PHILANTHROPIC INSTITUTIONS: DOES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DONORS AND THE BRAND MATTER?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Philanthropic institutions are crucial in society, especially in emerging countries. However, they fight for resources, making their donors essential for survival. Furthermore, few studies focus on the relationship between donors and the brands of these institutions. In this context, this innovative study aimed to determine the antecedents of donor loyalty to philanthropic institutions, considering their relationship with the institution's brand.

Design/methodology/approach – Quantitative research was carried out. A structured questionnaire was applied to three different philanthropic institutions in the health area, obtaining 571 responses. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using the AMOS 23 software to test the proposed hypothetical model.

Findings – The results indicate the impact of ideal self-congruence on trust and brand attachment, generating donor loyalty. However, the effect of real self-congruence on trust and attachment was not observed, demonstrating a more emotional and idealistic behavior.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature on consumer brand relationship with application in analyzing the third sector during a social crisis such as the pandemic, which is an unprecedented application. In addition, this is the first study carried out in a multiple case study in the social assistance segment.

KEYWORDS

Third sector; Social Cause; Consumer Brand Relationships (CBR); Loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

Philanthropic institutions have played a fundamental role in world society, working in partnership with governments, the private sector, and citizens. Philanthropy, or helping others through charitable and supportive attitudes, is widespread, especially in the face of catastrophes and natural disasters. These aids can be through financial donations, clothing, food, hygiene and cleaning materials, blood, organs, and even the availability of time and knowledge sharing. As in emerging countries, they can sometimes be permanent or longer-lasting (Mogotsi and Saruchera, 2023).

These institutions are even more relevant in emerging countries where the number of people needing support is more significant, and governments are more inefficient in serving the most vulnerable population (Rashid *et al.*, 2018). Okundaye *et al.* (2019) state that emerging countries face barriers and restrictions, including inadequate infrastructure, poor education, financial constraints, political obstacles, and sociocultural challenges. Thus, in this context, these philanthropic institutions tend to fill a gap with different projects, ranging from basic labor training to daily food for needy people.

Countries like Brazil stand out in this scenario and have seen growth in non-profit institutions since the 1990s. A survey by IPEAi (2019) showed that the country has 820,455 institutions in various sectors. However, the resources are insufficient to meet the projects' needs (Fonif, 2024). Faced with this fact, social entities must compete for public funding when their resources are inadequate or fight for resources and donations from people and companies (Torres, 2013). Another challenge these institutions face is the implementation of the Culture of Donation. According to the Brazil Donation Survey (2022), Brazilians donate out of solidarity, with the sole aim of helping. Thus, there is no understanding of philanthropic institutions' strategic and transforming role, or donors do not trust these institutions. The philanthropic culture is born of trust, and organizations must show transparency in their actions and strengthen their relationship with society (Catoiu and Tichindelean, 2012). However, trust is among emerging countries' most robust barriers (Butkouskaya *et al.*, 2021). In this way, it becomes crucial that philanthropic institutions develop more effective strategies to create an image that generates greater trust in donors and volunteers and efficient communication to achieve its goals and attract resources to continue developing projects that positively impact society.

Although these institutions are relevant, there is a gap in the literature on them (Mogotsi and Saruchera, 2023), and there are opportunities for empirical studies to increase understanding about this field of study, especially integrating marketing concepts to improve the relationship between donors and the institution (Machado *et al.,* 2019). In this sense, the literature on consumer behavior suggests that consumers relate to brands similarly to how they relate to people, developing positive or negative feelings (Gois *et al.,* 2023). This analogy, known as Consumer-Brand Relationships (CBR), can be adopted as it represents a set of mutually shared relationships between consumers, in this

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case, donors, and a brand represented by the institution. This bond or connection occurs as the consumer perceives their experience with the brand and verifies that the relationship has already generated and continues to generate positive results. Furthermore, within philanthropic institutions, it is also known that the brand significantly influences potential donors. People are more willing to contribute, volunteer, and recommend the nonprofit organization to others when they identify with the beneficiary's brand (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006).

