



Measuring employee-consumer integrated retailer brand equity

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to develop and test a measure of integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) based on frontline fashion retail employees' internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) perceptions of the retailer's brand. Comparisons are made between two types of frontline employees, patronizing and non-patronizing. Using advanced PLS-SEM techniques, this research introduces a third order reflective-formative hierarchical component model (HCM) into the retailer brand equity domain. The research validates an IRBE model with four consumer dimensions and seven employee dimensions. Both types of employees value all four consumer dimensions; however, they value different employee dimensions. The IRBE model, when operationalized, can encourage closer integration of human resources and marketing functions, and enable practitioners to enhance their brand offerings and build a more cohesive retailer brand.

1. Introduction

Retailers have evolved from organizations that merely sell products, to multi-sensory brands (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004) that offer customers unique shopping experiences (Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Indeed, retailers have their own multi-dimensional brand equity (Anselmsson et al., 2017) as evidenced by their larger than ever presence on brand ranking lists (Interbrand, 2022) that now includes 38 brands that rely on retail operations to deliver their brand promise (i.e., Amazon, IKEA, Toyota, Apple) of which 14 are fashion, apparel and/or beauty retailer brands (i.e., Zara, Louis Vuitton, Sephora, Nike). Retailing is a complex and highly competitive industry, and building a strong retail brand requires an understanding of a variety of stakeholders. However, retailers struggle to find new ways to competitively differentiate and understand what drives value for different stakeholders (Deloitte, 2019). Retailer brands are not only influenced by external (i.e., consumers) perspectives (Biedenbach and Manzhynski, 2016; Swoboda et al., 2016), but also internal (i.e., employees) stakeholders which together represent key drivers of a retailer's business success (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). Retailers build and invest in their external brand equity to persuade consumers (Gil-Saura et al., 2016), yet they must also invest in their internal brand equity to attract the best employees (Sivertzen et al., 2013).

Frontline workers are said to be the backbone of an organization (McKinsey and Company, 2023). Retailers, in particular, understand the importance of not only creating better customer experiences, but also employee experiences, in order to be relevant and successful. Frontline

employees play a crucial role to a retailer's competitive advantage (King and Grace, 2009). A recent study suggests a strong connection between employee satisfaction (via online reviews on Glassdoor) and customer satisfaction (via the American Customer Satisfaction Index), whereby a 1-star improvement in an employer's rating (out of 5) was associated with a 1.3-point increase in customer satisfaction (out of 100) (Zhao and Chamberlain, 2019). However, the lines between customers and employees are becoming increasingly blurred. Gelb and Rangarajan (2014) describe frontline retail employees as integral elements of the retailer brand, as well as ambassadors of the brand. In today's highly competitive environment, retailers are acknowledging the importance and growing empowerment of frontline employees (Gill-Simmen et al., 2018; Li, 2022). Indeed, a recent study found 43% of shoppers are more likely to make a purchase if they have interacted with a frontline employee, and these shoppers were 12% more likely to visit the store again if the interaction was a positive one (Petro, 2019). Frontline employees are no longer merely 'cashiers' or 'sales associates'; they are 'shopper concierges' (Petro, 2019). This trend of employee empowerment is particularly relevant in the fashion industry, where employees perform not only traditional retail duties of selling product and delivering customer service, but they are also product experts, and responsible for educating and inspiring their customers and delivering personalized service. In other instances, employees also comfortably expressing their views on the retailer where they work. For example, while customers use social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to review products and services, employees also use online platforms such as glassdoor.com and indeed.com to review their

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experiences on the job. Furthermore, there is scholarly evidence of consumers who desire to be frontline employees of their preferred retailer (Wang et al., 2017; DeMotta and Sen, 2017). An employee review exemplar on [indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com) demonstrates the dual role of frontline employees as both workers and customers: “If you like fashion and clothing, it is a cool environment to be in and handle all the clothes, learn about them, how they’re made and be able to get first dibs on new products that come in” (Employee review of H&M, [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com), 2023).

A review of retailer brand equity (RBE) literature reveals a wealth of research that examines consumers’ brand perceptions (Arnett et al., 2003; Haelsig et al., 2007; Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019; Pappu and Quester, 2021; Zhang et al., 2023), limited research examines employees’ brand perceptions (King and Grace, 2009) and how frontline employees influence the retailer brand (Jung et al., 2021), and even fewer studies investigate frontline retail employees’ perceptions of their retailer brand (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020). RBE research remains fragmented and scarce (Londoño et al., 2016, 2017) and there is a “... lack of clarity and consistency in the structure of retailer equity dimensions” (Anselmsson et al., 2017, p. 196). Few RBE studies address fashion retailing (Haelsig et al., 2007; Swoboda et al., 2016). Troiville et al. (2019) also expressed the need for RBE research in other countries and sectors.

Researchers have called for brand equity research from an internal (i. e., employee) stakeholder perspective (Davicik et al., 2015). Acknowledging the lack of attention paid to internal perspectives in the brand equity literature, scholars have called for more research on *internal or inside-out* perspectives (Poulis and Wisner, 2016; M’zungu et al., 2010). There is a growing interest in employee-based brand equity (King et al., 2012; Alshathry et al., 2017; Erkmén, 2018; Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020; Deepa and Baral, 2021; Li, 2022), however, the literature to date does not closely examine brand perceptions of frontline retail employees, nor has it studied frontline retail employees’ dual role as employees and consumers. Indeed, with the growing empowerment and influence of frontline retail employees (Li, 2022; Raggiotto et al., 2023) comes the need for retail practitioners to better understand this valuable stakeholder, and this current research addresses this need by closely examining frontline fashion retail employees’ perceptions of RBE.

This research views frontline retail fashion employees as dual stakeholders. Thus, the purpose of this research is to examine frontline retail employees’ internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) perceptions of RBE. This study develops and tests a measure of integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) and identifies key factors that influence frontline employees’ perceptions of RBE in fashion retailing. The research also examines if and how patronizing frontline retail employees’ (PFREs) (employees who frequently shop at their retailer) perceptions differ from non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs) (employees who infrequently shop at their retailer). This research is important because frontline employees’ perceptions of the retailer’s brand can have important implications on RBE.

A key contribution of this study is validation of an integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) model that consists of four consumer-based dimensions and seven employee-based dimensions. An importance ranking of the dimensions suggests that frontline employees’ perceptions are primarily influenced from their external perspective of the brand as a consumer and secondarily influenced from their internal perspective as an employee; this finding emphasizes the importance of also examining employees’ views as consumers. The use of importance rankings, when tracked and managed over time, can help marketing and human resources practitioners pinpoint where resources should be allocated across the brand. Retailers can also leverage segmentation strategies among their frontline employees and use these insights to potentially enhance their employees’ perceptions of their retailer brand. The findings from this research suggest frontline employees not only view their retailer as a place to work, they also view their retailer as a place to shop.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Retailer brand equity

Aaker’s (1991, 1996) simple parallel structure and Keller’s (2001) complex multi-step approach to customer-based brand equity (CBBE) laid the foundation for the development of other CBBE models (Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Christodoulides et al., 2006, 2015; Nam et al., 2011). While CBBE studies have examined product (Yoo and Donthu, 2001) and service based (Nam et al., 2011) brands, RBE studies focus on *retailers as brands*. Overall, the differences in country of study, nomenclature, retail sector, number and type of dimensions contribute to the domain’s fragmentation and lack of unity. Several RBE studies take a cross-sectoral approach (Swoboda et al., 2007, 2009, 2016; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Dabija et al., 2014; Anselmsson et al., 2017) where different sectors of the retail industry are examined, from department stores to fashion, grocery and DIY (do-it-yourself) stores. Swoboda et al. (2013a, 2013b) conceptualized RBE as a one-dimensional construct and used Verhoef et al.’s (2007) retail brand equity scale (strong, well-known, favourable, unique). Samu et al. (2012) and Dabija et al. (2014), like Swoboda et al. (2013a, 2013b), took a direct approach to measuring RBE but developed their own items. White et al. (2013) adopted Yoo and Donthu’s (2001) unidimensional scale to measure RBE. Several studies (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a, 2006b; Baldauf et al., 2009; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Das et al., 2012; Choi and Huddleston, 2014; Das, 2015; Londoño et al., 2016) adopted Aaker’s (1991) four CBBE dimensions (awareness, associations, perceived quality, loyalty) to develop a measure of RBE. However, studies that adopted Aaker’s (1991) four CBBE dimensions did not adapt their models to reflect the retailing context (Troiville et al., 2019). Furthermore, merely applying CBBE frameworks to “... measure retailer brand equity may lead researchers into the downward spiral of a poor and inadequate conceptualization” (Troiville et al., 2019, p. 74). Thus, studies that incorporate other retailer-specific dimensions are aligned with a more contemporary definition of RBE that considers ‘store attributes’ (Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019), specific and essential retail dimensions such as ‘access’ and ‘employees’ (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Swoboda et al., 2007; Troiville et al., 2019), and ‘private brands’ (Troiville et al., 2019). Other commonly used dimensions within RBE models are ‘price/value’, ‘service quality’, ‘product quality’, ‘store/brand image’, ‘trust’ and ‘assortment’. The studies that incorporated ‘brand/store image’ as an RBE dimension (DeCarlo et al., 2007; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017) draw on Keller’s (2001) brand resonance framework.

The conceptualization of RBE with antecedents (or not) highlights the theoretical debate on the structure of RBE, and whether its dimensions operate in a parallel or sequential fashion. Contemporary RBE measurement models predominantly extend Aaker’s (1991) simple parallel-structured four-dimensional CBBE model. Though influential and often cited, Keller (1998) model is less preferred from a conceptualization and operationalization perspective, due to the complexity in testing the multi-step process. Arnett et al. (2003), following Aaker’s (1991) parallel structure model, empirically validated a multi-dimensional consumer-based measure of RBE. Whereas Aaker’s (1991) model was designed to measure a product-based brand (e.g., Coca Cola), Arnett et al. (2003) sought to measure a fashion retailer brand. Thus, they adapted Aaker’s (1991) model and added retailer specific constructs. Arnett et al.’s (2003) model includes ‘awareness’, ‘loyalty’, ‘service quality’, ‘product quality’ and ‘value’. Considered a seminal RBE study, Arnett et al.’s (2003) retailer index’s strength (i.e., parsimony) could also be its’ weakness (i.e., lack of depth). Thus, future research could consider the addition of other retailer specific dimensions such as ‘store image’ and ‘retailer trust’. These retailer specific dimensions are critical since they differentiate a retailer brand (e.g., Nordstrom) from a product brand (e.g., Adidas Originals Stan Smith).

