



Determinants of Brand Switching Decision of the Egyptian Consumers during the Recession Period

العوامل المؤثرة للتحويل لمنتجات و علامة اخرى لدى المستهلكين المصريين خلال فترة الركود الاقتصادى

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الملخص

تتعلق هذه الدراسة بالتوصل إلى العوامل المؤثرة على قرار المستهلك بتغيير العلامة التجارية خلال فترة الركود الاقتصادي في السوق المصرية الناشئة، وتعمل على التوصل للعوامل الرئيسية التي تدفع المستهلكين إلى تغيير العلامة التجارية للمنتجات التي يقومون باستهلاكها. وقد تمت مراجعة الدراسات والأدبيات الخاصة و المتعلقة بالموضوع، وبعد المراجعة النظرية الشاملة، تم تطوير نموذج لاختباره و اشتملت الدراسة على عينة مكونة من 281 مستهلك مصري، تم جمع البيانات من مفرداتها بواسطة استبيان، كما تم إجراء 13 مقابلة شخصية متعمقة للحصول على معلومات تفسر النتائج. وقد تم تحليل الإجابات على أسئلة الاستبيان

اختبار assignment problem واختبار Hotelling's T-square (تطبيق حزمة attitudes measurement و rank order question (ordinal scale) مع تطبيق SPSS V.27 و Management Sciences)، ووضحت النتائج أن السعر هو العامل الأكثر تأثيراً على تغيير المستهلك للعلامة التجارية بالنسبة للمنتجات بصفة عامة في ظل الضغوط الاقتصادية حيث يسعى المستهلك إلى تخفيض التكلفة بالشراء بسعر أقل مع محاولة الحصول على نفس درجة الجودة. وأخيراً، تم تقديم توصيات عملية للشركات المنتجة و المديرين لمواجهة التحديات خلال فترات الركود الاقتصادي والمحافظة على الميزة التنافسية في السوق. وتطبيق هذه التوصيات يعتبر ضروري لإعداد استراتيجيات تسويقية تساعد في المحافظة على المستهلكين الحاليين وجذب مستهلكين جدد للحد من تأثير التحديات الاقتصادية على أداء و نتائج أعمال الشركات المنتجة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سلوك تغيير العلامة التجارية ، عوامل تغيير العلامة او الماركة التجارية ، عناصر المزيج التسويقي ، الضغوط الاقتصادية .

Abstract:

This study aims to examine the determinants influencing brand-switching decisions during an economic recession period in the Egyptian emerging market. It investigates the main factors in driving consumer brand switching across all product categories. Quantitative and qualitative techniques were employed to address the literature gap by conceptually and empirically examining the drivers of brand-switching decisions under unstable market conditions and their effect on consumer purchasing behavior. After forming an extensive theoretical review, a conceptual model was developed and tested through the use of 281 collected questionnaires and supported by 13 in-depth personal interviews with Egyptian consumers to gain in-depth explanations for the results. The data was analyzed through the use of rank order question (ordinal scale), assignment problem, and Hotelling's T-square test by using SPSS V.27 and Management Sciences Package software. The results revealed that price is the most influential determinant of brand switching across all product categories during economic distress. Furthermore, practical implications for marketers and business managers are provided, offering strategic recommendations to help in navigating through economic downturns and preserve competitive advantage in the market. These insights are crucial for crafting adaptive marketing strategies that retain existing consumers and attract new consumers to minimize the impact of economic challenges on brands' performance.

Keywords: Brand Switching Behaviour, Determinants of Brand Switching, Marketing Mix Elements, Economic Distress

Introduction

In times of economic instability, consumer behavior is not predictable. Uncertain global conditions that result in rising inflations, resource shortages, and political conflicts, have caused a tremendous shift in the way consumers make purchasing decisions. These decisions are no longer driven by preferences or brand loyalty but today's consumers are reacting to new economic pressures, making brand choices out of necessity rather than desire. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Palestinian-Israeli war, and widespread financial volatility have led to a global recession, diminishing purchasing power and reshaping consumers' priorities. Emerging markets like Egypt, already encountering high inflation and currency devaluation (World Bank, 2024), are witnessing consumers who rapidly switch from familiar foreign brands to local alternatives in which some are well-known and others are new to the market. The phenomenon of brand switching is highly dedicated in these unstable market conditions. The occurrence of consumers shifting their preferences from one brand to another is brand switching (Aw and Chong, 2019; and Govender 2017)