The theoretical proposal of the consumer-brand relationship has been the subject of marketing studies since the 1990s, seeking to strengthen and deepen the ties between the brand and the consumer. In this sense, several studies aimed to understand the antecedents and consequences of interactions and experiences between the consumer and the brand (Fetscherin, 2019). Previous studies have focused on understanding positive relationships such as love (Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022; Joshi and Garg, 2021; Baggozzi *et al.,* 2017; Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014) and brand attachment (Souki *et al.,* 2022; Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022; Park *et al.,* 2010). While others, relationships with negative feelings such as hate (Gois *et al.,* 2023; Grégoire *et al.,* 2009; Hegner *et al.,* 2017; Zarantonello *et al.,* 2016) and brand avoidance (Gois *et al.,* 2023; Hegner et al., 2017). Still, others aimed to understand behavior related to loyalty (Gonçalves Filho, 2022b; Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022; Unurlu and Uca, 2017), brand experience (Joshi and Garg, 2021), and brand trust (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera -Alemán, 2005; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Although several studies delve into issues related to CBR, few were found to be applied in the specific context of philanthropic institutions. Therefore, little is known about the effect of this relationship on donors despite evidence indicating a strengthening of the relationship (Machado, 2019).

On the other hand, in a philanthropic institution, loyalty emerges as a central factor in developing relationships between consumers (donors) and brands (institutions). According to Machado (2019), the absence of materials focusing on the consumer-brand relationship aimed at philanthropic institutions is a gap that requires further study.

One of the efforts found in the literature is the study by Ramjaun (2014), in which the author discusses the consumer-brand relationship in the philanthropic scope. However, he does so metaphorically through qualitative research without indicating a history of loyalty. Another study was found by Machado (2019), in which an evaluation of the donor's relationship with philanthropic institutions was proposed, verifying the correlation with the Self and the impact on attachment, trust, and loyalty to the brand. However, this study was applied in only one institution, which limits its scope.

Thus, considering the relevance of philanthropic institutions, as well as the advances in studies on consumer-brand relationships, and the scarcity of studies on the subject, the following research objectives were proposed: (1) to determine the antecedents of donor loyalty in institutions philanthropic, considering their relationship with the institution's brand; (2) verify the relationships between the donor's self-image, trust and emotional attachment to the institution's brand.

This study presents relevant contributions. First, studies on the antecedents of loyalty in philanthropic institutions are extended, considering the consumer-brand relationship paradigm. Second, it provides a foundation for developing effective communication strategies that must consider emotional attachment, trust, and images associated with the donor's ideal Self (ideal Self). Finally, the research creates bases for developing models that explain donor loyalty and their relationship with the brand, indicating a path capable of explaining 85% of its variations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Relationship between consumer brand relationships (CBR) and philanthropic institutions

Brand power can be defined as a brand's ability to influence consumer behavior, leading them to do something they would not normally do (Crosno et al., 2009). Fournier (1998), Keller and Lehmann (2006), precursors of studies on CBR, attested that the relationship with the brand is multidisciplinary, complex, and dynamic, given the intensity and emotional bonds, such as loyalty (Fetscherin, 2019), attachment (Park et al., 2010;) and trust (Chaudhuri, and Holbrook, 2001).

Considering that the context of philanthropic institutions is highly competitive about the number of organizations and the limitation of public funding sources (Sargeant and Lee, 2001), these institutions must focus on maintaining and developing new relationships with financiers in addition to maintaining existing ones (Macmillan et al., 2005). In this sense, relationship marketing theorists suggest that CBR may be suitable for the nonprofit sector (Burnett, 1998; Sargeant and Lee, 2001) and a competitive advantage for philanthropic institutions (Hau and Ngo, 2012). This is because CBR offers the ability to promote strong partnerships and develop and implement innovative financing models. Additionally, it designs various resource mobilization strategies and incorporates more professionalism and management structures within the nonprofit organization. Habib and Kotze (2002) highlight that the ultimate goal of CBR is to foster healthy relationships between stakeholders and nonprofit organizations that allow them to meet society's needs effectively.

