, respondents were requested to answer questions relating to their shopping experience with online multi-channel retailers. There were 418 usable online surveys collected from Australian consumers who had purchased a brand from an online multi-channel retailer in the past three months. Respondents were female (51.2%), male (48.8%) and older than 18 years of age. Respondents were divided into five age categories: 18–25 (14.8%), 26–35 (18.7%), 36–50 (28.5%), 51–65 (22%) and above 65 (16%). Most respondents held undergraduate or higher qualifications (57.9%). Respondents also reported their weekly usage of the internet: less than 5 h (6.5%), from 5 to 15 h (41.1%) and more than 15 h (52.4%). When completing the survey, respondents were instructed to recall the last brand they purchased online.

The sample significance requires population or frame parameters such as its mean/standard deviation estimates which are tested against sample statistics using *t*-test for mean differences. Given that this study was based on the convenience sampling and population or frame size is not known, we used bootstrapping procedure (5000) (other than confidence intervals) to estimate a population parameter. As bootstrapping relies on random sampling with replacement, it allows assigning measures of accuracy (defined in terms of bias, sample significance, variance, confidence intervals, prediction error or some other such measure) to sample estimates. The other measure taken to improve sample significance was sample to variable ratios. Many researchers recommend at least 10 cases for each item in the instrument being used (J.C. Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994; J. Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). With the sample size (418 subjects) to variables (27 items) ratio is 15.48.

4.1. Measures

A 7-point Likert scale was used for all measures (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Scales were adapted from Sweeney and Soutar (2001) to measure the customer-perceived value dimensions (i.e., emotional, price, quality and social). Relationship quality constructs, including commitment, trust and satisfaction, used scales from De Wulf et al. (2001). To measure hope, Snyder's (1995) scales, which have been extensively used in consumer behaviour literature, were employed. Customer goal attainment was measured using scales from

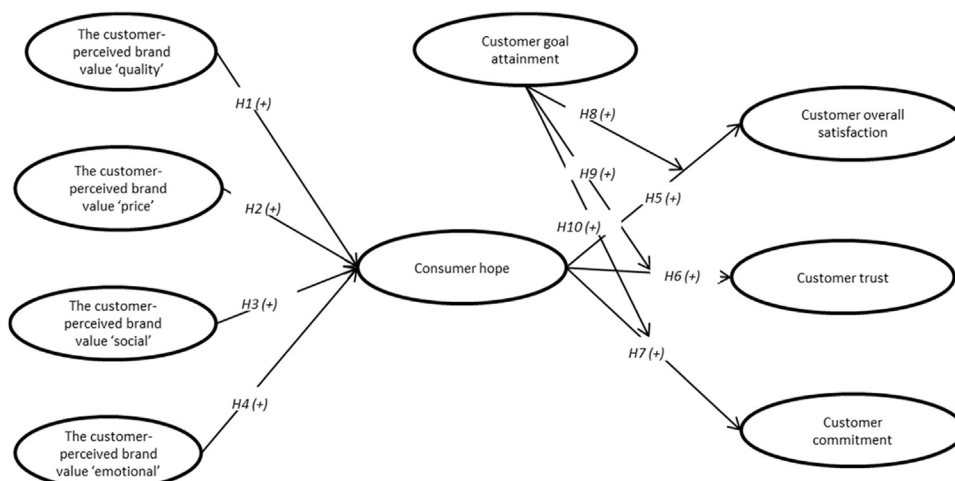


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

Table 1
CFA results.