Pappu and Quester (2006a) extended and tested Aaker’s (1991) CBBE model. They retained Aaker’s (1991) four key constructs

(‘awareness’, ‘associations’, ‘perceived quality’ and ‘loyalty’). Pappu and Quester (2006a) accounted for retailer specific dimensions by defining associations as ‘retailer image’ and defining ‘perceived quality’ as the retailers’ total ‘products and services offering’. Their results confirmed that ‘perceived quality’ is a distinct and important dimension of RBE (Pappu and Quester, 2006a). Gil-Saura et al.’s (2013) RBE model was the first to extend Keller (1998) multi-step brand equity process. Their model includes ‘store image’, ‘perceived value’, ‘trust’ and ‘store awareness’, and ‘consumer satisfaction’ mediates the relationship between ‘store equity’ and ‘loyalty’ towards the store. Gil-Saura et al.’s (2013) results reveal positive relationships between almost all store attributes (i.e., ‘store image’, ‘perceived value’, ‘store awareness’) and RBE, except ‘trust’. They also showed positive relationships between ‘store equity’ and ‘consumer satisfaction’, along with a positive and significant influence of ‘consumer satisfaction’ on ‘loyalty’. Swoboda et al. (2016) empirically tested their RBE model across four different retail sectors (i.e., fashion, electronics, DIY and grocery retailers). Their conceptualization of RBE followed Keller (1998) and Gil-Saura et al.’s (2013) multi-step approach whereby five retail attributes (‘assortment’, ‘price’, ‘layout’, ‘communication’, ‘service’) lead to RBE, which in turn, leads to ‘intentional loyalty’ (Swoboda et al., 2016). Çifci et al. (2016) compared the validity of Yoo and Donthu’s (2001) product-based CBBE model with Nam et al.’s (2011) service-based CBBE model, and applied them to fashion, grocery brands and private label brands within retailing. Their model measured ‘brand awareness’, drawing on Aaker (1996) and Keller’s (2003) definition, and demonstrated ‘brand awareness’ influences ‘brand satisfaction’ and ‘brand loyalty’. Anselmsson et al.’s (2017) model supports ‘awareness’ as an antecedent of RBE, and RBE contains four constructs (‘customer service’, ‘product quality’, ‘pricing policy’, ‘physical store’) and ‘retailer trust’ mediates the relationship between RBE and ‘loyalty’. Their study has important implications for RBE literature as it supports the integration of retail-specific attributes (i.e., ‘store image’) and furthers empirical research on multi-step (i.e., sequential) RBE models in other retail sectors, which has seldom been tested in the literature. Whereas Anselmsson et al. (2017) draws upon retailer image-based attributes and retail trust and reputation elements (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000), Troiville et al. (2019) draws upon consumer experiences at the store level (Keaveney and Hunt, 1992) to develop a new measure of RBE. They identify eight retailer brand equity dimensions (‘atmosphere’, ‘product quality’, ‘product value’, ‘assortment’, ‘employees’, ‘private brands’, ‘convenience’, ‘access’), and RBE is found to be an important and relevant predictor of ‘loyalty’, ‘attitude’ and ‘word-of-mouth’ (Troiville et al., 2019).

2.1.1. Retailer trust

Trust relies on each party in a relationship to fulfil their obligations (i.e., competence), act in a reliable manner (i.e., benevolence), and act with integrity (i.e., integrity) (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Lassar et al. (1995) found that consumers place high value in brands they trust. Keller (2003) viewed trust as a higher-order association that consumers hold for a brand. Trust has been associated with the retailer’s reputation and emerges from consumers interactions with the retail organization itself (Burt and Davies, 2010). Retail scholars have investigated the role trust plays in retailers’ brand building efforts (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000; Haelsig et al., 2007; Swoboda et al., 2009; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Lee and Lee, 2018). However, trust has not been widely examined as an outcome of RBE. Trust has been defined in terms of risk reduction (Haelsig et al., 2007), reliability and integrity (Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2009), brand associations (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009), reputation (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000; Lee and Lee, 2018) and consumers’ confidence in the retailer (Anselmsson et al., 2017). When a consumer trusts the retailer brand, they expect the retailer to deliver on their promise of product and service quality. Haelsig et al. (2007) believe retailers should place greater emphasis on trust because of the

importance of experience and credence criteria in evaluating service.

The review of RBE literature reveals ‘trust’ has been conceptualized as either a dimension of RBE (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Haelsig et al., 2007; Swoboda et al., 2009; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Lee and Lee, 2018) or an outcome (Anselmsson et al., 2017). Jinfeng and Zhilong (2009) included ‘trust’ as a component of retailer associations, which are linked to consumers’ memories of a retailer (Pappu and Quester, 2006a, 2006b). Their results found ‘trust’, as a dimension of RBE, precedes retailer ‘loyalty’. Lee and Lee (2018) and Burt and Carralero-Encinas (2000) viewed retailer trust as part of reputation, which represented the less tangible dimensions of store image. Gil-Saura et al. (2013) conceptualized trust as a dimension of RBE, but their hypothesis was not supported. The results of their study and previous consumer branding literature has shown trust positively influences brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005), and suggests there’s an opportunity to explore trust as an outcome of RBE. Anselmsson et al.’s (2017) study was also the first known study to align with Keller’s (2001) four step brand resonance framework, that validated retailer trust as a mediator between RBE and loyalty. Although retailer trust has been somewhat overlooked within the RBE literature, recent studies suggest an opportunity to further explore retailer trust as a mediator in the relationship between RBE and retailer loyalty.

2.1.2. Retailer loyalty

Loyalty can be defined as attitudinal or behavioural (Dick and Basu, 1994; Peppers and Rogers, 2017). Attitudinal loyalty refers to a consumer’s preference for a brand and behavioural loyalty refers to their actual behaviour and patronage activity. Although behavioural loyalty is more easily measured, attitudinal loyalty protects the relationship from competitive pressures. Swoboda et al. (2009) measured loyalty from both attitudinal (i.e., willingness to recommend) and behavioural (i.e., commitment to the retailer brand) perspectives. Swoboda et al. (2016) refer to behavioural loyalty as consumers’ intentional ‘readiness to re-purchase at a retailer or to recommend it to others’ (p. 265). Pappu and Quester (2006a, b) also align with a behavioural approach and define retailer loyalty as consumers’ intentions to purchase from the retailer as their primary choice. Jinfeng and Zhilong (2009) align with Arnett et al.’s (2003) definition of retailer loyalty whereby consumers are committed to purchasing products and services from preferred retailers, despite situational influences and marketing efforts which can lead to switching behaviour.

Loyalty is conceptualized as a dimension of RBE in parallel-structure studies (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a, b; Baldauf et al., 2009; Swoboda et al., 2009; Das et al., 2012; Das, 2015; Londoño et al., 2016). However other studies investigate a two-step process where RBE leads to loyalty (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Allaway et al., 2011; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2013a, 2013b; Çifci et al., 2016). Most recently RBE studies aim to understand how consumers perceive the brand and how the elements are related. Thus, it is now viewed as a sequential process whereby RBE mediates the relationship between retailer trust and loyalty (Anselmsson et al., 2017), or is an outcome of RBE (Troiville et al., 2019). Loyalty is well represented in RBE studies, and the most recent research suggest it is as an outcome of RBE. This view of loyalty aligns with Keller’s (2003) multi-step brand resonance framework, which has not yet been widely examined empirically within the RBE literature.

2.2. Employee based brand equity

Retail scholars have argued that an additional stakeholder perspective (e.g., employee) is critical to fully understand and measure RBE (Christodoulides et al., 2006; Davcik et al., 2015). Boukis and Christodoulides (2020) echoed Veloutsou and Guzmán (2017) and Christodoulides and de Chernatony’s (2010) observations regarding the wealth of CBBE studies and the lack of EBBE research. Aligning with Baumgarth

and Schmidt's (2010) definition of EBBE, they note "... EBBE captures the perceived added value that employees receive as a result of employee-based brand building efforts" (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020, p. 1). The EBBE literature is limited, and from a retailing perspective, even less is known about employees' contribution to the RBE building process. Miles and Mangold (2004) define EBBE as "... the process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organizational constituents" (p. 68). They proposed that employees impact several key facets of business from brand equity, brand messages and advertising to compensation, corporate culture and quality of service delivery; all of which are relevant elements to retail organizations. Although their propositions were not empirically validated, their ideas inspired EBBE future research.

DelVecchio et al. (2007) acknowledged the plethora of CBBE studies and the scarcity of studies that consider employees' perceptions. They proposed a model to test whether an organization's brand equity influences prospective employees' perceptions of job opportunities, while focusing on employee benefit dimensions. DelVecchio et al. (2007) found that companies with higher perceived brand equity are associated with greater internal opportunities, and an organization's strong brand equity positively affects perceptions of skill development and job seekers' perceptions of expected work ethic. Their results also suggest job seekers perceive working for companies with strong brand equity would build power on their resume. Most importantly, the study concluded the higher the resume power (i.e., having a strong brand on the resume) the lower the participants' salary demands were when accepting a job offer.

King and Grace (2009) advocated for a 'third perspective of brand equity' and coined the term employee-based brand equity (EBBE). King and Grace (2009) drew upon internal brand management theory and extended Keller's (1998) cognitive psychology approach to brand equity and conceptualized EBBE as encompassing dimensions of internal brand management (information generation, knowledge dissemination, openness, the human factor), employee brand knowledge benefits (role clarity, brand commitment) and EBBE benefits (brand citizenship behaviour, employee satisfaction, intention to stay, positive employee word-of-mouth). This was the first comprehensive conceptualization of EBBE in the literature that moved it towards a more contextual approach (vs. Keller's 1998 connectionism thinking). King and Grace (2009) established a new foundation to measure EBBE and presented an opportunity to understand the unique relationship between the employee and the organization by expanding on existing brand equity theory.

King and Grace (2010) empirically tested King and Grace's (2009) EBBE model. Their results represented EBBE as a multidimensional construct and found openness positively influences information generation and knowledge dissemination; the human or 'H' factor (i.e., organizations treating employees with respect) has a positive effect on openness and knowledge dissemination; information generation has a positive effect on knowledge dissemination; knowledge dissemination has a positive effect on role clarity and brand commitment; role clarity has a positive effect on EBBE benefits; and brand commitment has a positive effect on EBBE benefits (King and Grace, 2010).

King et al.'s (2012) EBE scale, developed and validated through a rigorous scale development process, consists of three dimensions: brand endorsement (defined as what employees say), brand consistent behaviour (defined as what employees do) and brand allegiance (defined as what employees intend to do in the future). Furthermore, the EBE scale allows organizations to demonstrate a more balanced approach to brand management, by incorporating internal and external brand perspectives. Their scale has been applied across a variety of industries and contexts including employee influencers (Smith et al., 2021).