Pulh et al. (2019) also indicate that actions linked to CBR in a philanthropic environment can develop positive engagement with the brand in its volunteers. Thus, it is already known in philanthropic institutions that the brand significantly influences potential donors. People are more willing to contribute, volunteer their time, and recommend the nonprofit organization to others when there is a notable identification relationship with the beneficiary institution's brand (Becker-Olsen

and Hill, 2006). However, unlike what occurs in private and commercial companies, the consumer-brand relationship needs to be better studied and understood within the scope of philanthropic institutions (Heding *et al.*, 2009).

On the other hand, the marketing literature reinforces that consumers are motivated to approach brands to strengthen their identity, looking for characteristics that they consider essential in brands, incorporating this relevance in the construction of the Self (Fournier and Alvarez, 2013). The self-congruence is achieved when the consumer, when using the brand, perceives the adjustment of the real Self, his "real self," with the personality of the product and when the ideal Self, his "ideal self," aligns with the attributes of the brand (Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022). Congruence is the ability to be what one is, being very close to the ideal Self through the individual's real experience and the awareness of their attitudes, choices, and behavior (Chang and Know, 2022). When a consumer feels emotionally connected to a brand, he tends to understand it as an extension of his identity (Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022).

The perception that a brand can satisfy the needs of the real Self is directly linked to the belief that the promise of value will be fulfilled, which leads to increased trust in the brand (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2003). Trust in a brand is generated when the congruence of the real Self is present. Like the brand, trust is a construct influenced by the congruence of the real and ideal Selves (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as the consumer's willingness to believe in its ability to fulfill its desire. According to Sabiote and Delgado-Ballester (2011), this consumer identification with the brand goes beyond the monetary exchange. In this sense, the correspondence between the consumer and the brand's personality is vital in strengthening trust and generating greater brand attachment (Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022). Previous studies suggest that consumers behave well when they perceive this congruence between them and the brands (Chang and Know, 2022; Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022).

Therefore, in philanthropic institutions, it becomes crucial that managers work with clear and transparent communication strategies to inform their donors and interest groups (Torres, 2013). According to Catoiu and Tichindelean (2012), philanthropic culture is born of trust, and organizations must show transparency in their actions and strengthen their relationship with society. In addition, how institutions present themselves builds an image that can positively or negatively affect their credibility (Herrera and Diaz, 2008). Therefore, it is possible that donors feel more confident in institutions that are congruent with the Self. Given this, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: Real Self-congruence generates brand trust.

The real self-congruence added to the consumer's satisfaction with the brand produces a feeling of attachment because the consumer perceives that his expectations and desires were met notably and clearly (Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022). Real self-congruence has a solid and positive relationship

with consumer satisfaction, which leads to attachment and loyalty (Chang and Know, 2022). Brand attachment is the strength of the cognitive and affective bond between an individual and a brand, connecting a brand to an individual so that the brand is an extension of the Self (Chinelato *et al.,* 2022).

Previous studies indicate that the person will become attached and feel close to a brand when perceived as a means of self-expansion (Park et al., 2013), and self-congruence positively impacts brand attachment (Japutra *et al.,* 2014). Thus, when consumers recognize themselves in a brand and realize their affinity, their proximity generates attachment (Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022).

Furthermore, Sabiote and Delgado-Ballester (2011) emphasize in their study the importance of when brands consider that it is not enough to produce a good product and must also consider the type of memory and relationship they build with their consumers. In philanthropic institutions, the brand significantly influences potential donors because people are more willing to interact and be involved when they feel more identified with the brand (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006). Given the above, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Real Self-congruence generates brand attachment.

According to the literature, consumers prefer brands that match their self-image or show the image they want to present to others (Chang and Know, 2022; Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2022). On the other hand, trust in the brand is based on the consumer's belief that their expectations and desires will be satisfied, on the perception that the brand will fulfill the desired promise, as idealized by the Self (Sabiote and Delgado-Ballester. 2011). Corroborating the hypothesis that trust is built based on the congruence of the self with the brand, Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) point out that the ideal self- congruence influences trust. Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2022) add that positive relationships with the brand are developed when consumers perceive this congruence. In the reality of philanthropic institutions, according to Catoiu and Tichindelean (2012), philanthropic culture is born of trust, and organizations must show transparency in their actions and strengthen their relationship with society. Thus, through transparent information developed by communication strategies (Torres, 2013), managers can work on the institution's brand image so that the donor knows it and feels more confident to relate. After all, people are more willing to contribute, offer their time, and recommend the organization when they identify with the beneficiary institution's brand (Becker-Olsen and Hill, 2006). Given this, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Ideal self-congruence generates brand trust.