		Estimate	Z-value	CR	AVE
Perceived brand value-quality 1	The brand that I purchased online has consistent quality.	.858	19.642	.858	.668
Perceived brand value-quality 2	The brand that I purchased online is well made.	.797	17.864		
Perceived brand value-quality 3	The brand that I purchased online will perform consistently.	.796	1		
Perceived brand value-price 1	The brand that I purchased online is reasonably priced.	.766	1	.816	.598
Perceived brand value-price 2	The brand that I purchased online offers value for money.	.849	16.005		
Perceived brand value-price 3	The brand that I purchased online was economical.	.697	13.629		
Perceived brand value-social 1	The brand that I purchased online would help me to feel socially accepted.	.856	19.619	.860	.672
Perceived brand value-social 2	The brand that I purchased online would improve the way I am perceived.	.779	17.490		
Perceived brand value-social 3	The brand that I purchased online will give me social status.	.823	1		
Perceived brand value-emotional 1	The brand that I purchased online is one that I enjoy.	.816	1	.868	.622
Perceived brand value-emotional 2	The brand that I purchased online would make me want to use it.	.809	19.023		
Perceived brand value-emotional 3	The brand that I purchased online is one that I would feel relaxed about using.	.812	19.121		
Perceived brand value-emotional 4	The brand that I purchased online would give me pleasure.	.713	16.031		
Consumer hope 1	I hope that the brand I purchased online will benefit me.	.865	1	.878	.706
Consumer hope 2	I hope the brand I purchased online will help me pursue my goals.	.846	22.212		
Consumer hope 3	I hope the brand I purchased online leads to my success.	.808	20.561		
Customer satisfaction 1	The brand that I purchased online is ideal.	.737	16.419	.803	.577
Customer satisfaction 2	This brand always returns the best value.	.762	17.122		
Customer satisfaction 3	I am very satisfied with my online purchase of this brand.	.762	17.122		
Customer trust 1	The brand I purchased online gave me a feeling of trust.	.820	1	.754	.606
Customer trust 2	The brand I purchased online gave me a trustworthy impression.	.734	16.132		
Customer commitment 1	I am willing "to go the extra mile" to remain a customer of this brand.	.818	1	.818	.601
Customer commitment 2	I feel loyal towards this brand.	.818	19.105		
Customer commitment 3	Even if I found that this brand was more difficult to buy, I would still make an effort to purchase it.	.682	15.006		
Customer goal attainment 1	I think I have achieved my goal by purchasing this brand online.	.656	1	.777	.539
Customer goal attainment 2	I think buying this brand online gives me a sense of achievement.	.730	13.856		
Customer goal attainment 3	I think my online purchase of this brand would help me achieve the goals that I have set for my life.	.809	15.103		

(N = 418), all values are significant at $p < .01$ level. Where: AVE = Average Variance Extracted and CR = Composite Reliability.

Elliot and Murayama (2008). Scale quality statistics are reported in Section 5. Results.

5. Results

5.1. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Psychometric properties of the constructs were evaluated by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the data using AMOS 23. The fit of the CFA for the scale data collected was found to be acceptable, with goodness-of-fit measures all appropriate ($\chi^2 = 632.092$, $df = 288$, $\chi^2/df = 2.195$, ($p < .01$), comparative fit index (CFI) = .956, incremental fit index (IFI) = .956, standard root mean square residual (SRMR) = .042, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .054). Table 1 shows that the values of the composite reliability scores of all constructs were above the recommended cut-off of .70, demonstrating good reliability (J. Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994; J.C. Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Table 1 further demonstrates that all item loadings are significant ($p < .01$), in support of convergent validity (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). This is supported by the average variance extracted of each construct being above the recommended .50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). We further conducted Chi-square difference tests for each of the above-mentioned constructs to see if the two constructs were indeed different. Significant chi-square values show that the pairs are discriminable. While some pairs of constructs exhibit high inter-factor correlations and their square root of AVEs is smaller than their inter-factor correlations, we understand that the same constructs were well established and their measures have been used extensively in the marketing literature (See the citations for sources of scales and pertinent literature in Section 4.1). As a further investigation, Chi-square difference test, was conducted to assess the discrimination between the pairs of the same factors. Chi-square difference tests support discriminant validity between each pair of constructs (Table 2).