A review of the EBBE literature reveals two types of dimensions: 1) employee-benefit dimensions, and 2) employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions. The employee-benefit dimensions relate to the

psychological contract employees have with their employers (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Lester and Kickul, 2001) and employee's perceptions of the work they do in exchange for the benefits of working for the organization. Employee-behaviour/perception dimensions are more complex than employee benefits and refer to the behavioural and cognitive attributes that reflect employees' willingness to participate and contribute to a retailer's brand success (King et al., 2012). In the literature, EBBE is mostly conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct with two to three constructs. Three studies (King et al., 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016; Smith et al., 2021) adopt King et al.'s (2012) three EBBE dimensions (brand endorsement, brand consistent behaviour and brand allegiance). Li (2022), Boukis and Christodoulides (2020), Tsang et al. (2011) and Burmann et al. (2009) draw upon identity theory to conceptualize EBBE.

3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) model is conceptualized (see Fig. 1) and integrates four consumer-based brand equity (CB-RBE) dimensions and seven employee-based retailer brand equity dimensions (EB-RBE), which leads to the formation of integrated retailer brand equity (IRBE) and ultimately retailer loyalty (RL), whereby retailer trust (RT) mediates the relationship between IRBE and retailer loyalty (RL).

The two main constructs, CB-RBE and EB-RBE, provide external (i.e., employee as consumer) and internal (i.e., employee as employee) brand perceptions respectively, and contribute to the formation of a broader construct, IRBE. The model draws upon Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) multi-step approach whereby RT mediates the relationship between IRBE and RL. It is unique from other RBE models that typically model all RBE dimensions in a parallel fashion. The conceptual model includes four CB-RBE first order lower order constructs (LOCs), each of which have been previously validated. They are discussed below.

Product quality represents consumers perceptions of the level of quality of the products sold by the retailer (Anselmsson et al., 2017). In fashion, revenues from the sales of products (i.e., clothing, accessories, shoes) represents 99.2% of clothing retailers' total operating revenues (Canadian Industry Statistics, 2017). Therefore, product quality is integral to the conceptualization of RBE in fashion retailing. Several retail scholars have validated product quality's importance in the measurement of RBE (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Allaway et al., 2011; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019).

Store image is a combination of functional (i.e., physical store appearance) and symbolic (i.e., consumer associations of store atmosphere) elements. Anselmsson et al. (2017) include retailer image dimensions in their RBE model and refer to the concept as consumer perceptions of the physical store, its appearance and its associations. The store image dimension is important to include in our conceptual model because it is examined in a bricks and mortar fashion retailing context. Store image and its influence on RBE is supported in a variety of previously validated RBE measurement models (Pappu and Quester, 2006a; Gil-Saura et al., 2013) and it has been conceptualized as: physical store (Anselmsson et al., 2017), atmosphere (Troiville et al., 2019), layout (Allaway et al., 2011), physical facilities (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009); and store design (Swoboda et al., 2007). The store image dimension is what differentiates a consumer-based product brand (e.g., Levi's, a pair of jeans) from a consumer-based retailer brand (e.g., Levi's, the retail store), thus it is an essential retailer specific dimension, especially for fashion retailers.

Price/value is defined as the price the consumer paid for the product or service relative to the overall value they believe they received from the retailer. Swoboda et al. (2007) note that price alone is not the main factor in generating consumer satisfaction and consumer loyalty in the long term. When a consumer is assessing the price/value of a retailer's brand (vs. the assessment of a product brand alone), they are considering the price of the product, the service they received and the value they believe they received, among other factors. However, individuals

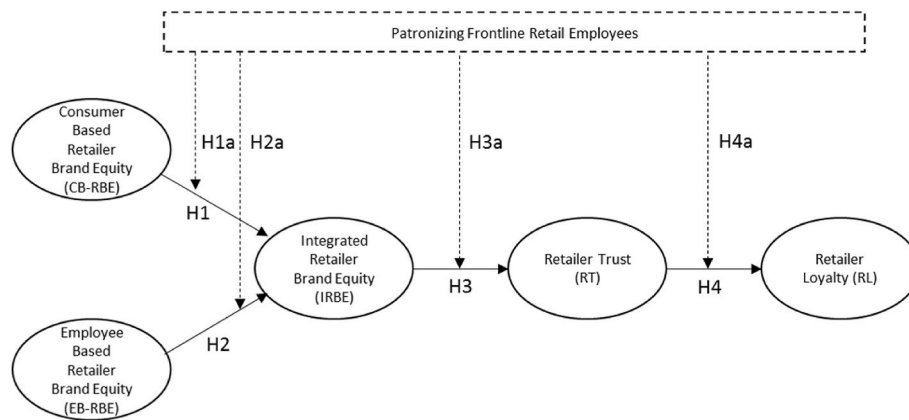


Fig. 1. Conceptual model and hypotheses.

perceive price/value differently. Several scholars (Arnett et al., 2003; Allaway et al., 2011; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017), found value or price quality influences RBE, thus we also believe price/value is an essential component to include in the conceptual model and will be positively associated with IRBE.

Service quality refers to consumers' perceptions of the quality of the services the retailer delivers (Anselmsson et al., 2017). Service quality is conceptualized as an antecedent (Swoboda et al., 2007, 2009; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009) or dimension (Arnett et al., 2003; Allaway et al., 2011; Jara and Cliquet, 2012; Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017) of RBE. In fashion, the array of services a retailer provides, such as product customization, tailoring or experiential retail, can be a key differentiator (Cullen, 2019). Consumers can create customized Nike shoes or monogram their Louis Vuitton handbag (Steel, 2018). In their examination of the German fashion sector, Swoboda et al. (2016) found service was not a key driver of RBE. Instead, they found consumers to be more focused on price, assortment and layout. However, their definition of service quality did not consider after sales service (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Pappu and Quester, 2008) or service reliability (Pappu and Quester, 2008). Gil-Saura et al. (2013) included service quality measures in their store image dimension (e.g., 'This store offers excellent customer service', 'This store has friendly personnel'), and found it to be an important dimension of RBE. Thus, it is hypothesized that service quality is positively associated with IRBE. An integrated framework to measure the effects of CB-RBE on IRBE is proposed, whereby the effects of all four CB-RBE dimensions are positively associated with IRBE. Thus, hypothesis 1 is stated as.

H1. The dimensions of CB-RBE (including product quality, store image, price/value, service quality) are positively associated with IRBE.

Aligning with the review of the EBBE literature, IRBE is conceptualized to include two categories of EBBE dimensions, including four employee-benefit dimensions, and three employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions. They are discussed below.

The employee-benefit dimensions refer to employees' perceptions of the work they do in exchange for the benefits of working for the organization and relate to the psychological contract employees have with their employers (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Lester and Kickul, 2001). *Internal advancement*, an employee benefit, is defined as an employee's ability to advance their career (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Cardy et al., 2007) at the retailer where they work. *Skills development* refers to the ability to develop skills at their current employer but also gain relevant skills that make them marketable to other organizations (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Cardy et al., 2007). *Resume power* is the strength of the company name on their resume which can assist them when searching for another job (DelVecchio et al., 2007). *Work demands* is defined by work ethic, and performance on the job (DelVecchio et al., 2007) as well as task demands (Lievens and Highhouse (2003)). These four employee

benefit dimensions reflect frontline employees' perceptions of employee-benefits related to their retailer's brand equity.

The three employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions are now discussed. *Brand endorsement* (or positive referrals by employees) can produce impressive organizational benefits (King et al., 2012). It measures what employees say, including verbal and non-verbal behaviours (Henkel et al., 2007; King et al., 2012). Miles and Mangold (2004) define employee branding, a concept analogous to brand endorsement, as "the process by which employees internalize the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organization constituents" (p. 68). This draws on the theory of reasoned action where the best predictor of future behaviour is the intention to act (Schiffman et al., 2001). In marketing literature, word of mouth (WOM), has garnered much attention as of late (Wentzel et al., 2014) as brands want to know what their consumers are saying about them. The concept of brand endorsement follows the same logic; employers want to know what their employees are saying about them, and they hope it's positive. *Brand allegiance* in the context of employees is analogous to the concept of purchase intentions in the context of consumers. It measures what employees intend to do in the future (King et al., 2012). Brand allegiance refers to employees' willingness to remain working at the retailer for a period of time; thus, remain committed to the organization (King et al., 2013). Hiring, firing and training drain company resources, therefore employers want to know if their employees intend to remain with them (King et al., 2012). *Brand consistent behaviour* speaks to the types of employee behaviours that align with the company values and can enhance internal brand management efforts (King et al., 2012), yet they are not prescribed behaviours such as the ones in a job description. An analogous term, brand citizenship behaviour, was a critical behavioural element to successful internal brand management (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005; Burmam et al., 2009b). Brand consistent behaviour measures what employees do (King et al., 2012). The relationships between all seven EB-RBE dimensions and IRBE are hypothesized as follows.

H2. All EB-RBE dimensions (including internal advancement, skills development, resume power, work demands, brand endorsement, brand allegiance, brand consistent behaviour) are positively associated with IRBE.

The retailer brand equity literature has paid little attention to trust, despite its association with overall brand equity (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017). Having a trustworthy retailer brand reduces risk for consumers (Haelsig et al., 2007) and improves a brand's strength for all stakeholders. Trust can also relate to the employee's confidence in their employer and their perceptions of their reputation (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000). Given the importance of continuing to study multi-step retailer brand equity structures, and Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) finding that trust is an outcome of RBE,

hypothesis 3 is stated as.

H3. IRBE is positively associated with retailer trust.

Similar to trust, there is divergence among researchers regarding whether loyalty is a dimension of RBE (Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a, 2006b; Swoboda et al., 2009; Das, 2015), or a consequence (Anselmsson et al., 2017; Martenson, 2007). A number of studies found loyalty is an outcome of RBE (Allaway et al., 2011; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Swoboda et al., 2016; Troiville et al., 2019). Given trust's association with overall brand equity (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017) and loyalty's widely studied role as an outcome of RBE, we posit the two dimensions should be examined together in one model. Following Anselmsson et al. (2017) empirical research that confirmed trust mediates the relationship between RBE and loyalty, it is proposed that frontline employees operate similarly to consumers in that they need to trust the retailer before they are loyal. There is sufficient evidence leading to the fourth hypothesis.

H4. Retailer trust mediates the relationship between IRBE and retailer loyalty.

Employee patronage literature studies employees' roles as consumers (Abston and Kupritz, 2011). This study focuses on frontline employees, who have dual responsibilities as service providers and consumers (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012) at the fashion retailers where they work. This critical yet overlooked retail stakeholder provides important internal and external brand perceptions. Abston and Kupritz (2011) found employees who were consumers before becoming employees had stronger perceptions of the services provided by their retailer. Given PFREs experiences as consumers, we believe they will positively moderate all relationships within the IRBE model. Therefore, we propose the following four hypotheses.

H1a. PFREs (compared to non-PFREs) positively moderate the relationship between CB-RBE and IRBE.

H2a. PFREs (compared to non-PFREs) positively moderate the relationship between EB-RBE and IRBE.

H3a. PFREs (compared to non-PFREs) positively moderate the relationship between IRBE and RT.

H4a. PFREs (compared to non-PFREs) positively moderate the relationship between RT and RL.