Brand attachment is defined as the strength of the cognitive and affective bond between an individual and a brand (Park *et al.*, 2010) developed from the interpersonal bonds created by the consumer. This

mental and affective bond connects a brand to an individual, so the brand is an extension of the self (Japutra *et al.*, 2014). It works as if the brand were an extension of the self, demonstrating a feeling of closeness between the consumer and the brand (Park *et al.*, 2010). Proximity and the perception that the brand represents him generate self-esteem, self-awareness, and attachment to the brand in the consumer. Studies such as those by Park *et al.* (2013) and Malar *et al.* (2011) reinforce that attachment occurs when the consumer recognizes the brand as more connected and closer to his ideals. Although studies point to different understandings of brand loyalty and attachment, it is clear that the more attachment, the more loyalty. According to Chinelato *et al.* (2022), brand attachment predicts solid and stable relationships between companies and consumers, forging favorable attitudes and behaviors. In the context of philanthropic institutions, donors need to identify with brands, believing in their causes (Catoiu and Tichindelean, 2012) so that there is a greater connection with the brand and for this to be achieved, transparent communication strategies can be developed (Torres, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that ideal self-congruence impacts brand attachment. Given these statements, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Ideal Self-congruence generates brand attachment.

Trust can modify consumer commitment to the brand. For this reason, companies invest in relationship actions since a conviction will lead to loyalty in the long-term consumer/brand relationship (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2003). Loyalty is understood in the marketing literature as the behavioral intention to continue to have a relationship with specific organizations or brands, even if there are other options or proposals from competitors (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2022a). Previous research states that companies must reinforce trust to maintain the loyalty of their consumers (Unurlu and Uca, 2017). Consumers need to feel more confident to continue engaging with the brand. Therefore, in the context of philanthropic institutions, they need to be transparent and responsible so that donors understand their credibility (Catoiu and Tichindelean, 2012). Torres (2013) suggests that these institutions can comply with information and transparency principles through advertising, bulletins, financial reports, letters, and communications aimed at interest groups. Hence, it is believed that by reinforcing trust in donors, institutions will significantly impact their loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented.

H5: Brand trust in the brand generates loyalty.

According to Pedeliento *et al.* (2016), attachment influences consumer brand loyalty. Evidence in the marketing field demonstrates that the stronger the trust in the brand, the greater the attachment relationship, resulting in a greater willingness of the consumer to remain with the chosen brand (Zhang and Sun, 2012). Chinelato *et al.* (2022) state that brand attachment is a relevant predictor

of solid and stable relationships between brands and their respective consumers, forging favorable attitudes and behaviors. For Japutra *et al*. (2014), when a brand reflects the consumer's image, there is an increase in attachment and the desire to continue consuming the brand, which can be characterized as loyalty. Sreejesh (2015) presents empirical evidence that brand attachment influences brand commitment. Given the above, it is plausible to consider that attachment to a philanthropic institution brand can generate donor loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented.

H6: Brand attachment generates loyalty.

Based on the literature review indicating the constructs and the development of the hypotheses pointed out in the previous sections, Figure 1 presents the hypothetical model of this research.

Figure 1. Hypothetical research model
Source: survey data

METHOD

This research is exploratory and descriptive. This is a multiple case study carried out in three philanthropic institutions in the health area in Brazil chosen for the representativeness of their brands, their donors, and the guarantee of accessibility to the institutions, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. This work has a quantitative, survey-type, cross-sectional nature. The researchers performed a literature review to identify the factors determining the antecedents of donor loyalty in philanthropic institutions. Thus, the hypothetical model of this research included the constructs of brand trust, brand attachment, and ideal and real self-congruence with the brand. The multitem scales were initially implemented in previous studies and used a 7-point Likert scale: brand trust – 4 items (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001); brand attachment – 4 items (Park *et al.,* 2010); ideal and real self-congruence with the brand – 2 items each (Malar et al., 2011); brand loyalty – 6 items (Brakus *et al.,* 2009).