These evolving trends of consumers switching among brands raise pressing questions: are the traditional reasons behind brand switching behavior still relevant, or have new factors emerged as consumers adapt to economic hardship? Prior studies have highlighted that brand switching has been attributed to brands' fluctuating prices, better alternatives, or aggressive marketing campaigns (Dutta et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2021; Zaho et al., 2021; Kordi Ghasrodashti, 2018). However, during times of economic instability, the specific reasons behind brand switching behavior remain unknown. This research seeks to explore the underlying factors that drive consumers to switch brands during a recession period, with a great focus on determining which element of the marketing mix, such as price, product, place, or promotion, is the most influential across all product categories. The findings offer business managers

valuable insights for navigating unpredictable market conditions. By understanding these shifts in consumers' preferences, companies can better position themselves to meet their consumers' evolving needs.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Through the extensive review of literature, there were various factors that may influence consumers' behavior when deciding whether to switch from one brand to another. These factors play a crucial role in shaping consumers' decisions, either motivating them to choose an alternative brand or to remain loyal to their current ones. These factors can be negative in their brand that pushes them to switch, or there are more appealing factors in the alternative brand. Some of these factors are relevant to the marketing mix elements, consumer characteristics, or external influences. This study focuses on the marketing mix elements, while consumer characteristics and external influences are outside the scope of this research.

Brand Switching Behavior

Brand switching has been a subject of interest among researchers over time, as they have been drawn to understand the underlying reasons for this behavior and mitigate negative effects on businesses across various product and service categories, including smartphones, telecommunication services, food and beverage, and home appliances (Appiah et al., 2019; Hussain et al. 2022). Liao et al., (2021); Kordi Ghasrodashti (2018); and Dutta et al. (2022), highlighted that brand switching often leads to a decline in companies' sales revenue, as consumers choose to switch to competing brands. This shift in consumer behavior raises a potential risk to the overall operations of businesses and threatens their market presence. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to closely examine consumer behavior in order to retain existing customers, as this is significantly more cost-effective than acquiring new ones. According to Mulyo et al. (2023), the cost of attracting new customers is estimated to be five times higher than the cost of retaining loyal ones.

In a competitive market, products are distinguished primarily by the brands to which they belong. Brands play a major role in both microeconomic and macroeconomic contexts, as well as in marketing, due to their significant influence on the economy and consumer behavior (Maurya and Mishra, 2012). Companies use branding to enable consumers to identify their products among other alternatives and to differentiate their offerings from those of competitors. One of the branding concepts that has received considerable attention is brand switching. Brand switching refers to the tendency of consumers to stop purchasing from one brand and purchase from another (Iranzo Barreira et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2021; Lam et al., 2010; Kordi Ghasrodashti, 2018; Mulyo, 2023; van Der Westhuizen, 2018; Kumar et al., 2013; Sang et al., 2018; and Zhao et al., 2022).

Consumer behavior towards brands has consistently been examined through the lens of either brand loyalty or brand switching. Govender (2017), has explored whether consumers develop brand loyalty or engage in brand switching, viewing these as two opposing behaviors. Bogomolovo and Grudinina (2011), highlighted that prior studies have indicated that consumers switch brands due to various factors, all of which are relevant to product or experience failure and other external influences, inducing them to seek alternatives. Govender (2017) further explained that consumers are considered brand switchers when they use two or more brands because they have not found a single brand that fully satisfies their needs. Jiang et al., (2014), Govender (2017), and Inman (2001) emphasized that brand switching can occur either between different brands offering the same product or within the same brand across its different products. So, consumers switch from a brand to another for the same product, or switch from a product to another in the same brand, or switch from a brand to another that offers a completely different product. This behavior may result from a consumer's desire to explore different products within the same brand or a shift in their preferences. Consequently, various determinants are

identified in the literature that can shape and explain consumers' brand switching behavior.

Determinants of Brand Switching

Determinants of brand switching belong to several categories that are considered as enablers of switching and may impose consumers to switch brands. Some of these determinants are related to the marketing mix factors (Aw and Chong, 2019; Mortimer and Weeks, 2019; Manzoor et al., 2020; and Mulyo, 2023), consumer characteristics (Mathur et al., 2003; Punj, 2011; Kokkiadi and Blomme, 2013; Shukla et al., 2013; Reitmeier and Roosen, 2015; Pradhan and Misra, 2015; Rao et al., 2016; Kamboj and Rshman, 2016; Govender, 2017; and Gundala et al., 2022), and other external influences. (Liao et al., 2021; Randabunga et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2022; and Ahmad et al., 2022) This study only focuses on the marketing mix elements whereas each of these factors is reviewed from previous studies to understand its influence on consumers' brand switching decisions.

Marketing Mix Elements

According to Govender (2017), brands induce consumer brand switching decisions by conducting constant manipulation in the marketing mix elements of a brand. They usually influence consumers' switching behaviors by changing the product's promotions, price, and attributes, which change the product's value proposition. Consequently, the marketing mix elements that are found in previous literature to may have an influence on switching decisions are price, promotion, place, and product.