4. Methodology

4.1. Study design and measures

A cross-sectional research design was chosen to understand how factors vary across organizations, situations, stakeholders or other units at a point in time (Easterby-Smith et al., 2013). Cross-sectional surveys are beneficial in allowing the researcher to assess relationships between variables, differences among sub-groups and identifying mediators and/or moderators (Visser et al., 2000). Frontline employees working at a variety of fashion retailers in major metropolitan centres in Canada were asked about their perceptions of their retailer brand at a point in time. An initial item pool was generated based on a comprehensive literature review of previously validated measures. Items were adapted and/or added to ensure the scale was relevant in a fashion retail context. To test the proposed IRBE model, a cross-sectional online survey was developed and deployed using Qualtrics. Qualtrics was retained to recruit respondents for this study; 361 total responses were obtained, of which 313 were useable. During the development of the survey instrument, one pre-test was conducted with 52 respondents to ensure the survey was error-free, could be completed within a reasonable time and contained understandable questions. An expert judging phase was also convened to provide evidence of face validity for the proposed item pool

and evaluate each item for relevance and clarity, and review the soundness of the scale. Following Hardesty and Bearden's (2004) suggested practices, a panel of four expert judges (leadership consultant, business professor, marketing/branding practitioner, marketing strategy professor) were asked to assess face validity of the initial item pool. The results of the pre-test and expert judge panel led to the addition of questions for the following eight constructs: store image, internal advancement, skills development, work demands, brand endorsement, brand consistent behaviour, retailer trust and retailer loyalty. Survey items were revised for three constructs: product quality, price/value and service quality. Minor wording modifications were made to the introduction, employee demographics and characteristics questions. A 6-point Likert type scale was used with anchors of 1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree. 6-point Likert scales do not have mid-points and are also referred to as forced-choice scales (Chang, 1994; Chyung et al., 2017). Compared to 5 or 7-point scales, the 6-point scale avoids the 'neither agree nor disagree' answers (Cummins and Gullone, 2000). The initial survey items (as they were presented during the pre-test with respondents and expert judges) are shown alongside the final survey items, in Appendix A. The constructs, final survey items and sources are shown in Appendix B.

Common method bias can be an issue when data are collected through one common source (Podsakoff et al., 2003). When designing the online survey, we implemented several procedural remedies, suggested by MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012) to minimize specific effects. These included: 1) explaining the importance of the study to improve respondents' motivations, 2) using concise language to avoid confusion, 3) minimizing its length to mitigate mood state influence, 4) ensuring anonymity to avoid respondents from answering in a socially desirable way, 5) including temporal and spatial separation of key areas of the survey (i.e., screening demographics, employment information, consumer based questions, employee based questions, other demographics) to ensure accuracy of responses 6) adding attention checks to maintain consistency of responses, 7) adding some open ended questions to ensure a balance of perspectives and avoiding leniency biases, and 8) using previously validated scales to avoid acquiescence biases. Statistical procedures to detect common method bias included a full Collinearity assessment in section 5.1.

4.2. Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit frontline fashion retail employees for this study. The respondents had to meet the following qualifying criteria: 1) 18 years or older, 2) currently working as a frontline employee at a fashion retailer, 3) residing in a major metropolitan area in Canada (e.g., Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto or Ottawa), 4) working at the fashion retailer for at least 3 months and 5) employed as a part-time or full-time employee (note: temporary or seasonal workers were excluded). Respondents who did not meet all five screening criteria were disqualified and redirected to the end of the survey. Hair et al. (2017) provide sample size recommendations in PLS-SEM for a statistical power of 80%, referencing Cohen (1992). A model with a maximum of seven arrows pointing to a construct (which is the case for this study) requires 80 observations for detecting R^2 values of at least 0.25 (with a 5% probability of error) (Hair et al., 2017). 361 total responses were obtained, however 48 were removed because of partial responses and/or they failed the attention checks. Thus, 313 responses were received, satisfying the study's respondent screening criteria and sample guidelines. The sample consisted of 190 females, 121 males, and 2 identified as other. 75.7% of the respondents were full-time employees and 50.8% indicated their job title was 'sales associate' and the majority of respondents (82.8%) work at clothing/apparel retailers (see Appendix C).

4.2.1. Patronizing and non-patronizing frontline retail employees

To test hypotheses 1a-4a, frontline employees are segmented into

two groups: patronizing frontline retail employees (PFREs) and non-patronizing frontline retail employees (non-PFREs). Retail patronage refers to the consumer who patronizes a retailer and its store (Darden et al., 1983). The retailing literature has focused on the behavioural aspects of patronage and views it from a consumer's perspective (Blut et al., 2018). Retail patronage behaviour can be measured by the number of store visits and store preference (Pan and Zinkhan, 2006), customer satisfaction (Babin et al., 1994), patronage intention (Baker and Meyer, 2012) or shopping frequency (Chang et al., 2015). Grewal and Levy (2007) advocate for behavioural measures of retail patronage (i.e., shopping frequency) and Mortimer et al. (2016) argue it has more managerial relevance than repurchase intentions alone. Scholars have argued increased shopping frequency reduces perceived risk and improves likelihood of future purchasing behaviour (Min, Overby and Im, 2012). In the retail literature, shopping frequency is measured with binary scales (frequently or infrequently) (Mortimer et al., 2016; Blut et al., 2018) or ordinal scales (Chang et al., 2015). Mortimer et al.'s (2016) grocery focused study stratified 'frequent' and 'infrequent' shoppers; frequent shoppers were defined as making 4–6 transactions in a 12-week time period and infrequent shoppers made only one transaction in the same time period. Drawing upon literature, the respondents in this study were asked, "Since you began working for this retailer, how frequently do you shop there?". Participants who answered, 'very frequently (every week)' or 'frequently (several times per month)' were categorized as PFREs (N = 176). Participants who answered 'occasionally (once per month)', 'rarely (several times per year)', 'very rarely (once per year)' or 'never' were categorized as non-PFREs (N = 137).

4.3. Estimation procedure

Research goals, data characteristics and model characteristics were carefully considered when estimating the relationships in the structural equation model. The goal of this research is to develop theory by integrating two perspectives (consumer and employee) into one model and focus on explaining the variance in the endogenous variables (retailer trust and retailer loyalty). Thus, regarding research goals, PLS-SEM is the most suitable SEM technique. The sample size for this study (N =

313) aligns with the sample sizes of other brand equity studies from the literature review. Although PLS-SEM is known for working efficiently and achieving high levels of statistical power with small sample sizes, it can also handle large sample sizes. Hair et al. (2017) explain that larger sample sizes increase the precision and consistency in PLS-SEM estimations. The model contains reflective and formative constructs, has constructs with multi-item measures and is a complex model with many structural model relations (type II reflective-formative HCM). "Estimation of complex models with many latent variables and/or indicators is often impossible with CB-SEM" (Hair et al., 2017, p. 27). Further, CB-SEM is more commonly used on models with mainly reflective indicators (Diamantopoulos and Riefler, 2011). SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015) software was used for the path model estimation procedures. The sample demographics were analysed separately with IBS SPSS statistical software. Hair et al. (2019, 2017) eight-stage systematic approach to applying PLS-SEM was followed.

4.4. Structural and measurement model specification

The first order LOCs (perceived quality PQ, store image SI, price/value PV, service quality, SQ, internal advancement IA, skills development SD, resume power RP, work demands W, brand endorsement BE, brand allegiance BA, and brand consistent behaviour BC) and their respective indicators are specified reflectively. A Type II: reflective-formative hierarchical component model (HCM) is specified whereby the LOCs point towards the indicators (see dotted box on left side of Fig. 2), the first order LOCs point towards the second order higher order constructs (HOCs) (CB-RBE and EB-RBE), whose arrows point towards their HOCs (IRBE). HCMs require researchers to evaluate the measurement model of the LOCs as well as the measurement model of the HOC as a whole (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Two measurement (outer) models and the structural (inner) model are illustrated in Fig. 2.

The repeated indicators approach can be problematic when a reflective-formative HOC is also the dependent variable in a path model (Sarstedt et al., 2019) since the HOC's variance would be fully explained by the LOC resulting in a R² value of 1.0. The HOC in this study also serves as a dependent construct, thus, the embedded two-stage approach

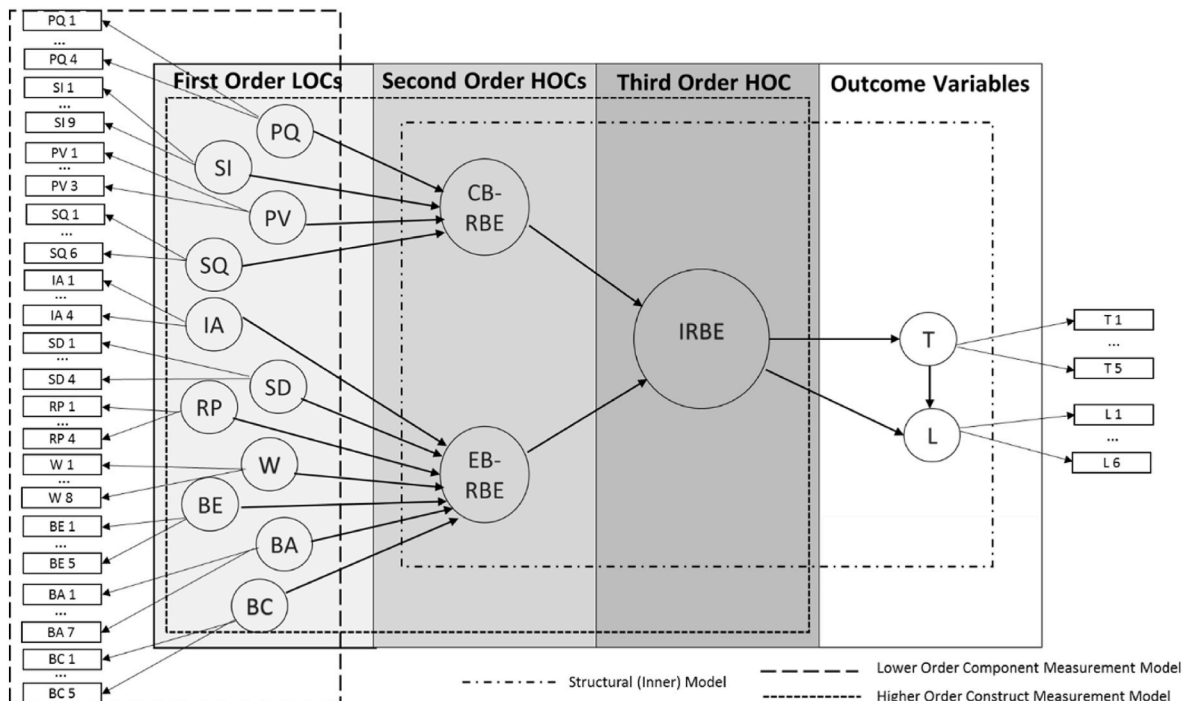


Fig. 2. Measurement (outer) and structural (inner) HCM

is used.