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Data collection was carried out through the online application of a structured and self-completed questionnaire, using Survey Monkey, with intentional non-probabilistic sampling for accessibility - the institutions made available the selection of the subgroup, and any donor of the institutions could participate in the survey sent by email. In all, 571 respondents were obtained.

In the data analysis, the structural equation modeling AMOS 23. The report includes the previous steps for applying multivariate methods (Hair *et al.,* 2019).

Common method bias was evaluated using Harman's single-factor test (Hyman and Sierra, 2012). Therefore, an unrotated exploratory factor analysis revealed a multi-factor structure. The first factor explained variance was 39%, below the threshold of 50%, implying that common method bias was not a concern.

The context of philanthropy in Brazil

Philanthropy is changing as the giver seeks to become more involved, better informed, and ensure their investment reflects their values. This vision was disclosed in the Institute for the Development of Social Investment - IDIS, report on Global Trends in Philanthropy of May 2020 (Stead *et al.*, 2020). In 2017, the World Donation Index published by the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) - considering the number of people who, in the year before the survey, donated money to a philanthropic institution, helped a stranger, or did voluntary work -, showed that Brazil occupied the 75th place, far from the first placed: Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, United States, and Ireland. The index compared donations made in 126 countries, using three actions as criteria: helping strangers, donating money, and volunteering time.

Between 2008 and 2018, organizations in Brazil managed an average investment volume of R$3.3 billion. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light a new situation for philanthropy in the country. Between March 2020 and August 2021, a record number of donations were made in Brazil to those most affected by the pandemic, totaling R$7,164,458,094; more than 731,974 donors were registered, and 557 campaigns were carried out, according to the COVID-19 Donation Monitor (2024).

RESULTS

Sample profile

According to the sample, 42.2% of respondents have a family income of R$1,734.00 to R$7,475.00, followed by 32.7% with more than R$9,745.00. The respondents' gender was well divided, with 58.7% female and 41% male. The age group was concentrated above 40 years old, with 27.8% from 40 to

49 years old, 22.8% from 50 to 59 years old, and 30.8% over 60. Schooling was concentrated above complete higher education, with 25.6% having completed higher education, 37.1% postgraduate, and 12.1% with a Master's/Doctorate. Most respondents were married (60.9%), with 24.3% single and 11.9% Divorced.

Variables Measurement

The first analysis used to verify the quality of the measurement was the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), with extraction by principal components and Varimax rotation with SPSS23 (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). All constructs were one-dimensional. In terms of commonalities, all variables reached the minimum desirable. As for the KMO and the Percentage of Explained Variance, all constructs showed adequate indices (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Then, Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed to investigate the psychometric properties of the scales and confirm whether the measurement model offers a good fit.

Reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity

The reliability of the constructs that comprise this survey's hypothetical model was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (CA), as Hair *et al.* (2019) suggested. Kline (2015) and Malhotra *et al.* (2017) state that the CA for previously tested scales should be greater than 0.8. Table 1 shows that all the scale constructs used in this research have CA values higher than the authors recommended, proving their reliability.

Another analysis used in this research was convergent validity (CV). Hair *et al.* (2019) state that CV is the degree to which a variable correlate positively with other variables that compound the same factor and share a significant percentage of its variance. Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend using the average extracted variance (AVE) to measure the CV, emphasizing that its values must be greater than 0.5. The AVE for all constructs in this research varied between 0.75 and 0.91, indicating their CV.

According to Hair *et al.* (2019) and Malhotra *et al.* (2017), composite reliability (CR) is another criterion that allows checking the CV, and its values must be greater than 0.7. The CR of all constructs wavered between 0.88 and 0.95, reaching the parameters recommended by the earlier-mentioned authors.

Hair *et al.* (2019) argue that attesting to the discriminant validity (DV) among the hypothetical model constructs is a crucial research stage that uses structural equation modeling (SEM). The DV shows that the variables included in each model construct have more significant correlations with the variables that compound that same construct than those that comprise other constructs. Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend a method in which the square roots of the AVE of each

construct must be higher than Pearson's correlations between the other pairs of constructs. The results confirmed the DV among all the research constructs in Table I.