A. Price

Price may be a critical determinant for consumers, influencing their decision to either remain with a brand or switch to an alternative. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010); Afzal et al. (2013); Manzoor et al. (2020); and Aw and Chong (2019), price represents the monetary cost a consumer bears to acquire a product or service, and perceived as an extrinsic factor that

reflects the functional benefits of the product. Mulyo (2023) assessed the brand switching levels in fast moving consumer goods market focusing on dairy products. The findings revealed that price conscious consumers may switch among brands that provide affordable prices rather than consuming from a brand with high monetary requirements. Awan *et al.*, (2016); Manzoor *et al.*, (2020); Isa *et al.*, (2020) investigated the price impact on brand switching decisions in the telecommunication market. These studies confirmed that the service price impact consumers switching decision. It was common among them that the higher the price of the service provider, the higher the tendency of switching to other brands. On the contrary, Ramesh Kumar and Advani (2005); and Aw and Chong (2019) findings revealed the opposite in their study. Ramesh Kumar and Advani (2005) elaborated that, consumers in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) market do not give high importance to prices and their main concern is the quality, which means if the prices are high, they may not switch to a cheaper alternative. Moreover, Aw and Chong (2019) further explained that consumers in emerging markets tend to be risk-averse and are may be willing to pay high prices for brands. This may emphasize that consumers' mindset in emerging markets believe that affordable prices of products indicate inferior quality.

B. Promotional Techniques

Consumers are often inclined to purchase from brands that actively engage in and deliver promotional activities. The promotional activities that serve as driver for brand switching include monetary promotions, advertisements, and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Vilcassim and Jain, 1991; Yoon and Tran, 2011; Appiah *et al.* 2018; Shehzad *et al.* 2020; Randabunga *et al.* 2021; and Mulyo, 2023)

Monetary promotions are activities done by brands to offer consumers price discounts or coupons. By using such tool, the brand can directly affect the cost benefit evaluation of the product in the consumers' mind and persuade them to switch (Vilcassim

and Jain, 1991; Aw and Chong, 2019; Buil *et al.* 2013; and Randabunga *et al.* 2021). According to Nagar (2009), monetary promotions have a high impact on changing the consumers' loyalty towards a brand. Marketers assert that these promotions do not only grab consumer attention but also provide them a financial incentive to switch brands (Nagar, 2009; Mortimer and Weeks, 2019; Aw and Chong, 2019). Bhatt and Saiyed (2017), and Mortimer and Weeks (2019), showed alignment with the previous findings and added that the existence of such behavior has a higher tendency in grocery items. Furthermore, Appiah *et al.* (2019) emphasized that consumers in unstable markets are price sensitive and they respond highly towards the brands that offer discounts.

Advertisements serve as a tool for brands to inform and persuade consumers to purchase their products. These activities are designed to deliver messages that foster positive and favorable changes in consumers' feelings towards the brand (Deighton *et al.*, 1994; Kumar and Raju, 2013; Madni *et al.*, 2016; Aw and Chong, 2019; Sama, 2019; and Shehzad *et al.*, 2020). Deighton *et al.* (1994) highlighted that advertisements play a crucial role in consumers' decisions to switch brands, particularly among promotion-oriented consumers or variety seeker consumers. Ahmed *et al.* (2022) further supported this view and stated that the more attractive a competitor's advertisements, the greater the likelihood that consumers may switch to the competing brand. Tariq *et al.* (2014) further noted that effective advertising negatively influences brand switching, suggesting that when fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands employ effective advertising techniques, they do not encourage consumers to switch brands.

Cheung and Thadani (2012), Palma *et al.*, (2021), and Randabunga *et al.*, (2021) noted that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is a tool used by consumers to convey information about a product or service within their social circle with the use of electronic media. Randabunga *et al.*, (2021), Nugroho (2020), and

Ali and Shaiq (2023) agreed that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has a significant positive influence on brand switching behavior as the more positive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) exists about a brand, the higher the likelihood that consumers switch to that brand. Meanwhile, Zhang *et al.*, (2015) studied the relationship between negative electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and brand switching behavior, and found no correlation between them, which indicates that while consumers may consider negative electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a reference in their decision, it does not necessarily lead to a change in brand choice.