4.5. Data examination and PLS path model estimation

The full data set ($N = 313$) was thoroughly inspected and no missing data, suspicious response patterns or outliers were found. The detection of outliers was achieved through a univariate examination of each of the original 69 variables used in this study. None of the observations contained exceptionally high or low values. Therefore, all 313 responses were retained for the next stage of analysis. Data were also inspected using two measures of data distribution, skewness and kurtosis. Twenty-eight items are negatively skewed, 26 are peaked (leptokurtic) and 10 are flat (platykurtic); thus, less than half of the items are not normally distributed. The study includes 69 indicator variables (i.e., items) that were used to examine the relationships between the LOCs, HOCs and latent variables (LVs).

5. Results

5.1. Measurement model assessment

This stage assesses the measurement (i.e., outer) models of the LOCs and the overall HOC using SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015). The evaluation of the measurement models within the HCM follows Sarstedt et al.'s (2019) guidelines, and includes two phases.

5.1.1. Phase one

The evaluation of the measurement model of the LOCs includes: internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Results of internal consistency reliability (see Table 1) show all variables fall within the acceptable lower (i.e., Chronbach's alpha) and upper limits (composite reliability), therefore, all variables are retained at this preliminary assessment stage.

Convergent validity analysis was conducted including outer loadings, indicator reliability and AVE. A latent variable should explain at least half of each indicator's variance. Thus, each outer loading should be 0.708 or higher, since 0.708^2 equals 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). The PLS algorithm was run for three times, each time items not meeting the minimum threshold were removed from the model, leaving 52 indicators. Results of the final round of convergent validity analysis, including outer loadings, indicator reliability and AVE, are reported in Table 2.

To assess discriminant validity, three measures were examined: cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker criterion, and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations. Rule of thumb states the indicator's outer loading on the associated construct should be greater than any of its cross-loadings (i.e., its correlation) on other constructs (Hair et al.,

Table 1
Internal consistency reliability analysis.

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

2017). Table 3 presents the results of the cross-loadings for the 52 indicators (in the rows) and 13 latent variables (in the columns). The cross loadings meet the required threshold levels.

The square root of AVE for each latent variable is larger than the corresponding latent variable correlations, therefore, discriminant validity has been established according to the Fornell-Larcker analysis (see Table 4).

The HTMT values for all pairs of constructs are examined in matrix format. All values should be lower than 1, and ideally lower than the recommended threshold value of 0.90 (Henkel et al., 2007; Hair et al., 2017). Results of the HTMT analysis are shown in Table 5.

The results show one potentially problematic correlation between BE (Brand Endorsement) and BA (Brand Allegiance) with a HTMT ratio of 0.912, which is slightly above the 0.90 threshold but below 1. It may suggest a lack of discriminant validity. An additional HTMT test (HTMT Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected Analysis via Bootstrapping in SmartPLS 3) is conducted to see whether the HTMT values are significantly different from 1. Specifically, the BE → BA relationship is examined since its HTMT ratio was 0.912, slightly above the 0.90 threshold. These HTMT confidence interval values, along with the values for all other combinations of constructs show there are no confidence intervals containing the value of 1, therefore, discriminant validity is established.

5.1.2. Phase two

The evaluation of the measurement model of the overall HOC includes three criteria: convergent validity, collinearity between indicators and significance and relevance of the outer weights. The embedded two stage approach was used to conduct the analyses. To assess the convergent validity of the formative measurement model, a redundancy analysis is conducted (Chin, 1998). This study contains three formative HOCs: CB-RBE, EB-RBE and IRBE. The CB-RBE analysis yields a path coefficient of 0.855 and R^2 of 0.731, which are above the recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50 respectively (Hair et al., 2017). The EB-RBE analysis yields a path coefficient of 0.912 and R^2 of 0.831. The IRBE analysis yields a path coefficient of 0.680 and R^2 of 0.463, which are slightly below the recommended thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50 respectively, but not significantly different (Hair et al., 2017). The results showed each formatively measured construct (i.e., CB-RBE, EB-RBE and IRBE) is correlated with a reflective measure of the same construct and convergent validity of the overall HOC is supported. The collinearity analysis of the model produces VIF values of 2.385 for CB-RBE and 2.385 for EB-RBE, which are lower than the recommended threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017) as well as the conservative threshold of 3.0 (Hair et al., 2019). Thus, it is concluded there are no collinearity issues, and the model is not affected by common method bias.

5.2. Structural model assessment

The results from stage one of the embedded two-stage approach are used to evaluate the structural model. Collinearity is not an issue, as there are no VIF values above 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017). The results of significance and relevance testing (i.e., running the PLS-SEM algorithm with bootstrapping) are summarized in Table 6.

The hypothesized relationships are listed in the first column, followed by path coefficients, t values, p values, bias corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals (BCa) and significance testing at the 1.0% level. Fifteen of the sixteen hypothesized relationships are supported. One relationship is not supported (IRBE → RL). Since RT is conceptualized as mediating IRBE and RL, the relationship between IRBE, RT and RL are further examined via mediator analysis. The research findings provide evidence to support H1, H2, and H3.

Looking at the relative importance (path coefficients) of the consumer-based dimensions, the results reveal service quality (SQ) is most important (0.544), followed by product quality (PQ) (0.370), and price/value (PV) (0.233). In contrast, store image (SI) has the least

Table 2
Convergent validity analysis.

	Latent Variable	Number of Measures	Indicators	Loadings	Indicator Reliability (square root of loadings)	AVE			
CB-RBE	Store Image	3	image_1	0.690	0.476	0.524			
			image_2	0.780	0.608				
			image_7	0.697	0.486				
	Product Quality	4	product_1	0.887	0.787		0.707		
			product_2	0.905	0.819				
			product_3	0.852	0.726				
			product_4	0.706	0.498				
	Price/Value	3	price_1	0.842	0.709		0.687		
			price_2	0.783	0.613				
			price_3	0.860	0.740				
	Service Quality	6	service_1	0.828	0.686		0.667		
			service_2	0.789	0.623				
			service_3	0.838	0.702				
			service_4	0.808	0.653				
			service_5	0.795	0.632				
			service_6	0.843	0.711				
EB-RBE	Brand Allegiance	5	allege_1	0.764	0.584	0.617			
			allege_5	0.731	0.534				
			allege_6	0.854	0.729				
			allege_7	0.783	0.613				
			allege_8	0.791	0.626				
			Brand Consistent Behaviour	5	consist_1		0.755	0.570	0.585
					consist_2		0.725	0.526	
					consist_3		0.767	0.588	
	consist_4	0.798			0.637				
	consist_5	0.779			0.607				
	Brand Endorsement	3	endorse_1	0.821	0.674	0.681			
			endorse_2	0.865	0.748				
			endorse_3	0.789	0.623				
	Internal Advancement	4	advance_1	0.766	0.587	0.627			
			advance_2	0.851	0.724				
			advance_3	0.838	0.702				
			advance_4	0.702	0.493				
	Resume Power	4	resume_1	0.834	0.696	0.739			
			resume_2	0.856	0.733				
			resume_3	0.866	0.750				
			resume_4	0.882	0.778				
	Skills Development	4	skills_1	0.885	0.783	0.716			
			skills_2	0.827	0.684				
			skills_3	0.826	0.682				
skills_4			0.844	0.712					
Work Demands	2	work_1	0.850	0.722	0.641				
		work_6	0.748	0.560					
Outcome Variables	Loyalty	4	Loyalty_1	0.699	0.489	0.533			
			Loyalty_2	0.743	0.552				
			Loyalty_3	0.767	0.588				
			Loyalty_4	0.709	0.503				
	Trust	5	Trust_1	0.831	0.691	0.736			
			Trust_2	0.858	0.736				
			Trust_3	0.840	0.706				
			Trust_4	0.896	0.803				
			Trust_5	0.863	0.745				

bearing on employees' external brand perceptions (0.076). For employee-based dimensions, frontline employees' brand allegiance (BA) is most important (0.245), followed by skills development (SD) (0.221), brand consistent behaviour (BC) (0.221), resume power (RP) (0.218) and brand endorsement (BE) (0.154). Internal advancement (IA) (0.110) and work demands (WD) (0.076) do not highly influence employee's brand perceptions. The relative importance of IRBE on the two endogenous constructs RT and RL reveals frontline employees' perceptions of RT is most important (0.657). Whereas, frontline employees' perceptions of RL has relatively weak importance. Perceptions of RT on RL are relatively important (0.336). Table 7 organizes the hypothesized relationships and their respective path coefficients from highest importance to lowest importance.

Understanding the relevance of the constructs can also be evaluated through analysis of total effects. The total effects from the consumer-based exogenous constructs on the endogenous constructs are all statistically significant at the 5% level, except Store Image → Retailer

Loyalty. The total effects from the employee-based exogenous constructs on the endogenous constructs are all statistically significant at the 5% level. The results of the R^2 values of the endogenous latent variables RT and RL reveal IRBE is an important and relevant predictor of RT (0.432) which has a moderate value and RL (0.143) which has a weak value. The predictive relevance (Q^2) results reveal both endogenous constructs are larger than zero. RT has a higher value (0.30) and exhibits medium predictive accuracy, and RL (0.07) exhibits small predictive relevance of the PLS path model. These results indicate support for the model's predictive relevance regarding the model's endogenous latent variables. The f^2 effect size results indicate CB-RBE and IRBE have a substantive impact on the R^2 values of RT, and EB-RBE has a small to medium effect. However, CB-RBE, EB-RBE and IRBE have small effects on the R^2 values of RL, and RT has a small to medium effect. The q^2 effect size results indicate CB-RBE has a medium effect on the Q^2 values of RT, and EB-RBE has a small effect and IRBE has a negative effect. A negative effect occurs when the endogenous construct's Q^2 value increases when an exogenous

Table 5
HTMT analysis.

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

Table 6
Significance and relevance.

Hypothesized Relationships	Path Coefficients	t Values	p Values	95% Confidence Intervals	Significance (p < 0.05)
CB-RBE → IRBE	0.397	26.849	0.000	[0.366, 0.424]	Yes
SQ → CB-RBE	0.544	32.053	0.000	[0.513, 0.579]	Yes
PQ → CB-RBE	0.370	21.528	0.000	[0.340, 0.407]	Yes
PV → CB-RBE	0.233	18.386	0.000	[0.212, 0.261]	Yes
SI → CB-RBE	0.076	17.899	0.000	[0.069, 0.085]	Yes
EB-RBE → IRBE	0.681	34.416	0.000	[0.645, 0.723]	Yes
BA → EB-RBE	0.245	29.667	0.000	[0.232, 0.264]	Yes
SD → EB-RBE	0.221	27.046	0.000	[0.207, 0.238]	Yes
BC → EB-RBE	0.221	28.537	0.000	[0.205, 0.235]	Yes
RP → EB-RBE	0.218	20.454	0.000	[0.200, 0.242]	Yes
BE → EB-RBE	0.154	25.031	0.000	[0.143, 0.167]	Yes
IA → EB-RBE	0.110	14.946	0.000	[0.097, 0.126]	Yes
WD → EB-RBE	0.076	16.935	0.000	[0.068, 0.085]	Yes
IRBE → RT	0.657	12.475	0.000	[0.546, 0.754]	Yes
RT → RL	0.336	3.877	0.000	[0.157, 0.494]	Yes
IRBE → RL	0.063	0.638	0.524	[-0.123, 0.268]	No

construct is omitted from the model. CB-RBE has a small effect on the Q² values of RL, however, EB-RBE have no effect, and IRBE and RT have negative effects. The model has achieved the relevant evaluation criteria, therefore, as per the guidelines of Shmueli et al., (2019), the model is assessed for out-of-sample predictive power (PLSPredict) and the results are presented (Table 8).

