



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: www.ijirss.com



Price attractiveness, distributor relationship, and brand equity impact on customer advocacy in cement industry

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Abstract

This study examines the role of price attractiveness, distributor relationships, and brand equity in shaping customer advocacy in Indonesia's bagged cement industry. This verification study focuses on cement retailers as the observation unit. The collection of data uses a questionnaire employing a 5-point Likert scale. A sample of 300 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used for causality analysis. The findings indicate that price attractiveness significantly affects both brand equity and customer advocacy. Distributor relationships strongly influence customer advocacy but have no direct effect on brand equity. Brand equity significantly drives customer advocacy, while price attractiveness indirectly impacts advocacy through brand equity. The study highlights the dominant role of distributor relationships in fostering advocacy, emphasizing trust, reliability, and communication. Based on the findings, strengthening distributor relationships is crucial for the management of cement distributors to enhance advocacy in cement sales. Managers should improve communication, reliability, and trust. Future research can explore additional factors influencing distributor relationships and customer advocacy in commodity markets.

Keywords: Bagged cement, Brand equity, Customer advocacy, Distributor relationship, Price attractiveness.

DOI: 10.53894/ijirss.v8i3.6948

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

History: Received: 25 March 2025 / Revised: 28 April 2025 / Accepted: 5 May 2025 / Published: 12 May 2025

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Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Publisher: Innovative Research Publishing

1. Introduction

The increasingly competitive situation puts tremendous pressure on commodity product producers and further suppresses their market share and margins [1]. Competition in the cement business in Indonesia has increased, where the growth of new players has reached four times that of old players. To face this competition, loyal customers are expected to be able to increase

market share, generate increased margins, provide strength in competing against competitors in the market, reduce marketing costs, and gain an increase in the long-term loyal customer base [1]. The role of customer advocacy is also very important because the specific and complex characteristics of services make personal recommendations very effective and can influence purchasing decisions and drive sales significantly [2].

This shows the increasing importance of customer advocacy. Moreover, in today's digital media landscape, consumers are increasingly able to engage in advocacy related to companies or brands (e.g., through referrals) [3]. Research on brand advocacy has been conducted among retailers [4]. There are relationships between consumer trust, consumer commitment, and several customer advocacy behaviors [5]. However, apart from this study, there has not been much research on customer advocacy in the cement retail/distributor analysis unit, especially in Indonesia, so this study is important to conduct.

A good understanding of the price dimension can improve performance and strengthen customer relationships [6]. In a study of cement commodities, consumers were willing to pay a premium price based on the brand [1]. The role of price is reinforced by other studies in which product pricing has a greater influence than product packaging in the purchasing decision process [7].

On the other hand, a previous study revealed the importance of the resource allocation behavior of sales channel members [8]. More and more retailers are realizing the need to develop trusting relationships [9]. This indicates the importance of maintaining distributor relationships.

Other studies have found that consumers are more loyal to brands with high equity [10]. When consumers are attached and loyal to a brand, they tend to make repeat purchases [11]. The strength of brands with high equity enjoys higher benefits from their loyalty programs compared to brands with low equity [10]. The results of these studies illustrate that efforts to retain and increase customers are influenced by brand equity.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the relationship between price attractiveness, distributor relationships, brand equity, and customer advocacy in the cement industry in Indonesia. Research on consumer behavior in the cement industry itself is still very limited and only tests or examines the behavior of end consumers.

2. Literature Review

Every business must choose the pricing policy and strategy that best suits it, especially in a competitive market [12]. Subjective price perception plays an important role in influencing consumers' perceived value, purchasing decisions, and post-purchase behavior [13]. Certain discount patterns in price promotions have a significant effect on perceived price attractiveness and purchase intention [14]. Price verification is important to provide satisfaction with customer choices that can affect customer loyalty and customer repurchase intentions [15]. Customer purchase intentions are shaped by the perception of price attractiveness, which is influenced by certain discount patterns in price promotions [14]. A study in cement products identified the willingness of consumers to pay premium prices based on brands [1].

Relationship commitment is very important, as a consequence of relationship exploration [16]. Customer trust in a brand can drive brand image in creating advocacy intentions [17]. Trust also plays a role in driving consumer advocacy [18]. There is a strong relationship between selective distribution and customer advocacy [19]. Customer trust, which in turn increases repurchase intentions and stimulates advocacy [20].