C. Product

Mulyo (2023) emphasized that product attributes have a critical role in shaping consumers' preferences for a brand's product. Wahyuningsih *et al.* (2023) further explained that consumers use these attributes as bases for judging whether to consider or disregard a brand. These attributes encompass various factors, including packaging, perceived quality, features, and design (Mulyo, 2023; Kotler and Armstrong, 2010; Wahyuningsih *et al.*, 2023; Afzel, 2013; and Isa *et al.*, 2020). Wahyuningsih *et al.*, (2023) and Aprirachman and Hasri (2022), confirmed in their studies that product attributes have a major role in affecting consumers' brand switching decisions. This highlights that if consumers perceive a competitor's product attributes positively, there is a high tendency that they may switch to that brand. In contrast, Ahmad *et al.* (2022) found in their study on the telecommunication industry that signal dropping has an insignificant effect on brand switching, highlighting that even if a provider's signals drop, loyal consumers are unlikely to switch to another competitor.

D. Place

Place is an important element of the marketing mix and includes physical distribution activities to ensure the availability of the product or brand at the right place/location and time. Also it includes channels of distribution (wholesaling and retailing) to maintain the availability of the products/brand in the stores and

can be approached by consumers. Sloot and Verhoef (2008), Clemes et al. (2010), Awan et al. (2016), Anyanwu and Okpalaeke (2022), and Mawar Firdausi et al. (2023) identified product or service inconvenience as a critical determinant driving brand switching behavior. This suggests that when consumers face difficulties in accessing or using a brand's offering, they are more likely to seek alternative options.

In summary, the marketing mix elements are stated to be enablers for brand switching behavior across all product categories in reference to prior studies. It can be clearly seen from the review that all elements influence brand switching behaviors. However, there are limited studies exploring which is the most influential element of the marketing mix factors that impact consumers' switching behaviors. In addition, some studies illustrated controversial findings on the effect of price as a determinant for brand switching behavior. This could be considering that previous studies have explored this determinant in stable market conditions, where consumers are less prone to be price sensitive and may look for upgrading their purchases for more luxurious brands. According to these stable conditions, price was not an influential element among other marketing mix factors. Moreover, as this study aims to investigate the main determinant of brand switching across all products within unstable economic contexts, price may be the most influential determinant of brand switching as consumers are experiencing financial constraints as a drawback of the arising conflicts. Accordingly, this study fills the gap of investigating which of the marketing mix elements has the highest effect in influencing consumers switching decisions in economic distress and hypothesizes the following:

H1: Price is the most influential determinant of brand switching behavior in economic distress.

Methods and data

The Research Methods

Based on the previously stated hypothesis, the research model was conceptualized, as seen in Figure (1), whereas determinants of brand switching are the independent variable and brand switching behaviors is the dependent variable.

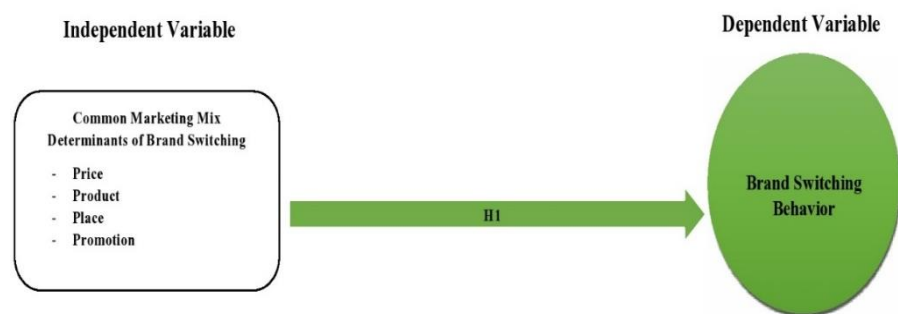


Figure 1. The Research Model

Source: Prepared by the Author

For the variables and measurements, the brand switching behavior is conceptualized by identifying and measuring the different switching behaviors consumers perform which are in form of permanent, temporary, or for trial. The determinants of brand switching measures relate to the marketing mix elements developed and confirmed by prior studies. The marketing mix measures are price, product, promotion, and place, each of the elements include items to reflect its meaning. Price and promotions measurement scales were adopted from Aw and Chong (2019) and Abril and Rodriguez-Canovas (2016). As for product and place measurements were adopted from Rasmesh Kumar and Advani (2005) and Isa et al. (2020).

The researchers utilized quantitative techniques with the use of 281 structured questionnaires that were collected from Egyptian consumers who are affected by the Egypt's recession where they had to switch/ or intend to switch among brands due to the hyperinflation and scarcity of products of various categories through the use of nonprobability restricted

judgmental non-random sample technique to ensure the units represents males and females. As for the qualitative insights, 13 in-depth personal interviews were conducted with consumers across various hypermarkets through convenience sampling to provide explanatory views on the results.

The Research Data and Findings

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample of 281 respondents consists of 58% females and 43% males, and the majority of them either hold a bachelor's degree or have completed their postgraduate studies. As for their age distribution, most of the respondents were in their 20s, 30s, or 40s, with an average age of 46.8 years. According to this age distribution of the sample, this means it represents respondents from all age ranges that conduct purchases and may be affected by the ongoing economic dilemma. Regarding their income levels, the majority of the units receive both fixed and changeable income. As for this occupation, most of them are either unemployed/on pension, employed in the private sector, or are private professionals. The authors perceive the sample as representative based on the demographic variables within the units.