5.2. Path analysis

In order to test the hypotheses, relationships were modelled (see Fig. 2) using Amos 23. The fit of the structural model was found to be acceptable, with significant chi-square $\chi^2 (222) = 3.585$ ($p < .01$), CFI = .907, IFI = .908, SRMR = .060 and RMSEA = .079. Overall variance explained ranged from 89.1% (TST) to 94.7% (SAT). Table 3 demonstrates the path estimates of the model.

5.3. Indirect effects

Following an approach employed by Zhao et al. (2010), bootstrapping procedures in AMOS 23 were used to further test the significance of the indirect effects of antecedents to hope on dependent variables through consumer hope. In this study, 5000 bootstrapping samples were generated from the original dataset (N = 418) by random sampling. According to the results: 1) perceived brand value (price) and perceived brand value (social) exerted their indirect effect on customer overall satisfaction, customer trust and customer affective commitment through the mediating effect of consumer hope; 2) despite having a significantly positive direct impact on perceived brand value (quality), consumer hope could not explain the relationship between perceived brand value (quality) and customer overall satisfaction, customer trust and affective commitment; and 3) perceived brand value (emotional) does not impact consumer hope significantly, nor does consumer hope mediate the impact of perceived brand value (emotional) on customer overall satisfaction, customer trust and affective commitment. The indirect effects of all three mediators and their associated 95% confidence intervals are displayed in Table 4.

5.4. Slope analyses for moderation

Slope analysis was performed to evaluate the moderation effect of customer goal attainment (CGA) on the relationship between the customer-perceived brand value, customer satisfaction, trust and affective commitment. Results demonstrate that goal attainment positively

Table 2
Inter-factor correlations.

	Mean	Standard Deviation	PBVQ	PBVP	PBVS	PBVE	HOPE	SAT	TST	COM	CGA
PBVQ	5.521	1.065	(.818)								
PBVP	5.419	1.064	.926	(.789)							
PBVS	4.358	1.536	.525	.582	(.820)						
PBVE	5.368	1.035	.611	.699	.381	(.773)					
HOPE	4.699	1.394	.552	.584	.711	.484	(.840)				
SAT	5.324	1.050	.909	.893	.694	.720	.700	(.760)			
TST	5.229	1.185	.813	.839	.747	.639	.758	.913	(.778)		
COM	4.842	1.327	.735	.803	.792	.544	.674	.956	.842	(.775)	
CGA	4.755	1.298	.659	.723	.835	.593	.842	.864	.873	.845	.734

(N = 418), all values are significant at p < .01 level. Shared Variance in diagonal. Where: PBVQ = Perceived brand value quality, PBVP = Perceived brand value price, PBVS = Perceived brand value social, PBVE = Perceived brand value emotional, HOPE = Consumer hope, SAT = Customer satisfaction, TST = Customer trust, COM = Customer commitment, CGA = Customer goal attainment.

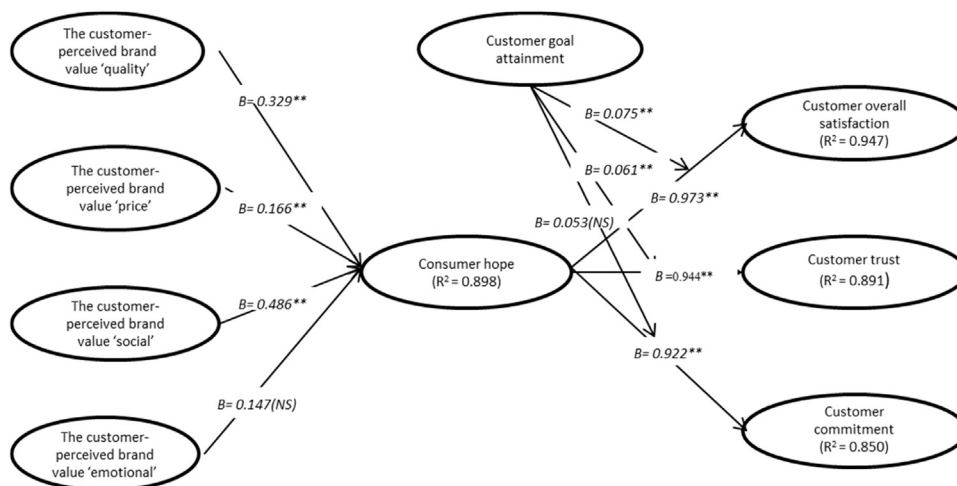


Fig. 2. Final model.