Table I. Assessment of reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity

	CR	CA	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
Loyalty	0.954	0.942	0.777	**0.881**				
Brand trust	0.923	0.861	0.751	0.812	**0.867**			
Brand attachment	0.948	0.925	0.82	0.863	0.753	**0.906**		
Real self-congruence	0.956	0.955	0.915	0.825	0.708	0.801	**0.957**	
Ideal self-congruence	0.883	0.896	0.791	0.862	0.742	0.863	0.861	**0.89**

Note(s): Composite Reliability (CR); Average Variance Extracted (AVE); Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (CA); the diagonal is the square root of AVE, and the off-diagonal values are the correlations.

Source(s): research data
Measurement model – AMOS 23

The measurement model used to calculate discriminant and convergent validity was executed in AMOS 23 with Maximum Likelihood. The model presented an adequate fit with $\chi2/df=2.903$ (p=0.000), NFI=0.974, CFI=0.983, TLI=0.974 and RMSEA=0.058 (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Nomological Validity

This section presents the test of this study's structural model, applying the structural equation modeling technique. This test allows for testing models of interrelations between constructs in a single approach while considering the impact of the estimates' measurement errors (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The hypothetical model was tested using AMOS 23 and ML (Maximum Likelihood) estimation method. Table II shows the results.

Table II. Test of the structural model with standardized weights

	Hypotheses	Weight	SD	T (2,58)	Sig	Results
H1	Real self-congruence → Brand trust	0.103	0.06	0.8	0.423	Not supported
H2	Real self-congruence → Brand attachment	-0.018	0.12	-0.16	0.872	Not supported
H3	Ideal self-congruence → Brand trust	0.682	0.06	5.12	***	Supported
H4	Ideal self-congruence □ Brand attachment	0.913	0.13	7.67	***	Supported
H5	Brand trust → Loyalty	0.404	0.08	10.04	***	Supported
H6	Brand attachment → Loyalty	0.592	0.04	13.7	***	Supported

Source: research data

The nomological model presented an adequate fit with $\chi2/df=3.231$ (p=0.000), NFI=0.927, CFI=0.937, TLI=0.922 and RMSEA=0.069 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, the R^2 of brand loyalty was 85%, demonstrating the capacity of the model to explain the construct. According to the research results, loyalty is impacted significantly by brand attachment ($\beta=0.592$; p<0.01) and brand trust ($\beta=0.404$; p<0.01). Therefore, the results suggest that emotional connections to the brand (attachment) are slightly more relevant than rational aspects such as trust; both are necessary to generate loyalty in a donor.

On the other hand, real self-congruence presented a non-significant impact on brand trust ($\beta=0.103$; p>0.05) and brand attachment ($\beta=-0.0018$; p>0.05). These results suggest that the congruence of the donor´s real self with the brand´s self does not contribute to loyalty.

However, ideal self-congruence presented a highly significant impact on brand attachment ($\beta=0.913$; p<0.01) and brand trust ($\beta=0.682$; p<0.01). Therefore, this evidence suggests that donors donate based on who they want to be (ideal self), not on who they are (real self). It looks like donors have an ideal image of themselves that is positive and different from the real one. Donation enables them to be more aligned and nearer the behavior and image they pursue of the ideal self they conceived.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to determine the antecedents of donors' loyalty to philanthropic institutions, considering their relationship with the institution's brand. For this, six hypotheses were proposed in the hypothetical model tested.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that the real self-congruence generates trust in the brand. However, this hypothesis was not confirmed. The same occurred with hypothesis 2, which was insignificant in ensuring the influence of real self-congruence on brand attachment. On the other hand, a significant influence on both relationships was identified regarding the impacts of ideal self-congruence on trust (hypotheses 3) and brand attachment (hypotheses 4), reinforcing the weight of ideal self-congruence in brand attachment.

Hypotheses 5 and 6, which sought to investigate the impacts of brand trust and brand attachment in the generation of loyalty, were confirmed. These results demonstrate that brand trust and brand attachment are antecedents of loyalty.

Besides, results suggested that the greater the congruence between the individual's self-concept and the brand personality, the greater the intensity of the relationship between these agents. There needs to be harmony between what the donor understands as reality and what the institution communicates so that he identifies and creates a strong connection, leading him to become loyal.

