
Brand Factors Sustaining Preference for South Africa's Artisanal Cheese Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development construes CSR as continuous firms' commitment in contributing to a local community/region's economic development through providing quality products and services, doing so ethically, and improving the quality of life for all in the region. In the face of stagnant and declining economic growth in South Africa, small and medium size (SMEs) cheese producers in the Cape Winelands serve customers and sustain livelihoods of farmers, workers, and the community. However, and following influx of imported cheese brands into South Africa, the cheese market is highly competitive, questioning sustainable preference for the local small-scale cheese brands. Thus, this study used snow-balling sampling technique to obtain 280 responses from shoppers on their brand knowledge structure (BKS) (i.e., brand awareness, image, and familiarity), perceived quality and preference for local artisanal cheese produced by SMEs in Cape Winelands of South Africa. Following a finding that a firm's CSR efforts in building brand equity depends on customers' perceived product value, we tested the mediating role of perceived quality in how BKS impacts preference. Structural equation modeling results revealed that perceived quality is the strongest driver of brand preference followed by region-of-origin brand awareness and familiarity. Perceived quality significantly mediated in the brand awareness-preference, and brand image-preference relationships. While region-of-origin brand image did not significantly impact brand preference directly, it did so indirectly through perceived quality. The results inform small-scale farmers of the importance of using all available channels including social media to build BKS, which measures how consumers think, feel and belief in a brand, and which produces myriads of benefits in competitive markets. Small-scale cheesemakers in other regions can use the findings to understand the act of building preference for local artisanal cheese brands so that business sustainability can be guaranteed, and continuous socio-economic CSR can be made.

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