moderates the relationship between hope and customer satisfaction and trust, but does not have an impact on the effect of hope on customer affective commitment (see Figs. 3 and 4).

5.5. Moderated mediation

To further explore the relationship between four independent variables, IVs, (perceived value quality, perceived value price, perceived value emotional and perceived value social) and three dependent variables, DVs, (satisfaction, trust and commitment), we used

conditional process modeling to test for moderated mediation as outlined by Hayes (2012) using the PROCESS macro. Specifically, we examined the moderated mediation using customer goal attainment as moderator and consumer hope as a mediation (this model corresponds to Model 14 in Hayes, 2012 and generated 12 outcomes). Moderated mediation occurs when a path from IVi to DVi will be mediated by M1 and another path M1 to DVi (where I for IVs ranges from 1 to 4, for DV ranges from 1 to 3) is moderated by a moderator, V1 (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). Given that the aim of study was to examine the direct, mediated and moderated paths, no theoretical arguments were

Table 3
Path analysis.

Hypotheses	Estimate	Z-value	Accepted/Rejected
(H1) PBVQ has a significantly positive impact on HOPE	.329**	2.643	Accepted
(H2) PBVP has a significantly positive impact on HOPE	.166**	3.465	Accepted
(H3) PBVS has a significantly positive impact on HOPE	.486**	10.422	Accepted
(H4) PBVE has a significantly positive impact on HOPE	.147 ns	1.010	Rejected
(H5) HOPE has a significantly positive impact on SAT	.973**	14.376	Accepted
(H6) HOPE has a significantly positive impact on TST	.944**	14.847	Accepted
(H7) HOPE has a significantly positive impact on COM	.922**	14.461	Accepted
(H8) CGA moderates the relationship between HOPE and SAT	.075**	4.126	Accepted
(H9) CGA moderates the relationship between HOPE and TST	.0610**	3.06	Accepted
(H10) CGA moderates the relationship between HOPE and COM	.053 ns	1.96	Rejected
Variance explained (%) for HOPE	89.8		
Variance explained (%) for SAT	94.7		
Variance explained (%) for TST	89.1		
Variance explained (%) for COM	85.0		

N = 418, ** p < .01, Two-tailed tests. Ns = Non-significant. Where: PBVQ = Perceived brand value quality, PBVP = Perceived brand value price, PBVS = Perceived brand value social, PBVE = Perceived brand value emotional, HOPE = Consumer hope, SAT = Customer satisfaction, TST = Customer trust, COM = Customer commitment, CGA = Customer goal attainment.

Table 4
Bootstrapping indirect effects and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the mediational model.

Mediation	Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Point estimates	(95% CI) Bootstrapping (Lower bound-Upper bound)
PBVQ→HOPE→SAT	PBVQ	SAT	.321(ns)	(.025)–(.768)
PBVQ→HOPE→TST	PBVQ	TST	.311(ns)	(.017)–(.737)
PBVQ→HOPE→COM	PBVQ	COM	.304(ns)	(.027)–(.729)
PBVP→HOPE→SAT	PBVP	SAT	.161 [*]	(.064)–(.263)
PBVP→HOPE→TST	PBVP	TST	.157 [*]	(.063)–(.260)
PBVP→HOPE→COM	PBVP	COM	.153 [*]	(.061)–(.252)
PBVS→HOPE→SAT	PBVS	SAT	.473 ^{**}	(.390)–(.555)
PBVS→HOPE→TST	PBVS	TST	.459 ^{**}	(.372)–(.545)
PBVS→HOPE→COM	PBVS	COM	.448 ^{**}	(.365)–(.529)
PBVE→HOPE→SAT	PBVE	SAT	.143(ns)	(– .377)–(.502)
PBVE→HOPE→TST	PBVE	TST	.139(ns)	(– .364)–(.490)
PBVE→HOPE→COM	PBVE	COM	.136(ns)	(– .358)–(.478)