Validity and Reliability Measures

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Measures of the Scale

❖ Variable	Items	VIF	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance extracted
Price	Cheaper Prices	1.564	0.644	0.788	0.583
	Price Value	1.338			
	Gifts Coupons	1.5			
	Price Quantity	1.628			
	Discounts	1.483			
Promotional techniques	Price Off	1.82	0.627	0.778	0.555
	Sales Reps	1.278			
	Intensive Ads	1.595			
Product Characteristic	Friends & Family	1.534	0.678	0.819	0.602
	Better Quality	1.817			
	Packaging Design	1.462			
	Made in Egypt	1.833			
	More Benefits	1.281			
	Long Lasting	1.622			
	After Sales Services	1.927			
Variety	1.575	0.607	0.704	0.585	
Distribution	Availability				
	Delivery	1.723			

Source : Prepared by the Author

Before further analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to ensure both the reliability and validity of the measures as seen in table (1). The reliability measures is confirmed as the Cronbach’s Alpha values exceed 0.6 which indicates that the items used to measure the determinants of brand switching are internally consistent. Additionally, the composite reliability values are above 0.7 that further support the reliability of the scale. As for the convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) values are greater than 0.5 which shows that the items are effectively related to the variable that they are intended to measure; therefore, this ensures good convergent validity as

supported by Taber (2018). Furthermore, there is absence of multi-collinearity as the variance inflation factor (VIF) range between 1.2 and 1.9, which are below the acceptable threshold of 5.

Testing Hypothesis

The researchers used the rank order scale and the assignment problem to determine the 3 main determinants that influence consumer switching decision across all product categories. Lastly, the attitude scale was utilized to further confirm the factors generated from the rank order and assignment problem results.

a. Rank Order (Ordinal Scale) and Assignment Problem Results

Table 2. Rank Order Results of 3 Main Determinants of Brand Switching Across All Product Categories

Factors	1 st Most Important	2 nd Most Important	3 rd Most Important	Total	Rank
1. Cheaper/Less Price	69	18	27	270	2
2. Value for Money	99	82	14	475	1
3. Gifts/Coupons	0	0	7	7	15
4. Price Off/Discount	6	28	43	117	7
5. Recommended by Sales Representatives	0	5	4	14	13
6. Price Quantity Ratio	9	32	38	129	4
7. Intensively Advertised	0	2	3	7	15
8. Recommended by Family & Friends	7	20	13	74	8
9. Better Quality	50	26	21	223	3
10. Attractive Packaging Design	1	10	3	26	10
11. Made in Egypt	17	19	36	125	5
12. More Benefits	0	6	12	24	11
13. Long-Lasting/Durable	1	3	8	17	12
14. Aftersales Services	4	9	6	36	9
15. Wider Variety of Products	0	0	13	13	14
16. Available in Markets/Stores	17	20	30	121	6
17. Delivery Facilities	0	1	2	4	16

Note: Frequencies of each ranked factor is multiplied by a weight to reflect its degree of importance and then total summation is computed to reveal the overall factor weight (1st most important =3, 2nd most important = 2, 3rd most important =1)

Table (2) presents the ranked determinants of brand switching behavior across all product categories. The results indicated that the 1st and most influential determinant that drive brand switching is value for money. The 2nd determinant is cheaper prices which encourages consumers to switch to more affordable alternatives. The 3rd determinant is better quality which reflects the importance of product attributes in influencing consumers switching behavior. It can be noticed that the first two determinants ranked are both price-related which emphasizes the priority consumers place on the costs they will pay to switch and purchase from a brand in volatile market conditions. The 3rd determinant better quality which highlights while price is a primary considered factor, the product attributes and quality plays a significant role in brand switching behavior. This indicates that consumers assess product quality after initially considering the brand’s price.

The assignment problem technique focuses on identify and maximizing the factor which was highly ranked as first, second, or third most important among all determinants. This makes the assignment problem unique in its nature compared to rank order. Table (3) illustrates the assignment problem results.

Table 3. The Determinants of Brand Switching Behavior for All Product Categories (Assignment Problem Results)

Degree of Importance	Factor Number	Factor Name
1st Most Important	1	Cheaper/Less Price
2nd Most Important	2	Value for Money
3rd Most Important	4	Discounts/Price Off

As shown in table (3), the 1st most important factor is cheaper prices, followed by value for money and discounts/price off as the 2nd and 3rd most important factors respectively. These results highlight that consumers gave the 3 main determinants that

influence their switching behaviors rely in the price factor which confirm the results of the results of rank order.