Brands play an integral role in developing long-term customer relationships and goodwill and meeting sales goals [21]. Branding is a powerful tool for using information cues about products, prices, and product enhancements made by marketers [22]. Brand represents assurance, trust relationships, and promises to consumers [23]. Trust acts as a mediator between the relationship between satisfaction and advocacy, and customer advocacy helps companies in various ways, including acquisition, loyalty brand relationships, etc. [24].

Among brand and managerial factors as antecedents, consumer brand identification is significantly and positively related to advocacy [2]. Advocacy generally refers to highly influential communication, built with the explicit purpose of influencing others [2]. There are several positive consequences of customer advocacy in general, namely gaining customer trust and loyalty, influencing consumer emotions, intentions, and behavior, consumer participation, and consumer involvement [25]. Based on this conceptual framework, it is hypothesized:

H₁: Price attractiveness has a significant effect on brand equity.

H₂: Distributor relationship has a significant influence on brand equity.

H₃: Price attractiveness has a significant effect on customer advocacy.

H₄: Distributor relationship has a significant influence on customer advocacy

H₅: Brand equity has a significant influence on customer advocacy. H₆: Brand equity mediates the influence of price attractiveness on customer advocacy.

H₇: Brand equity mediates the influence of distributor relationships on customer advocacy.

3. Methodology

This research is verification research. The research data was collected in one cross-section/one-shot period, namely in 2024. The source of data and information was obtained from primary data by using a questionnaire. The questionnaire, which uses a Likert Scale of 5 points, includes perceptions from the store regarding the variables of price attractiveness, distributor relationship, brand equity, and customer advocacy.

The population of this study was a building store that routinely sells cement products in sacks, with a sample of 300 respondents. The sampling technique used was stratified random sampling based on work area. Stratified random sampling is a structured random sampling method that divides the population into several subgroups (strata), then samples are selected from each stratum.

This study uses causality analysis to obtain evidence of a causal relationship between variables. This analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which is a multivariate statistical technique that explains the causal relationship between research variables [26].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Goodness of fit model

The model fit test illustrates how a research model is supported by empirical conditions. In this section, the results of hypothesis testing using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) will be discussed.

Table 1.
Goodness of Fit.

No.	Degree of Fit Measurement	Value	Adjustable Degree of Fit	Description
1	Absolute Fit Test			
	Chi Square	655.05	P -value>0.05	Close Fit
	Normed Chi Square (x2/df)	P -value = 0.39394		
	Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.97	>0.80	Close fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.004	RMSEA ≤ 0.08 (good fit) RMSEA < 0.05 (close-fit)	Close fit	
2	Incremental Fit Measures			
	Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.96	AGFI > 0.8	Close fit
	Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.97	NFI > 0.90	Close fit
	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	1.00	CFI > 0.90	Close fit
3	Parsimonious Fit Measures			
	Parsimonious Normed Fit Index (PNFI)	0.89	PNFI > 0.80	Close fit
	Parsimonious GFI (PGFI)	0.84	PGFI > 0.80	Fit

Source: Output LISREL 8.7 (2024).

From the Table 1 above, p value = 0.393942 > 0.05, Goodness of Fit Indices (GFI) and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) > 0.90, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) < 0.05, so it can be concluded that the research model is fit or the paradigm is supported by empirical conditions.

The following displays a complete picture of the model testing results using LISREL.

4.2. Structural Model

Based on the structural model framework tested, the following results are obtained:

$$\begin{matrix} & & \text{BRAND} = 0.13 * \text{PRICE} + 0.069 * \text{RELATE}, R^2 = 0.025 \\ & (0.048) & (0.050) \\ 2.65 & & 1.36 \end{matrix} \tag{1}$$

$$\begin{matrix} \text{CUSTADVO} = 0.45 * \text{BRAND} + 0.25 * \text{PRICE} + 0.61 * \text{RELATE}, R^2 = 0.73 \\ (0.050) & (0.042) & (0.062) \\ 8.95 & 5.82 & 9.91 \end{matrix} \tag{2}$$

4.3. Measurement Model

The result of validity and reliability can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2.
Validity and Reliability.