N = 418, Two-tailed tests. Ns = Non-significant, Where; PBVQ = Perceived brand value quality, PBVP = Perceived brand value price, PBVS = Perceived brand value social, PBVE = Perceived brand value emotional, HOPE = Consumer hope, SAT = Customer satisfaction, TST = Customer trust, COM = Customer commitment, CGA = Customer goal attainment.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

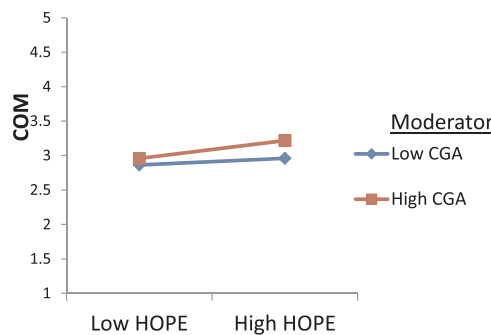


Fig. 3. CGA moderates the relationship between HOPE and SAT.

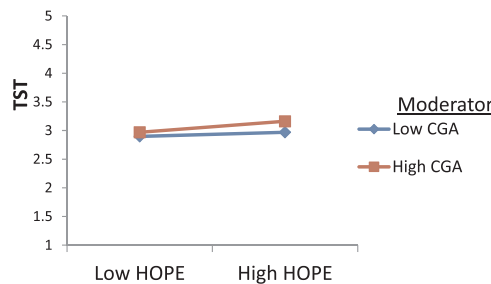


Fig. 4. CGA strengthens the relationship between HOPE and TST.

presented in the paper for moderated mediation relationships. Therefore, the analyses were reported as an additional exploration of moderated mediated relationship. Using four IVs, four DVs with one mediator and a moderator, the results are summarised in Table 5.

Results demonstrate that most moderated mediated relationships were not significant. Conditional indirect effect(s) of IV on DV at lower values (– 1) of the moderator i.e. consumer goal attainment was significant for CPVE→Hope→Trust and CPVS→Hope→Trust. Conditional indirect effect(s) of IV on DV at higher values (+ 1) of the moderator i.e. consumer goal attainment remained significant for CPVQ→Hope→Trust, CPVE→Hope→Trust and CPVS→Hope→Satisfaction.

6. Discussion

This research examined consumer hope in an online retailing context, and specifically tested a model of the psychological mechanisms that facilitate consumers’ positive experiences in such a context. By assessing the role of consumer hope in relational exchanges, our understanding of the customer–brand relationship is enhanced, leading to

implications for online retailers to garner higher levels of brand loyalty. It was hypothesised that customer-perceived brand value (in terms of quality, price, social and emotional dimensions) would have a positive impact on consumer hope. Each of these types of value was argued to increase customer confidence in the brand and with purchase-related outcomes, thus leading to higher levels of hope that such outcomes would be achieved (e.g., Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Three of the relevant hypotheses were supported (H1–H3): perceived brand value with regard to quality, price and social dimensions had a positive impact on consumer hope. However, the fourth hypothesis (H4) – perceived brand value with regard to the emotional dimension – was rejected. In this regard, it appears that consumer hope is predicted by customers’ perceived value in relation to the quality, price and social implications of the brand, but not the emotional dimension. Thus, perceptions of performance of the brand (i.e., quality) in terms of meeting purchase-related goals (Goldberg et al., 2013), perceptions of benefits outweighing costs in terms of price (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001), and perceptions of the extent to which the brand can enhance social self-concept (Snyder, 2002) create hope in the customer. However, the extent to which the brand creates positive feelings in the customer does not lead to the creation of hope. This is consistent with conceptions of hope as being a cognitive-focused state (e.g., Youssef and Luthan, 2007; Ojala, 2015), under which hope is composed of both agency and pathways to reach desired goals; quality, price and social dimensions of value appear therefore to be more goal-oriented than the emotional dimension.