For RL (loyal_1 ... loyal_4), the PLS-SEM values for all items are less than the LM values, indicating high predictive power. For RT (trust_1 ... trust_5), the majority of the items in the PLS-SEM analysis yields smaller prediction errors compared to the LM, indicating medium predictive power. Thus, the model exhibits moderate to high predictive power.

5.3. Mediator analysis

The indirect effect is expressed as the product of the path coefficient from IRBE to RT (0.658) and RT to RL (0.329), via the mediating

Table 7
Relative importance of hypothesized relationships.

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

Table 8
PLSPredict results.

Item	PLS-SEM		LM	PLS-SEM - LM
	Q2predict	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE
loyal_1	-0.008	1.299	1.342	-0.043
loyal_2	0.032	1.389	1.462	-0.073
loyal_3	0.087	1.351	1.524	-0.173
loyal_4	0.025	1.384	1.486	-0.102
trust_1	0.262	1.292	1.297	-0.005
trust_2	0.275	1.310	1.307	0.003
trust_3	0.284	1.228	1.145	0.083
trust_4	0.301	1.326	1.375	-0.049
trust_5	0.317	1.325	1.354	-0.029

variable RT. The results are presented in Table 9.

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

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

The VAF indicates that 73.9% of the total effect of IRBE on RL is explained by the mediator RT. Based on VAF results, RT partially mediates the relationship between IRBE and RL. The research findings provide evidence to support H4.

5.4. Multi-group analysis

Group A (patronizing frontline retail employees) shop at their retailer very frequently (n = 60) or frequently (n = 116), (n = 176). Group B (non-patronizing frontline retail employees) shop at their

Table 9
Direct and indirect effects.

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

Table 10
Multi-group analysis.

Hypothesis	Path	Group A: PFRE		Group B: Non-PFRE		Welch-Satterthwait MGA		Sig.	
		p (1)	se (p (1))	p (2)	Se (p (2))	p (1) - p (2)	t-Values		
1a	CB-RBE → IRBE	0.487	0.049	0.340	0.039	0.147	2.370	0.019	Supported
2a	EB-RBE → IRBE	0.607	0.041	0.731	0.036	0.124	2.273	0.025	Not Supported
3a	IRBE → Trust	0.559	0.066	0.658	0.054	0.099	1.169	0.238	Not Supported
4a	Trust → Loyalty	0.198	0.132	0.251	0.137	0.053	0.279	0.781	Not Supported
		N = 176		N = 137					

retailer occasionally ($n = 93$), rarely ($n = 34$), very rarely ($n = 5$), never ($n = 5$), ($n = 137$). The results in Table 10 show positive and statistically significant differences between the two groups as observed in the relationship between CB-RBE → IRBE.

There is a negative and statistically significant difference between the groups in the relationship between EB-RBE → IRBE. There were no statistically significant differences in the IRBE → Trust and Trust → Loyalty relationships. PFREs and non-PFREs can be interpreted as an aggregate data group and substantiates generalization of a single underlying theoretical model for the IRBE → Trust and Trust → Loyalty relationships examined in this IRBE model. The results of the multi-group analysis provide evidence to support H1a, however, they do not support H2a, H3a or H4a.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Discussion of the findings

The results confirm each of the eleven (four consumer-based and seven employee-based) dimensions examined in this model influence frontline employees' perceptions of RBE. By integrating frontline employees dual brand perceptions as both consumers and employees, our study begins to address Boukis and Christodoulides (2020) call for future research to move beyond the unidimensional EBBE construct and develop integrated models that combine different stakeholder perspectives. Our study also suggests retailer trust partially mediates the relationship between IRBE and retailer loyalty, suggesting IRBE is a four-step process whereby CB-RBE and EB-RBE lead to IRBE, which leads to retailer trust and retailer loyalty. This aligns with Anselmsson et al.'s (2017) four-stage RBE model; however, their model starts with awareness, then leads to brand associations and consumer responses, and then leads to trust, and finally loyalty. A recent study found brand trust to be a mediator, however, it mediated the relationship between multichannel integration service quality and retailer brand equity (Qi et al., 2020). Earlier studies show RBE as simplified parallel structures (i. e., one stage process) (Aaker, 1991; Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006a) or two-stage models (Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009). More recent studies illustrate RBE as a three-stage process (Troiville et al., 2019) whereby retailer specific dimensions lead to RBE, which lead to attitude, loyalty and word of mouth.

Looking at the relative importance of the eleven dimensions (from most important to least important) and their individual and combined importance, can help retailers understand which factors offer the greatest potential and/or priority for brand building activities. This is essential in retailing, given the conflicting demands and priorities that retailers face in an increasingly competitive environment and the growing accountability of management having to justify their resource

and investment decisions. The relative importance of the RBE dimensions and the findings from this research are discussed in terms of CB-RBE (employees' external perceptions of retailer brand equity, as consumers), EB-RBE (i.e., employees' internal perceptions of retailer brand equity, as employees) and Patronizing versus Non-Patronizing Frontline Retail Employees below.

6.1.1. CB-RBE: employees external perceptions of retailer brand equity (as consumers)

The results reveal *service quality* was most important, followed by *product quality* and *price/value*. In contrast, *store image* had the least bearing on frontline employees' perceptions of CB-RBE. The findings clearly demonstrate quality of the services the retailer delivers (i.e., service quality), the quality of the products sold by the retailer (i.e., product quality) and their perceptions of the relationship between what they get and what they paid (i.e., price/value) are important to frontline retail employees. Even though frontline retail employees' perceptions of the physical store, appearances and associations (i.e., store image), are seemingly less important than *service quality*, *product quality* and *price/value*, *store image* is important to a retailer's marketing strategy. A possible interpretation is that frontline employees view *store image* as a 'basic' or minimum requirement of a retailer's brand equity. In contrast, frontline employees may not perceive *store image* as a powerful means of differentiation. However, as in two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), neglecting one area may lead to other negative consequences. Rather, neglecting one dimension entirely could destroy the retailer brand equity that had previously been created. Furthermore, if retailers do not manage their RBE dimensions well, they could become liabilities (Aaker, 1991). If they are managed better than their competition, they can be interpreted as assets (Aaker, 1991; Anselmsson et al., 2017). Retailers must measure and manage each brand equity dimension over time to achieve the right balance. These results of this research suggest fashion retailers should prioritize the consumer-based factors of *service quality*, *product quality* and *price/value* when building RBE.

In Haelsig et al.'s (2007) inter-sector consumer-based retailer brand equity study also found *service* to be the most important dimension in the textile sector, and store image the least important. Their results are similar to the results of our study, however, they note, in fashion retailing all dimensions have a significant influence on the retailer brand (Haelsig et al., 2007), thus it is critical that retailers aim for coherence of all dimensions. In Troiville et al.'s (2019) study on RBE found *in store atmosphere* to be the most important. Both studies showed *product quality* and *product value* (interpreted as price/value in this thesis) to be important contributors to retailer brand equity. However, while Troiville et al. (2019) found *store atmosphere* to be the most important RBE dimension for consumers, we found *in store atmosphere* to be the least important RBE dimension for frontline employees. These comparisons

suggest frontline employees may be less demanding (or more forgiving) than consumers when it comes to store atmosphere. Further, Troiville et al. (2019) found *service quality* provided by frontline employees (i.e., promptness and attention) to be less crucial to consumers. Whereas, in our study perceived *service quality* was the most important consumer-based determinant of RBE. In a more recent study, Zhang et al. (2023) found *service quality* as well as *shopping atmosphere* and *shopping effect* to be key contributors to consumer shopping experience, as well as antecedents of retailer brand equity. Zhang et al. (2023) found product and brand assortment (similar to our study's product quality) to ultimately influence retailer brand equity from a consumer's perspective on grocery shopping. Given the key role brand equity plays in developing competitive differentiation (Feuer, 2005), the divergent findings suggest retailers should consider a variety of stakeholder perspectives to understand the underlying drivers of their RBE.

6.1.2. EB-RBE: employees' internal perceptions of retailer brand equity (as employees)

The relative importance of each of the exogenous driver constructs for the perceived EB-RBE (employee-based retailer brand equity) are now examined. The results reveal *brand allegiance*, *skills development*, *brand consistent behaviour* and *resume power* are most important, followed by *brand endorsement* and *internal advancement*. The top two most important factors are employee-benefit variables. These relate to the employee's perceptions of the work they do in exchange for the benefits of working for that retailer, and they speak to the psychological contract these frontline employees have with their retailer (Miles and Mangold, 2004; Lester and Kickul, 2001). *Work demands* is the least important EB-RBE dimension, which is also employee-benefit variable. This does not necessarily imply that *work demands* do not hold any relevance in a retailer's internal branding strategies. Perhaps frontline employees view *work demands* as an expected side-effect of working in retail. Another interpretation is that frontline employees do not view *work demands* as a powerful means for their retailer to differentiate itself.

The results demonstrate the employee's desire to maintain a relationship with the retailer where they work (i.e., brand allegiance) was most important factor of EB-RBE. This aligns with recent research on employees as influencers, where employees demonstrate their allegiance to their employer by communicating positive and future-oriented messages about their employer on their personal social media accounts (Smith et al., 2021). Chinelato et al. (2022) found that salesperson brand attachment (similar to frontline employees' brand allegiance) was relevant in driving sales performance.

Other factors that influenced retailer brand equity were frontline employees' perception that they can develop relevant and valuable professional skills within their organization (i.e., skills development), their demonstration of positive extra-role behaviours (i.e., brand consistent behaviour), the employee's perception that working at this retailer with strengthen their resume (i.e., resume power), the employee's propensity to say positive things about their retailer (i.e., brand endorsement), the employee's perception that they can advance their career within the organization (i.e., internal advancement), and their perception that their colleagues are hard workers and the work itself is demanding (i.e., work demands).