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor (I)	t-value	Prob.	Alpha Cronbach	Composite Reliability
PRICE ATTRACTIVENESS	Price Perception	0.84	-	0.00	0.897	0.768
	PA1	0.65	-	0.00		
	PA2	0.61	13.82	0.00		
	PA33	0.64	14.18	0.00		
	Price Comparison	0.79	10.49	0.00	0.773	0.748
	PA4	0.61	-	0.00		
	PA5	0.63	12.90	0.00		
	PA6	0.61	12.78	0.00		
	Promotion dan Discount	0.82	10.52	0.00	0.792	0.756
	PA7	0.60	-	0.00		
	PA8	0.62	13.10	0.00		
PA9	0.65	13.33	0.00			
DISTRIBUTOR RELATIONSHIP	Communication	0.81	-	0.00	0.784	0.709
	DR1	0.63	-	0.00		
	DR2	0.60	13.96	0.00		
	DR3	0.62	14.29	0.00		
	DR4	0.61	14.14	0.00		
	Reliability	0.82	11.24	0.00	0.783	0.752
	DR5	0.61	-	0.00		
	DR6	0.62	13.45	0.00		
	DR7	0.63	13.57	0.00		
	Trust	0.86	11.34	0.00	0.749	0.732
	DR8	0.61	-	0.00		
DR9	0.62	13.25	0.00			
DR10	0.58	12.83	0.00			
BRAND EQUITY	Brand Awareness	0.89	-	0.00	0.767	0.740
	BE1	0.61	-	0.00		
	BE2	0.60	13.30	0.00		
	BE3	0.62	13.54	0.00		
	Brand Image	0.83	10.90	0.00	0.792	0.748
	BE4	0.61	-	0.00		
	BE5	0.63	13.35	0.00		
	BE6	0.61	13.14	0.00		
	Brand Association	0.80	10.88	0.00		0.752
	BE7	0.62	-	0.00		
	BE8	0.63	13.30	0.00		
BE9	0.61	13.13	0.00			
CUST ADVOCACY	Marketing Research	0.87	-	0.00	0.800	0.732
	CA1	0.63	-	0.00		
	CA2	0.59	13.70	0.00		
	CA3	0.59	13.70	0.00		
	Word-of-mouth referrals	0.90	11.94	0.00	0.899	0.791
	CA4	0.55	-	0.00		
	CA5	0.59	12.61	0.00		
	CA6	0.57	12.35	0.00		
	Affective Commitment	0.83	12.19	0.00	0.764	0.749
	CA7	0.62	-	0.00		
	CA8	0.61	12.65	0.00		
Repatronage intention	0.83	11.67	0.00	0.734	0.736	
CA9	0.59	-	0.00			
CA10	0.62	12.16	0.00			

Source: Output LISREL 8.7.

Table 2 above shows that each latent variable is measured by its dimensions and indicators with a loading factor value > 0.50 and t value > 1.98 (t table at $\alpha = 0.05$) with prob < 0.05. The reliability test value with CR and Alpha Cronbach have a value greater than 0.7, it can be concluded that the indicators in the measurement model for each variable are valid and reliable [27].

The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in Table 3:

Table 3.
Hypothesis Testing Results.

No	Hypothesis	Coeff. Estimate	SE	t value	Prob	R ²	Conclusion
1	Price attractiveness has a significant effect on brand equity	0.130	0.048	2.650	0.008	0.017	Significant
2	Distributor relationship has a significant effect on Brand Equity	0.069	0.050	1.360	0.175	0.005	Not Significant
3	Price attractiveness has a significant effect on customer advocacy.	0.250	0.042	5.820	0.000	0.063	Significant
4	Distributor relationship has a significant effect on customer advocacy.	0.610	0.062	9.910	0.000	0.372	Significant
5	Brand Equity has a significant effect on customer advocacy.	0,450	0,050	8,950	0,000	0,203	Significant
6	Price attractiveness has a significant effect on customer advocacy through brand equity	0,059	0,023	2,593	0,010	0,059	Significant
7	Distributor relationship has a significant effect on customer advocacy through brand equity	0,004	0,023	0,177	0,859	0,004	Not Significant

Source: LISREL 8.7 (2024).