The three hypotheses relating to the consequences of consumer hope (H5–H7) were all supported: hope positively predicted overall customer satisfaction, customer trust and customer affective commitment. As stated earlier, Equity Theory proposes that partners in an exchange seek to maintain an equivalent ratio of their inputs to the exchange with the benefits received. Consumer hope may facilitate perceptions of equity with the expectation that purchase-related goals will be achieved, thus leading to overall satisfaction (Buck, 2004). Similarly, if equity is achieved, or even expected, then customers’ confidence in the brand’s reliability is enhanced, resulting in trust in the brand offered by an online retailer (Redman et al., 2011). Further, as explained earlier under Social Exchange Theory, in the hope of receiving a benefit from a brand, customers will feel a willingness to reciprocate that benefit, which cultivates the maintenance of a valued relationship with the brand (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), thus resulting in commitment. Hopeful customers, therefore, express a range of positive outcomes with regard to the customer–brand relationship.

It was further hypothesised that customer goal attainment would moderate the relationship between consumer hope and overall satisfaction, trust and affective commitment (H8–H10). Customers reporting that they had achieved their purchase-related goals were

Table 5
Moderated mediation.

Independent variable	Dependent Variable	Conditional indirect effect(s) of IV on DV at lower values (− 1) of the moderator i.e. consumer goal attainment: (BootLLCI-BootULCI)	Conditional indirect effect(s) of IV on DV at higher values (+ 1) of the moderator, i.e., consumer goal attainment: (BootLLCI-BootULCI)	Moderation effect of consumer goal attainment on hope- > DV
CPVQ	SAT	− .063 (− .0977 to .0223)	.0529 (− .0103 to .1138)	.093**
CPVQ	TST	.0610 (− .014 to .135)	.106 (.035–.183)**	.047
CPVQ	COM	− .004 (− .081 to .067)	.022 (− .049 to .096)	.027
CPVP	SAT	− .0320 (− .101 to .040)	.063 (− .007 to .140)	.112**
CPVP	TST	.052 (− .011 to .123)	.107 (.043–.184)	.064*
CPVP	COM	− .007 (− .082 to .064)	.036 (− .032 to .116)	.051
CPVE	SAT	− .019 (− .090 to .053)	.051 (− .021 to .123)	.068**
CPVE	TST	.081 (.003–.161)**	.109 (.033–.189)**	.026
CPVE	COM	.012 (− .066 to .086)	.012 (− .065 to .090)	.001
CPVS	SAT	− .074 (− .189 to .036)	.131 (.024–.251)**	.162**
CPVS	TST	.044 (.055–.149)**	.160 (.058–.276)	.091**
CPVS	COM	− .057 (− .156 to .033)	.025 (− .070 to .134)	.065*

N = 418, Two-tailed tests. Where BootLLCI = Lower level Confidence Interval (95%), BootULCI = Upper level Confidence Interval (95%), PBVQ = Perceived brand value quality, PBVP = Perceived brand value price, PBVS = Perceived brand value social, PBVE = Perceived brand value emotional, HOPE = Consumer hope, SAT = Customer satisfaction, TST = Customer trust, COM = Customer commitment, CGA = Customer goal attainment.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

expected to be more satisfied, trusting and committed than those who did not. It was found that customer goal attainment moderated the relationship between consumer hope and customer satisfaction (H8) and trust (H9), but not commitment (H10). This is an interesting finding, which indicates that goal attainment facilitates the relationship of hope with satisfaction and trust – arguably more “state-like, cognition-focused” emotional responses – but not with commitment – arguably a more “trait-like”, or at least enduring, response. Perhaps in this sense, goal attainment or its absence creates a more immediate affective response that does not necessarily impact upon the more lasting effects of hope. Hopeful customers, versus those with no or low hope, are quicker in establishing their goals, with a sense of confidence that the pathways to achieve these goals will be effective (Snyder et al., 2002) and, thus, in terms of these findings, appear to be more consistent in their “trait-like” versus their “state-like” responses.