6.1.3. Patronizing versus non-patronizing frontline retail employees

The results suggest PFREs vs. non-PFREs value the same CB-RBE factors: *service quality*, *product quality*, *price/value* and *store image*. PFREs place the most value on the EB-RBE dimensions of *brand allegiance*, *skills development* and *brand consistent behaviour*, and non-PFREs place the most value on *brand allegiance*, *resume power* and *brand consistent behaviour*. Both PFREs and non-PFREs value employee-benefit and employee-behaviour/perceptions dimensions.

Market segmentation studies are common practice in retailing, whereby organizations divide (i.e., segment) their consumers into smaller groups based on characteristics (i.e., demographics, geography,

behaviours) to optimize products and design marketing communications and advertising to different consumers (Grewal and Levy, 2007). Organizations who effectively tailored their product and service offerings via segmentation strategies achieved 15.0% profit on average versus 5.0% profit for companies who did not (Markey et al., 2008). Thus, employee segmentation (Cardy et al., 2007) presents opportunities for retailers to better understand their frontline employees, how they perceive their brand and to tailor their product and service offerings accordingly. Furthermore, retailers can leverage employee segmentation strategies to be more efficient and effective in attracting, retaining and motivating current and prospective employees (Moroko and Uncles, 2009). The results of our study may encourage retailers to leverage employee segmentation strategies to potentially enhance their employees' perceptions of their brand. Dividing frontline employees into segments according to different characteristics may produce more precise and insightful analyses and enable retailers to adapt their brand strategies appropriately. Understanding the frontline employees' external perceptions of the brand could provide insights to the marketing department and their internal perceptions of the brand could provide insights to the human resources department, and vice versa. Together, these two often 'siloes' departments may find opportunities to collaborate and build collaborative and holistic brand strategies.

6.2. Theoretical implications

This research identifies four consumer- and seven employee-based dimensions of IRBE, and it validates IRBE as a multi-step structure whereby retailer trust partially mediates the relationship between IRBE and retailer loyalty. This is the first employee-based RBE model, to the authors' knowledge, that focuses on frontline fashion retail employees and integrates their internal and external perceptions of the brand into one model. This is also the first RBE model, to the authors' knowledge, to examine the moderating effect of two types of employees – PFREs and non-PFREs – in Canadian bricks and mortar fashion retailing.

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the RBE and EBEBE literatures. Early RBE models transferred Aaker's (1991) and Keller (1998) product-based models to a retailer-based context without strong rationale (Arnett et al., 2003; Jinfeng and Zhilong, 2009; Pappu and Quester, 2006a, 2006b). Ailawadi and Keller (2004) suggested RBE is more multi-sensory and complex than product-based brand equity. To address this, recent conceptualizations of RBE (Swoboda et al., 2016; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Troiville et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2023) acknowledge retail's unique attributes thus making theoretical contributions. A recent review of retailer loyalty literature suggests traditional factors such as price and product assortment are not enough to maintain retailer loyalty (Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022). Rather, consumers require an emotional connection to the brand to positively impact retailer loyalty (Liu-Thompkins et al., 2022). Our study shows support that retailer trust mediates the relationships between IRBE and retailer loyalty, demonstrating consumers and employees need to have an emotional connection to their retailer brand. Yet, most RBE studies to date continue to focus on the consumer-only view. Similar to RBE, EBEBE theories to date rely on the perceptions of one-dimensional stakeholders (i.e., employees), and do not acknowledge the complex and nuanced nature of employees' social identity within their organizations. Thus, this study advances and connects RBE and EBEBE theories by introducing and operationalizing a dual stakeholder perspective. This research validates a multi-dimensional IRBE model and brings together RBE and EBEBE streams through the theoretical lens of a dual stakeholder, to identify the factors that contribute to frontline retail employees' perceptions of RBE. Theoretically, this research provides a deeper understanding of a critical fashion retail stakeholder, the frontline employee, whose dual perceptions of their retailer's brand equity offer valuable insights into an organization's internal and external brand building strategies and activities. Finally, this study extends our understanding of retailer trust's mediating role on the relationship between IRBE and

retailer loyalty.

6.3. Managerial implications

This IRBE measure could be operationalized in-house quite seamlessly by marketing practitioners due to its short survey (12-min average complete time) and software (SmartPLS) cost-effectiveness. Compared to other costly industry-based brand equity measures (e.g., BrandAsset Valuator™) an in-house measure is a practical alternative. Operationalizing and deploying the IRBE measure to their frontline employees would involve the collaboration of both marketing and human resources departments. It could be deployed in house or via a third-party service provider (i.e., consultant) on an annual or semi-annual basis. The ranking of importance of its key influencing factors could drive future strategic marketing and human resources decisions. Furthermore, fashion retailers, could benefit from adding this IRBE measure into their portfolio of performance metrics, to support a new way to measure and manage their true value creation. Traditional retail metrics such as year-over-year growth and profitability are not as useful in today's complex retail environment (Deloitte, 2019). Retailers need to understand what drives value for different stakeholders by taking a holistic, more comprehensive and inclusive approach to measuring performance (Deloitte, 2019).

Troville et al. (2019) found measuring RBE requires nuanced and retailer-specific dimensions. Thus, a more realistic approach to RBE measurement is to consider a variety of brand equity measures across different stakeholders (e.g., consumers, employees) and contexts (e.g., price points, channels, product categories, sectors) (Davicik et al., 2015). When a retailer acquires or merges with another organization, the issue of goodwill arises. Goodwill is the difference between what a company pays for the organization and its fair value of net identifiable assets; thus, goodwill encompasses those intangible assets that are difficult to measure, such as brand equity, loyalty, trust and reputation. Being able to calculate an accurate and credible goodwill value is important to retailers because this calculation represents the premium the acquiring organization is willing to pay over the fair value of the company's tangible assets. When a retailer's brand is perceived to be highly valuable, it's overall financial value increases. The IRBE model offers retailers a practical tool to assist in determining a financial value on their goodwill component of the balance sheet, regarding brand equity, trust and loyalty. The proposed IRBE model could assist managers in measuring and managing their frontline employees' brand perceptions over time and enable them to benchmark progress (i.e., across territories, stores), make appropriate adjustments and determine the financial value of goodwill, and support a more holistic approach to measuring and managing the retailer's true value creation.

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

Adopting an employee-consumer IRBE measure could encourage and enable marketing and human resources managers to work together to build a cohesive brand. A study by i4cp entitled 'Reimagining Talent Acquisition: Mastering Employer Brand' found human resources and marketing departments collaborate on brand strategy in fewer than one-third (27.0%) of companies (Lykins, 2018). Yet, high-performance organizations are six-times more likely for their human resources and marketing departments to collaborate with each other, and 1.5-times more likely to share the responsibility of building and managing the employer brand together (Samdahl, 2019). It is common practice for retailers to solicit feedback from customers, because they are viewed as a valuable source of insights. Schaefer (2016) noted in the Harvard

Business Review article entitled 'Why (and How) HR Need to Act More Like Marketing' advised companies to "compete for talent the way companies compete for customers." Thus, frontline employees can also be a valuable source of brand insights. Thus, by adopting the proposed IRBE measure, it could enable marketing and human resources managers to mine employee insights for the betterment of the brand, collaborate on brand initiatives and positively contribute to the achievement of common organizational goals. When operationalized the IRBE measurement tool can enable and encourage two previously disparate departments, human resources and marketing, to develop common brand building goals.

6.4. Limitations and future research

This research was conducted with frontline employees working at fashion retailers in Canada. Thus, the choice of country (i.e., Canada), industry (i.e., retail), retail sector (i.e., fashion), urban setting (i.e., metropolitan areas), stakeholder group (i.e., frontline employees) and year it was collected (2019) may limit its overall generalizability. Future research could extend and advance this study to other retail sectors, countries, stakeholder groups and industries. This research utilized a cross-sectional design; therefore, another limitation of this study is that causal links cannot be determined. As such, future research could employ a longitudinal approach to draw future inferences about lagged effects. The measures used to represent the dimensions of consumer-based and employee-based RBE used validated scales from the literature, however, they were combined in a new way. Thus, these new measures would be applicable to other fashion retailers in Canada but not all retail sectors (e.g., grocery, electronics). Another limitation is that the endogenous (i.e., dependent) variables and exogenous variables were self-reported measures. Thus, even with CMB procedural remedies in place, there is the risk that the respondents may have over- or under-reported their perceptions due to the influence of social desirability (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone, 2002).

Recent RBE research examines the role of consumer shopping experience and shopping value (Zhang et al., 2023), the influence of the internet (Jung et al., 2021), perceived retailer innovativeness (Omar et al., 2021) and multichannel retail environments (Qi et al., 2020) on retailer brand equity. Future research could incorporate retail experiential dimensions as well as investigate e-commerce shopping environments.

The results of this research demonstrate support for this novel measure of IRBE that considers the internal (i.e., as employee) and external (i.e., as consumer) perceptions of frontline retail fashion employees. From a theoretical perspective, this new conceptualization of IRBE includes eleven dimensions, a mediating variable (retailer trust) and one outcome variable (retailer loyalty). Thus, similar to Swoboda et al.'s (2016) cross sectoral analysis of grocery, fashion, electronics and DIY sectors, future research could replicate this model with other retail sectors (e.g., home furnishings, electronics, grocery), compare sectors, and/or similar to Swoboda et al.'s (2014) comparison of the grocery sector in Germany and Romania, future studies could compare two or more countries (e.g., Canada vs. USA). Conducting an RBE study over time with one retailer could also provide valuable managerial and operational insights into the practical workings of RBE. Future research could add, remove or replace specific dimensions according to the retail sector or type of stakeholder being examined. However, there is a risk that adding dimensions may reduce the parsimony and lead to non-significant results (Troville et al., 2019). Given retail's diversity, finding an appropriate retailer brand equity model to fit every situation will continue to be a challenge for retail scholars searching for 'one' unified measure of RBE. Finally, future research could also include organizational performance data such as sales revenue, profit, market share or customer satisfaction scores in addition to employee brand perceptions and apply the performance data as dependent variables in the model. Thus, another research avenue could examine frontline

employees' perceptions of RBE and their effect on key retailer performance metrics.

interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

Appendix A

Consumer-Based RBE Initial and Revised Survey Items

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

Employee-Based RBE Initial and Revised Survey Items

Construct	Initial Survey Items	Revised Survey Items
Internal Advancement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel that I would be able to advance in my career at the retailer where I work. 2. There would be a lot of desirable positions within the retailer where I work that I may be able to grow into. 3. There would be many opportunities at the retailer where I work for advancement to better and higher positions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel that I can advance my career at the retailer where I work. 2. There are a lot of desirable positions that I may be able to grow into at the retailer where I work. 3. There are many opportunities for advancement to better and higher positions at the retailer where I work. 4. I believe management listens to my opinions and ideas.
Skills Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working for this retailer, it is likely that I will develop skills that will make me attractive to other companies. 2. The experience that I gain working for this retailer would make me more marketable to other firms the next time I go on the job market. 3. The training and exposure I receive by working at this retailer will allow me to get an even better job at another company in the future. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By working for this retailer, it is likely that I will develop skills that will make me attractive to other companies. 2. The experience that I gain at this retailer would make me more marketable to other firms the next time I go on the job market. 3. The training and exposure I receive at this retailer will allow me to get an even better job at another company in the future. 4. I believe the retailer where I work is helping me develop valuable skills
Resume Power	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working for this retailer is a definite resume builder. 2. Having this retailer's brand name on my resume makes me stand out among other applicants for future jobs. 3. Having this retailer's brand on my resume will lend credence to my abilities when searching for another job. 4. Working for this retailer is likely to make me highly regarded by recruiters at other firms. 	No changes
Work Demands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Standards for performance for employees at the retailer where I work require that employees spend a lot of time and effort at their jobs. 2. I am expected to work long hours at this retailer. 3. Employees at the retailer where I work, work harder and/or longer hours than employees at other retailers in order to achieve high performance goals. 4. As an employee of this retailer I have to work long hours in order to achieve expected results. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work sets high performance standards for its employees. 2. I am expected to work long hours at this retailer. 3. Employees at the retailer where I work, work harder and/or longer hours than employees at other retailers. 4. I must work long hours to achieve expected results at the retailer where I work.