The results of testing hypotheses 1 and 3 are supported, indicating that price attractiveness has a significant effect on brand equity (p-value < 0.05) and customer advocacy (p-value < 0.05), with a value of $R^2 = 0.063$. The effect is greater for customer advocacy than for Brand Equity ($R^2 = 0.017$). The role of price attractiveness supports a previous study [15] that price verification is important to support customer intentions to re-subscribe. Emotional reactions associated with price perceptions can encourage repurchases [13].

The results of testing hypothesis 4 are supported, but hypothesis 2 is not supported. This means that the distributor relationship has a significant effect on customer advocacy (p value < 0.05) with $R^2 = 0.3726$, but not significant on brand equity (p value > 0.05). The significant role of distributor relationships in customer advocacy supports previous findings of Meanwhile, the absence of a significant role of distributor relationships in brand equity contradicts [17-20] that customer trust in a brand can boost brand image.

The results of testing hypothesis 5 are supported that brand equity has a significant effect on customer advocacy. The important role of brand equity supports previous findings [2, 28, 29] that brand equity can create customer advocacy.

The results of testing hypothesis 5 are supported that price attractiveness has a significant effect on customer advocacy mediated by brand equity (p value < 0.05) and $R^2 = 0.059$. This shows the important role of brand equity in increasing the role of price attractiveness to encourage the formation of customer advocacy. This supports the research findings of Punniyamoorthy et al. [1] that brand equity reduces consumer sensitivity to high prices, makes them willing to pay more according to their perception of brand equity, so it can affect customer loyalty and customer intentions to re-subscribe [15].

The results of testing hypothesis 6 do not supported that distributor relationships have no significant effect on customer advocacy mediated by brand equity (p value > 0.05) with $R^2 = 0.004$. This indicates that distributor relationships are unable to increase brand equity, so they cannot create customer advocacy. There are other variables that play a more significant role in creating brand equity that can increase customer advocacy.

Based on the results of testing the hypothesis, the research findings model is obtained in Figure 1 as follows:

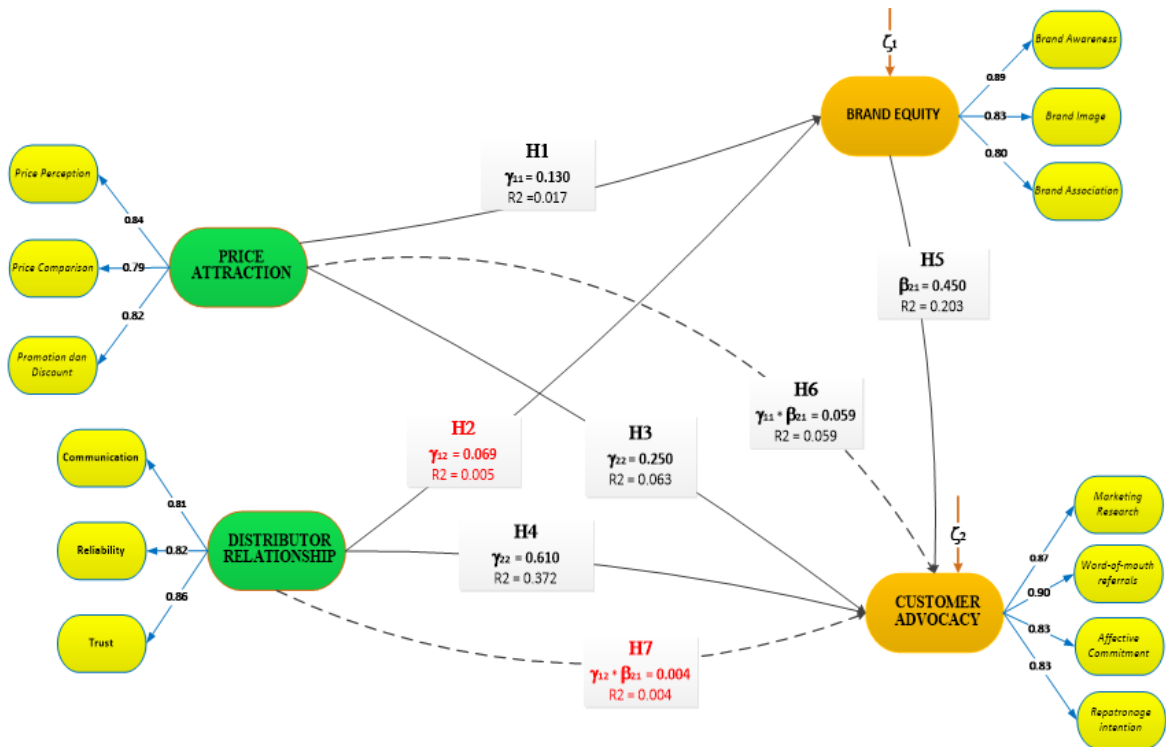


Figure 1. Research Finding.

The findings of this study reveal the dominant role of distributor relationships in encouraging the creation of customer advocacy. The findings regarding the dominant role of distributor relationships in the cement industry are possible because the profile of building stores is still managed directly by the owner. This condition creates a situation where business decisions, including purchasing decisions and relationships with distributors, are still very centralized or influenced by the preferences and personal relationships of the store owner. In this context, communication patterns, perceptions of reliability, and trust felt between the store owner and the distributor play a key role in determining the success of product distribution, in this case, cement.

The finding that distributor relationships are the dominant aspect that forms customer advocacy, in the analysis unit of building stores selling cement bags in Indonesia, is very relevant in the context of the characteristics of cement sales as a branded commodity. A commodity is a product that is the same as other products of the same type produced by other manufacturers, but through differentiation elements such as packaging, marketing communications, or the country of origin of the product, the commodity can be transformed into a branded commodity [30]. These findings confirm the importance of building and maintaining relationships based on trust to achieve long-term success in relationship marketing.

Brand equity is the second aspect that plays a significant role in creating customer advocacy. The importance of brand equity was previously stated by Shahroodi et al. [28] that companies that successfully position brand equity in the minds of customers are considered to have more advantages compared to other companies. Therefore, retailers need to develop decision-making strategies regarding in-store brands, Shailesh and Reddy [29].

5. Conclusion

Price attractiveness has a significant effect on brand equity and customer advocacy. Distributor relationship has a significant effect on customer advocacy, but not significant on brand equity. Brand equity has a significant effect on customer advocacy. Price attractiveness has a significant effect on customer advocacy mediated by brand equity. Distributor relationships have no significant effect on customer advocacy mediated by brand equity. The results of this study reveal the dominant role of distributor relationships in encouraging the creation of customer advocacy. Communication, reliability, and trust have an equally large role in encouraging advocacy for building stores selling cement bags. Brand equity is the second aspect that plays a significant role in creating customer advocacy.

The findings of the study, which reveal the dominant role of distributor relationships in creating customer advocacy, provide a theoretical contribution to the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing. This theory asserts that trust and commitment formed from strong relationships between distributors and building stores are key elements in creating customer experiences that can encourage customers to engage in customer advocacy. Future research can explore distributor relationships by examining various dimensions and indicators that can strengthen customer advocacy in commodity products, especially bagged cement. Future research could explore different strategies to build stronger relationships and how these relationships influence loyalty and product recommendations.

Based on the findings, the implications of this study are suggestions for the management of cement bag distributors to strengthen distributor relationships by giving equal attention and priority to building communication, reliability, and trust

between distributors and building stores. Distributor management is also advised to pay more attention to strengthening brand awareness, which is supported by strengthening the brand image and brand association for the cement products sold.

Management is advised to strengthen distributor relationships by giving equal attention and priority to building communication, reliability, and trust between distributors and building stores. Training programs to strengthen the distributor's function in building relationships with building stores need attention. Communication needs to be improved by more actively communicating in solving problems, making time to communicate more intensively with the stores, being more open in working with the stores, and applying more transparent information in working with the stores. Furthermore, to improve reliability, the cement distributor needs to be better able to solve any existing problems, fulfill promises in product delivery, both in terms of quantity and type of product, and make more timely product deliveries. Then, to strengthen trust, the cement distributor needs to better maintain the confidentiality of store data, be more committed to fulfilling its promises, and emphasize its honesty.

Besides that recommendation, regulators can also encourage the conduct of periodic customer satisfaction surveys to ensure that products in the market truly meet customer expectations and needs.

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