In relevancy with the results stated above, it is visible by both techniques that most factors ranked by consumers as the main in inducing their brand switching behavior are related to the brand’s pricing strategy. This confirms that consumers now suffer from the volatile economic conditions, which pushed them to become attentive and rational in their purchasing behavior. The rationality behind this is that they switch to brands that offer cheaper or adequate value products. As they become price sensitive, they react dramatically to the price changes of brands and search for cheaper alternatives to cut their spending. As the rank order results emphasizes that consumers do give attention to the quality of the brand, this interprets that they look for less expensive brands with acceptable quality.

b. Attitude Scale and Hotelling T-Test Results

Table 4. Consumers’ attitudes towards reason for switching to other brand behavior

Statements	(5) Strongly Agree	(4) Agree	(3) Neutral	(2) Disagree	(1) Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean
You switch to the brand/ trademark that....							
1. is cheaper/less price than the brand you used.	139 49.50%	90 32%	38 13.50%	7 2.50%	7 2.50%	281 100%	4.23
2. Provide you with good value for money.	224 79.70%	48 17.10%	8 2.80%	1 0.40%	0 0%	281 100%	4.76
3. Offer you coupon/gifts.	9 3.20%	96 34.20%	97 34.50%	61 21.70%	18 6.40%	281 100%	3.06
4. has discount/price-off	112 39.90%	112 39.90%	48 17.10%	9 3.20%	0 0%	281 100%	4.16
5. sales reps recommended it to you.	8 2.80%	35 12.50%	94 33.50%	110 39.10%	34 12.10%	281 100%	2.55
	146	103	28	4	0	281	

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6. has fair price compared to its quantity.	52.00%	36.70%	10%	1.40%	0.00%	100%	4.39
7. is advertised intensively.	16 5.70%	76 27%	110 39.10%	68 24.20%	11 3.90%	281 100%	3.06
8. your relatives/friends recommend it to you.	80 28.50%	135 48%	57 20.30%	9 3.20%	0 0%	281 100%	4.02
9. has better quality.	225 80.10%	46 16.40%	7 2.50%	1 0.40%	2 0.70%	281 100%	4.75
10. has attractive packaging design.	39 13.90%	150 53.40%	50 17.80%	31 11%	11 3.90%	281 100%	3.62
11. is made in Egypt.	134 47.70%	72 25.60%	46 16.40%	25 8.90%	4 1.40%	281 100%	4.09
12. provide you with more benefits.	156 55.50%	99 35.20%	21 7.50%	5 1.80%	0 0%	281 100%	4.44
13. is more durable (Long-lasting).	80 28.50%	140 49.80%	56 19.90%	3 1.10%	2 0.70%	281.000 100%	4.04
14. provide after-sales services.	138 49.10%	117 41.60%	21 7.50%	2 0.70%	3 1.10%	281 100%	4.37
15. is available with wide range of products (variety).	44 15.70%	90 32%	67 23.80%	77 27.40%	3 1.10%	281 100%	3.34
16. is available in markets/stores.	201 71.50%	61 21.70%	15 5.30%	4 1.40%	0 0%	281 100%	4.63
17. provide delivery facility.	23 8.20%	65 23.10%	117 41.60%	61 21.70%	15 5.30%	281 100%	3.07

To gain a deeper understanding of the determinants driving brand switching across all product categories, 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the attitude towards 17 statements each represent a determinant in which these statements are consistent with the 17 determinants of brand switching. Table

(4) provides a detailed overview of the mean value for each of the 17 statements.

Delving into the analysis of the six most influential determinants of brand switching based on their highest mean values. These factors were found to have a significant agreement level on their impact on brand switching behavior. The first and most significant determinant is “value for money” with the highest mean value of 4.76. The second determinant is “better quality” receiving a high mean of 4.75. The minimal difference between the mean values of these two factors emphasize that consumers highly prioritize both value for money and quality. Particularly, it means that consumers switch for brands that would provide them with value in terms of good quality with affordable prices that would fit their budget constraints during economic instability, highlighting the importance of the price factor to them. The third determinant is “availability” supported by a mean value of 4.63, indicating that consumers switch to brands that are easily found, specifically when other alternatives are scarce. The fourth determinant is “more benefits” with a mean of 4.44, reflecting consumers’ growing preference to switch to brands that offer additional benefits during economic instability. This means that they switch to brands that maximizes for them the value they can get from their products. The fifth determinant is “price-to-quantity-ratio” ranked by a mean of 4.39 which reflects consumers’ rational approach when switching between brands that offer large quantity with good price. Lastly, “aftersales services” with a mean value of 4.37 making it the sixth important determinant of brand switching. The six determinants that consumers highlighted as of high importance in influencing their brand switching behaviors are from various marketing mix elements that brands use.