6.1. Implications

Globally, online purchasing through multi-channel retailers has grown substantially over the past two decades, driven by technological advancements, secure platforms and price transparency (Denegri-Knott, 2006; Nedergaard and Gyrd-Jones, 2013; Rosqvist and Hiselius, 2016). While earlier research has focused on examining drivers and barriers, such as trust and risk factors (Pappas, 2016; Suki and Suki, 2017), encouraging frequency of purchase (Martin et al., 2015) or customer loyalty (Mutum et al., 2014), this is the first study to examine consumer hope in the context of online brand consumption. It was proffered that consumer hope was worthy of attention as it provides new insights into customers’ perceptions of, and feelings toward, customer-brand relationship outcomes in an online retailing context (Raggio et al., 2014).

When a customer purchases a brand online from a multi-channel retailer they hope that the brand will meet their expectations; that is, it fits well, is of good quality and/or provides value for money. These purchase outcomes, overall satisfaction, trust and commitment in the brand are considered purchase goals that the consumer hopes to achieve. Hope is intensified in an online environment as the customer anticipates that the description and images portrayed on the retailer’s website are accurate reflections of the brand. In contrast, when purchasing in-store, a customer can easily determine brand quality, fit and conformance. Our findings determined that consumer hope positively predicted overall satisfaction, customer trust and affective commitment to brands purchased through online retailers. Put simply, the more hope a customer has that the brand will provide value, the more satisfied, trusting and committed they will be toward the brand. Accordingly,

multi-channel retailers should implement strategies to cultivate consumer hope. Kiosks or temporary pop-up shops would facilitate consumer experience touchpoints, where customers could touch, feel, taste and physically experience the product prior to purchasing online (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). Doing so would mitigate risk and improve feelings of hope that the brand will resemble the displayed product. The implementation of Click and Collect facilities, where customers could inspect brands purchased online and engage with the multi-channel retailer prior to consumption, would also improve a customer’s feelings of hope (Vyt et al., 2017). Further, it has been determined that a customer will invest time and energy in searching, evaluating and comparing brands online and seek ways to attain online purchase-related goals (Chiu et al., 2014). These pathways may include looking to multi-channel retailers to provide transactional facilities, like payment plans, price guarantees or easy return methods (Jeng, 2017). Such mechanisms will improve the customer’s confidence in achieving their purchase-related goals and this, in turn, improves the online purchase outcomes of overall satisfaction and trust. As such, multi-channel retailers should implement such online transactional devices.

6.2. Limitations and future directions

As with any study, this research contains limitations that suggest potential avenues for further research. The cross-sectional nature and single-level data collection put limitations on the generalisability of this current study. It is suggested that a longitudinal research design be considered to examine the relationships between perceived brand value, hope and online purchase outcomes of frequent and infrequent online shoppers. Another limitation of this current work is that it excludes other variables that might be perceived as close to hope, such as desire, expectation and optimism. A research design that establishes a control for these variables may bring about new insight. Further, an experimental approach could manipulate the levels of hope (High hope versus Low hope) to clarify its impact on online brand purchase outcomes and customer goal-attainment processes. We also accept that the use of cross-sectional data from a single source may create issues other than common source variance.

While the nature of online shopping engenders consumer hope – we hope the brands purchased online meet our satisfaction once delivered – it would be interesting to compare in-store purchasing of brands and whether variances exist between these two channels. Future research may also consider specific types of brand from an online retailer to validate the findings of our empirical outcomes.

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