Furthermore, the result of this study contrasts with Machado (2019), where real self-congruence affected brand trust. Notably, the model tested by Machado (2019) occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic, which suggests that the donor had a more rational relationship with the brands. In other words, real self-congruence can build confidence. This reflection advocates that relationships with brands are more emotional, and consumers are becoming more idealistic. The uncertainty that emerged with the pandemic seems to have created a sense of humanity and solidarity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 557 social campaigns were carried out, according to the COVID-19 Donations Monitor (2024), suggesting that when challenging situations are shared, the tendency to create emotional bonds grows. On the other hand, it is perceived that a lot of work is still needed for Brazil to have a philanthropic mentality and a culture of donation.

Theoretical implications

This study presents academic contributions. First, the literature review and the results reinforce the CBR model with the expansion of analysis in the third sector during a social crisis (such as a pandemic), which is an unprecedented application. The second contribution was the study of multiple cases in the social assistance segment since only one study was found in one institution (Machado, 2019). The third contribution is related to the behavioral analysis of the donor in a moment of social crisis context, revealing alteration in the real self-congruence in the impact on brand trust, which is an innovative finding since no study was carried out during this type of crisis, as the pandemic caused by COVID-19. In this sense, differing from Machado (2019), the donor appears to be more idealistic than before the pandemic, which moves him towards donating to philanthropic institutions.

Besides, the results of this study corroborate the literature on the importance of trust in the brand as a source of competitive advantage for institutions when an institution works on its image.

After all, trust and attachment to the brand were confirmed as antecedents of loyalty. Thus, institutions should constantly reinforce their mission and commit to transparency, reporting to their stakeholders on the allocation of donations received.

Managerial implications

In emerging countries, there is greater government inefficiency and significant challenges to companies and citizens. Thus, managers face enormous challenges posed by the State's deficiencies and the needs of society.

In this context, philanthropic institutions are fundamental in society. However, they have to face a series of barriers, ranging from a lack of resources to a greater need to develop confidence to raise funds and ensure their survival. This study aims to contribute to this field of research and apply relevant marketing concepts in the context of these institutions to help managers find ways to help manage their brands and improve relationships with regular donors and new donors.

To achieve this, firstly, institutions need to give voice to their social causes and increase their interaction with donors and volunteers. Furthermore, in philanthropic institutions, managers must be transparent and seek a relationship with society to generate trust. In this sense, the CBR presents a relevant resource that can help managers of philanthropic institutions seek a relationship between donors and volunteers with the institution's brand.

Another contribution is that the results of this study show the importance of trust in the brand as a source of competitive advantage for institutions. Thus, they can support the manager's strategic decision-making regarding creating a relationship with the new donor. However, it is also recommended that these managers consider the importance of maintaining a regular relationship with the donor. This relationship can be developed through efficient and specific communication strategies.

Furthermore, managers need to consider that trust is a relevant antecedent of loyalty and needs to be continually worked on with the donor. To achieve this, institutions must constantly reinforce their mission and commit to transparency, informing about the destination of donations received. Once again, this reinforces the need to develop different communication strategies so donors and society can interact with the institution. Therefore, it is recommended that institutions interact with their interest groups through advertising, newsletters, financial reports, letters, or targeted communications.

Finally, managers must consider how institutions work on their image, which can directly impact their reputation. In this way, it is believed that by reinforcing trust and transparency with clear information focused on donors, institutions will have a better reputation, which could impact their loyalty.

Research limitations and suggestions for future research

This research is not free of limitations, which may motivate further research. Firstly, this study was limited to the fact that the research has a quantitative approach, making a subjective analysis of the theme impossible. Second, data collection was restricted to a single philanthropy sector (health hospital) in a country (Brazil). Third, the study was limited to the consumer-brand relationship based only on CBR theories.

Thus, for future research, it is suggested that similar research be applied in other institutions from different sectors. In addition, they can consider other types of crisis periods (such as wars, emergencies, or disasters caused by nature) to verify if the donor remains more ideological than rational. In addition, it is indicated to apply in other countries with different sociocultural contexts to generalize the results. Finally, further studies on the effects of self-congruence on brand satisfaction and commitment are also recommended.

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