In addition, Hotelling’s T-Square test was applied as a statistical test to assess whether there are differences among the importance of the highest ranked factors and are statistically significant or statistically indifferent in importance at 95%

confidence level. The application of this test is to further validate the ranks and importance of these main determinants, offering a precise indication for their degree of impact on brand switching behavior across all product categories. Details of the Hotelling T-square results are presented in the appendix. The test confirmed that “value for money” and “better quality” are indifferent, indicating that consumers view them as equally important in influencing their brand switching behavior. These findings indicate that consumers perceive value by assessing a brand’s product quality and comparing its price. This relationship between quality and price reveals that consumers in unstable markets are not only seeking cheaper alternatives but also evaluating whether the quality of the product justifies the price they pay. Both determinants emphasize the critical role of price in shaping consumer brand switching behavior as they are becoming more rational due to the volatile conditions. According to the Hotelling T-Test, the first main determinants of brand switching are value for money and better quality.

The test further validated that brand availability is the second most important determinant, emphasizing that the lack of accessibility is a major driver for consumers to switch brands. Additionally, the test revealed that “more benefits”, “price-to-quantity ratio”, and “aftersales services” are statistically indifferent, highlighting their equivalent importance when consumers switch brands. These factors influence consumers’ brand switching behavior at the same level, with each perceived as equally important. Consequently, these results denote the product attributes that consumers seek when switching brands, while also maintaining affordability, as the “price-to-quantity ratio” once again emphasizes the importance of price factor. If an alternative brand offers products with additional benefits, large quantities at an affordable price, or aftersales services, consumers are more likely to switch to it.

The third main determinants of brand switching according to Hotelling T-Test are “more benefits, and “price-to-

quantity ratio”, “aftersales services”. So the six most important determinants are “value for money”, “better quality”, “availability”, “more benefits”, “price-to-quantity ratio”, and “after-sales services” were further analyzed and found that some factors have the same weight of importance in consumer’s eyes through Hotelling T test and are group to 3 main categories. Therefore, the results revealed that there are three main determinants of brand switching; the first determinant is “value for money” and “better quality”, the second factor is “availability”, and the third determinant is “after-sales services”, “price-to-quantity ratio”, and “more benefits”. These results confirm the results of the rank order question that price and quality are the main determinants for brand switching behavior.

Other factors were agreed upon by consumers that have an influence on their brand switching behaviors. The analysis revealed that consumers agree that financial savings, affordability, and local production of products influence their switching behavior in economic and political instability. Price-related factors, such as “cheaper prices” with a mean of (4.23) and “discounts” with a mean of (4.16) are considered drivers of brand switching by consumers. These results show that cost reductions matter to them during those financially tough times. Product-related factors, including “Made in Egypt” with a mean (4.09), “durability” with a mean (4.04), “attractive packaging” with mean of (3.62), and “product variety” with a mean of (3.34), also play a vital role in their switching decisions. Additionally, promotion-related factors, such as “recommendations from family and friends” with a mean of (4.02), have an impact on them. While, other promotional techniques, such as “sales representatives’ recommendations”, and “gifts/coupons” with a mean value of (3.06), as well as place-related factors like “delivery” with a mean of (3.07), show a minimal impact on consumer brand switching decisions during economic distress.

c. Qualitative Results Using In-depth Personal Interviews

The results of the interviews with 13 Egyptian consumers revealed that the majority have been heavily suffering from the hyper-inflation across all product and service categories. They quoted *“Due to rising prices, we switch from brands we used and begun seeking cheaper/affordable alternatives with acceptable quality among different product categories. By switching to these cheaper options, we reallocate the saved amount to cover other essential expenses such as electricity bills, water bills, and school fees, etc...”* This ensures that due to the current complications, they are selective in their purchases and look for affordability as a primary factor. Furthermore, they explained that they carefully explore the value they may receive compared to its price to compromise their switching decision. They consider checking discounts broader to know brands on discount and consider switching to the brand with good price off deal. They stated that *“because of the current Palestinian issues, we switched to known and unknown local brands to be part of the boycott movement.”* Another factor that contributed to their switching behavior is the unavailability and shortage of the brand’s products in the market. It is determined that the general factors that push consumers to switch across all product categories now are cheaper/less price, value for money, discounts/price off, and made in Egypt brands. It can be concluded that the majority of determinants that contribute to their switching behaviors rely in the prices of the brand. Accordingly, the interview results confirm the findings of the questionnaire which indicate that price is the most influential determinant of brand switching behavior.