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(continued)

Construct	Initial Survey Items	Revised Survey Items
Brand Endorsement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I say positive things to others about the retailer where I work. 2. I would recommend the retailer where I work to someone who seeks my advice. 3. I enjoy talking to others about the retailer where I work. 4. I talk positively to others about the retailer where I work. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. I am expected to work on holidays. 6. I am always given the hours that I want. 7. It is difficult to have work/life balance when working at this retailer. 1. I say positive things to others about the retailer where I work 2. I would recommend the retailer where I work to someone who seeks my advice 3. I enjoy talking to others about the retailer where I work 4. I use social media to say positive things about the retailer where I work 5. I use social media to say negative things about the retailer where I work
Brand Allegiance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I plan to stay working with this retailer for a while (King et al., 2012, 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016). 2. I plan to work for this retailer for 5 years from now. 3. I would turn down an offer from another retailer if it came tomorrow. 4. I am willing to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the retailer I work for successful. 5. I am proud to be a part of the retailer I work for. 6. I really care about the reputation of the retailer I work for. 7. I feel like I really fit in where I work. 	No changes
Brand Consistent Behaviour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand promise of the retailer I work for. 2. I consider the impact on my retailer's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation. 3. I am always interested to learn about my retailer's brand and what it means to me in my role. 4. My values are similar to those of the retailer I work for. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I understand the brand values of the retailer I work for 2. I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand values of the retailer I work for 3. I consider the impact on my retailer's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation 4. I am always interested to learn about my retailer's brand and what it means to me in my role 5. My values and beliefs are similar to those of the retailer I work for

Retailer Trust and Retailer Loyalty Initial and Revised Survey Items

Construct	Initial Survey Items	Revised Survey Items
Retailer Trust	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have total confidence in the retailer where I work. 2. The retailer where I work has never let me down. 3. The retailer where I work has a good reputation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have confidence in the retailer where I work. 2. The retailer where I work has never let me down. 3. The retailer where I work has a good reputation. 4. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider my individual well being. 5. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider the community's well-being
Retailer Loyalty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I consider myself to be a loyal consumer of the retailer where I work. 2. When buying fashion, the retailer where I work is my first choice. 3. I will not buy from other fashion retailers if I can buy the same item at the retailer where I work. 4. Even when items are available from other retailers, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 5. I would recommend the retailer where I work to my friends to shop there. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I consider myself to be a loyal consumer of the retailer where I work. 2. When buying fashion, the retailer where I work is my first choice. 3. I will not buy from other fashion retailers if I can buy the same item at the retailer where I work. 4. Even when items are available from other retailers, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 5. Even when items are available from other retailers at lower prices, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. 6. I would recommend the retailer where I work to my friends to shop there.

Appendix B

Consumer-Based Constructs, Survey Items and Sources.

Construct	Survey Items & Sources
Product Quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a high likelihood that products bought at the retailer where I work will be of high quality. (Arnett et al., 2003) 2. Overall, the retailer where I work sells high quality products. (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Arnett et al., 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2008) 3. The retailer where I work sells products of consistent quality. (Pappu and Quester, 2008) 4. Overall, the retailer where I work sells trendy products. (New)
Store Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The retailer where I work has a nice store atmosphere. (Pappu and Quester, 2008) 2. The retailer where I work has an interior that is visually appealing. (Dabholkar et al., 1996; White et al., 2013) 3. The retailer where I work offers convenient facilities (e.g. washrooms, parking ...). (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Pappu and Quester, 2008) 4. The retailer where I work has a good location. (New) 5. The retailer where I work offers good variety of products. (Pappu and Quester, 2008) 6. The retailer where I work sells well-known brands. (Swoboda et al., 2016) 7. The retailer where I work offers consumers opportunities to provide feedback. (New) 8. The retailer where I work listens to consumer feedback. (New)
Price Value	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The products at the retailer where I work are good value. (Arnett et al., 2003; Gil-Saura et al., 2013)

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(continued)

Construct	Survey Items & Sources
Service Quality	2. The prices at the retailer where I work are acceptable. (Arnett et al., 2003)
	3. The products at the retailer where I work are a good buy. (Arnett et al., 2003)
	1. The retailer where I work offers reliable consumer service. (Pappu and Quester, 2008)
	2. The retailer where I work offers good after sales service. (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Pappu and Quester, 2008)
	3. The sales associates where I work are friendly with consumers. (Swoboda et al., 2016; White et al., 2013)
	4. The sales associates where I work are knowledgeable about the products they sell. (Dabholkar et al., 1996; Swoboda et al., 2016; White et al., 2013)
Service Quality	5. The sales associates where I work are respectful to consumers. (Swoboda et al., 2016)
	6. The sales associates where I work are honest with consumers. (Swoboda et al., 2016)

Employee-Based Constructs, Survey Items and Sources.

Construct	Survey Items & Sources
Internal Advancement	1. I feel that I would be able to advance in my career at the retailer where I work. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	2. There would be a lot of desirable positions within the retailer where I work that I may be able to grow into. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	3. There would be many opportunities at the retailer where I work for advancement to better and higher positions. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	4. I believe management listens to my opinions and ideas. (New)
Skills Development	1. By working for this retailer, it is likely that I will develop skills that will make me attractive to other companies. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	2. The experience that I gain working for this retailer would make me more marketable to other firms the next time I go on the job market. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	3. The training and exposure I receive by working at this retailer will allow me to get an even better job at another company in the future. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
Resume Power	4. I believe the retailer where I work is helping me develop valuable skills. (New)
	1. Working for this retailer is a definite resume builder. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	2. Having this retailer's brand name on my resume makes me stand out among other applicants for future jobs. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	3. Having this retailer's brand on my resume will lend credence to my abilities when searching for another job. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
Work Demands	4. Working for this retailer is likely to make me highly regarded by recruiters at other firms. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	1. The retailer where I work sets high performance standards for its employees. (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
	2. I am expected to work long hours at this retailer. (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
	3. Employees at the retailer where I work, work harder and/or longer hours than employees at other retailers. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	4. I must work long hours in order to achieve expected results at the retailer where I work. (DelVecchio et al., 2007)
	5. I am expected to work on holidays. (New)
	6. I am always given the hours that I want. (New)
Brand Endorsement	7. It is difficult to have work/life balance when working at this retailer. (New)
	1. I say positive things to others about the retailer where I work. (King et al., 2012).
	2. I would recommend the retailer where I work to someone who seeks my advice. (King et al., 2012).
	3. I enjoy talking to others about the retailer where I work. (King et al., 2012).
	4. I use social media to say positive things about the retailer where I work. (New)
Brand Allegiance	5. I use social media to say negative things about the retailer where I work. (New)
	1. I plan to stay working with this retailer for a while. (King et al., 2012, 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016)
	2. I plan to work for this retailer for 5 years from now. (King et al., 2012, 2013; Poulis and Wisker, 2016)
	3. I would turn down an offer from another retailer if it came tomorrow. (King et al., 2012, 2013)
	4. I am willing to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the retailer I work for successful. (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
	5. I am proud to be a part of the retailer I work for. (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
	6. I really care about the reputation of the retailer I work for. (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000)
Brand Consistent Behaviour	7. I feel like I really fit in where I work. (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010)
	1. I understand the brand values of the retailer I work for. (New)
	2. I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand promise of the retailer I work for. (King et al., 2012, 2013)
	3. I consider the impact on my retailer's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation. (King et al., 2012, 2013)
	4. I am always interested to learn about my retailer's brand and what it means to me in my role. (King et al., 2012, 2013)
	5. My values are similar to those of the retailer I work for. (King et al., 2013)

Trust and Loyalty Constructs, Survey Items and Sources

Retailer Trust	1. I have confidence in the retailer where I work. (Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017)
	2. The retailer where I work has never let me down. (Gil-Saura et al., 2013; Anselmsson et al., 2017)
	3. The retailer where I work has a good reputation. (Burt and Carralero-Encinas, 2000)
	4. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider my individual well being. (New)
	5. I trust the retailer where I work, because they consider the community's well being. (New)
Retailer Loyalty	1. I consider myself to be a loyal consumer of the retailer where I work. (Yoo et al., 2000; Arnett et al., 2003)
	2. When buying fashion, the retailer where I work is my first choice. (Yoo et al., 2000)
	3. I will not buy from other fashion retailers if I can buy the same item at the retailer where I work. (Arnett et al., 2003)
	4. Even when items are available from other retailers, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. (Arnett et al., 2003; Gil-Saura et al., 2013)
	5. Even when items are available from other retailers at lower prices, I tend to buy from the retailer where I work. (New)
	6. I would recommend the retailer where I work to my friends to shop there. (Arnett et al., 2003)

Appendix C

Sample Characteristics

	(N = 313)	%
Gender		
Female	190	60.7
Male	121	38.7
Other	2	0.6
Age		
18-24	70	22.4
25-29	65	20.8
30-39	87	27.8
40-49	55	17.6
50-59	30	9.6
60+	6	1.9
Retailer Type		
Clothing/Apparel	259	82.8
Accessories	23	7.4
Cosmetics	19	6.1
Jewellery	6	1.9
Shoes	6	1.9
Geographic Location		
Vancouver	72	23.0
Edmonton	36	11.5
Calgary	24	7.7
Toronto	156	49.8
Ottawa	25	8.0
Length of Employment		
3–6 months	42	13.4
6–12 months	45	14.4
1–2 years	77	24.6
2–4 years	66	21.1
4–6 years	48	15.3
6+ years	35	11.2
Employment status		
Full-time	237	75.7
Part-time	76	24.3
Job Title		
Sales Associate	159	50.8
Cashier	51	16.3
Assistant Store Manager	57	18.2
Store Manager	38	12.1
Other	8	2.6

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