The comprehensive analysis using rank order question supported by assignment problem and attitude scale (supported by Hotelling T-square test) to test hypothesis 1 produced the main determinants influencing brand switching behavior across all product categories in unstable markets. Moreover, the in-depth interviews validated these findings as consumers stressed that they mainly switch brands for its affordability and value in the

current conditions. The findings of all techniques used collectively reflected the significant role of the price factor in driving brand switching behavior in economically volatile conditions.

Therefore, H1 is accepted as price is the most influential determinant of brand switching behavior in economic distress.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the most influential determinant of brand switching among the marketing mix elements, such as price, product, place, and promotion, during the Egyptian economic recession period. Testing hypothesis 1 revealed that price is the main factor among the marketing mix elements that highly influences consumers' brand switching during economic distress, which supports hypothesis 1. Consumers have identified that the main drivers for their switching behaviors are cheaper prices, value for money, and better quality. The findings indicate that consumers switch to brands that majorly offer a combination of affordable prices with good quality, highlighting a significant emphasis on pricing factors. Consumers during the time of instability are rational buyers; therefore, they search for cheaper products with acceptable quality to match their budget constraints and savings. Accordingly, there is a major emphasis made by the consumer on factors reflecting affordability and quality in their response by ranking price factors such as cheaper prices and value for money in the first and second criteria when switching.

Anyasor et al. (2021), Hayat et al. (2020), Shah et al. (2018), Ahmad et al. (2022), Hussain et al. (2022), Hwang et al. (2021), and Manzoor et al. (2022), were in alignment with the current study findings, which indicate that price significantly impacts consumers' brand switching decisions. However, these studies were conducted under stable market conditions and highlighted that price is a factor among other factors that influence brand switching behavior. Yet, this study aimed to emphasize which among all the marketing mix elements impacts consumers'

switching decisions highly during economic distress. Accordingly, it was hypothesized and proven that among all elements, price was found to be the most influential determinant compared to other marketing mix factors that drive consumers switching behavior as a consequence of the instability. In accordance, business managers and marketers across all product categories in the context of economic and political disturbances should prioritize offering cheaper and good value for money products.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations and implications are suggested for business managers and marketers across all product categories to implement in their brands when operating under economically volatile conditions. As price is identified as the most influential determinants of brand switching, business managers of all product categories should prioritize applying competitive pricing strategies. This does not only include maintaining lower prices but also offer good quality products with affordable prices, discounts, price reductions and flexible pricing options to appeal to price sensitive consumers in response. They must ensure that the pricing strategy reflects the perceived value of the product as its essential to retain and attract consumers by justifying to rational consumers the reason they should stay or switch to the brand.

Companies may also attempt to reduce their costs to subsequently lower their products' prices. It is advised that companies minimize production costs by reducing the expenses of the packaging materials while ensuring that product quality is maintained. Brands should evaluate their packaging options and select the more cost effective without hindering quality. Additionally, Brands can produce smaller packages sizes as consumers now are willing to buy in less quantity if the quality remains high. This shift can attract budget-conscious shoppers and potentially increase the overall sales during market instability. Furthermore, it is recommended that brands reassess their marketing expenditure in an attempt to reduce their costs.

By cutting the traditional advertising expenses and reallocating those funds in offering consumer sales promotion through offering monetary promotions or discounts as consumers now are more attracted to these promotional activities compared to others.

It is also recommended that business owners tailor value product lines or apply down stretching for their lines directly targeting and appealing to price conscious consumers who are managing their spending. These lines should maintain good quality with lower prices than their existing offerings. They should also promote these products by conducting campaigns that effectively target this segment. Since consumers highlighted that “cheaper prices” and “discounts” are among the 3 main factors driving brand switching. Businesses should consider offering competitive discounts and price reductions. This can be through the use of discounts, Buy-One-Get-One (BOGO), or bundles offering complementary products together. These use of these sales promotion strategies, particularly in response to economic instability, can make a brand more appealing to price-sensitive consumers.

As for the research limitations, this study has limitations regarding the geographical limitations and market context. For the geographical limitation, the data collection was conducted primarily in two governorates in Egypt, Cairo and Giza, resulting in a sample that does not include responses from consumers in other regions of Egypt. Furthermore, this study focuses on investigating the main determinants of brand switching across all product categories with no major focus on a certain industry to highlight for all companies the elements of high importance during these conditions.

According to these limitations, suggestions are provided for future research to overcome and address these limitations. Future researches are suggested to apply this research in other regions such as emerged or other emerging who are experiencing economic instability to identify if determinants of brand switching remain the same or cultural differences shape

consumers' reactions. Future studies should examine the determinants of brand switching for service sectors during economic instability, such as telecommunication, banking, hospitality, as it will offer insights on how service-based companies can adapt to economic challenges.

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