

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Consumer's response to brands: A case study of beauty lotion brand in Cameroun

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**This article seeks to contribute to a better knowledge of sensitivity of consumers to brands. The results of the survey carried out with 361 women aged fifteen and above on the beauty lotions market in the towns of Douala, Yaounde, Ngaoundere and Bafoussam validate the fact that enduring involvement, perceived differences and perceived risks in a category of products influence sensitivity to brands. The study also confirms that perceived differences between brands are the most explanatory variable of sensitivity to brands. Finally, this paper proposes a model of sensitivity to brands of Cameroonian consumers. To succeed in Cameroun, body lotion enterprises should make visible the characteristics/advantages of their brand and act on interpersonal communications. The strengthening of the brand strategy is an action lever strongly recommended to these enterprises.**

**Key words:** Sensitivity to brands, consumer behaviour, brands, perceived risk, perceived differences between the brands, enduring involvement.

### INTRODUCTION

Brands constitute an essential element of economic life and represent undeniable assets for companies (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). By multiplying the devices of interaction with consumers, they have become indispensable partners and powerful ferments of social bond. Sign of the flag bearer of value, brands are able to create around them a community of fans. Apple, for example, creates a cult (Kapferer, 2011). Vector of differentiation and loyalty, brands allow enterprises of sub-Saharan Africa to be more competitive (Chinedu et al., 2011) through strategies of alliances (Bekolo, 2004).

In developing countries and particularly in Cameroon, the explosion of brands is remarkable. An investigation report of the Economic Mission (2004a) found a significant breakthrough of brands in the dairy industry, the cosmetics industry and the production of foam by Batoula and Scimpos. One observes exponentially, the regular introduction of new brands in the Cameroonian

market. For example, Guinness is launching Smirnoff Ice (December 2008) and Pilsner (November 2009). In March 2010, the Cameroonian Cement of plants have introduced in the market Fabrique. The Cameroonian breweries have expanded their range of products with Booster Pina Colada (December 2008), Orangina (November 2010) and XXL (November 2012). In July 2012, X- net phone (or Jam), the first Cameroonian phone brand Cameroonian has been created. Industry of body lotion is enriched with brands (eg Rapid'Clair, Bel'Clair, Moby Baby, Vaseline, Lumina, B-Light, etc.). In mineral water (bottled, bagged and placed in glasses), many brands compete for consumers (Tangui, Supermont, The Febe, Aquabelle, Contrex, Sahel Springs, Aqaba, Africa pure water, sweet water, Sahel, etc.). These illustrations are not exhaustive and are found in all sectors. The dominant role of brands, in at least the Africa market, probably reflects the importance that consumers attach to them.

Indeed, a survey by McKinsey (2012) emphasizes that brands play an important role in African purchasing decisions. According to this institute, African consumers attach great importance to both the quality and the brand in their decision taking contrary to the idea that they are prone to unbranded products, cheap and of poor quality.

Hence, a blooming research focuses on several fundamental concepts of brand management like brand equity (Aaker, 1992), the brand extension (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Volckner and Sattler, 2006), the brand personality (Aaker, 1997), attachment to the brand (Chaplin and Deborah, 2005; Fedorikhin et al., 2008; Park et al., 2009) and, the love of brand (Thomson et al., 2005; Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012) amongst others. If interest in the theme of the brand is significant, it must be acknowledged that little research focuses on sensitivity to brands and this, despite its managerial importance (Amine, 1998). Blomback (2005) underlines the interest of sensitivity to brands for a better optimization of brand awareness which is a prerequisite for brand image (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) and a factor of loyalty to the brand (Kapferer and Laurent, 1992; Amine, 1998; Odin et al., 2001). Brand sensitivity conditions the influence of brand personality on the relationship of the consumer to the brand (Gouteron, 2006, 2008; Bouhleb et al., 2011). Finally, sensitivity to brands is a key determinant of the relative importance of the brand in purchase decisions of organizations (Zablah et al., 2010).

The objective of this article is to contribute to the existing literature on consumer behaviour by the study of a phenomenon which has not been dealt with enough in the academic framework (Kapferer and Laurent, 1983; 1992; Froloff-Brouche and Ben-Miled, 1995): sensitivity to brands. We are precisely interested in the antecedents of sensitivity to brands. The present research is organized as follows. Firstly, the literature on the concept of sensitivity to brands and the factors likely to explain it are presented. Thus, the conceptual framework and the various proposals are specified. Then, the research methodology and the results are exposed. Lastly, the managerial implications, the limits and the research paths are explored.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand sensitivity originates from the tradition of research on brand loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978) or more precisely on the commitment to the brand (Froloff-Brouche and Ben-Miled, 1995). It addresses the issue of the brand in general (Michel, 2004) that is to say, the strength of the link between the consumer and all brands of a category of a product. In this work, we use indifferently sensitivity to the brand. In addition, the brand is a complex and multidimensional concept, which can be subject to a single definition. To delineate the scope of our research, we begin by clarifying this notion. It is a verbal or figurative element (a word, logo, symbol, motto,

initials, numbers etc) used to identify the goods or services of an enterprise and to differentiate them from those of the competitors (Keller and Hoeffler, 2003, Duncan, 2005; Kotler and Keller, 2006). The term "brands" includes the brand of the manufacturers and distributors, large and small brands, local and international brands.

Brand sensitivity expresses the importance that the consumer attaches to the brand during the purchasing process (Kapferer and Laurent, 1983, 1992; Amine, 1998; Lachance et al., 2003; Beaudoin and Lachance, 2006). All consumers do not integrate brand in their purchase decision process. Only those who are sensitive to it do it (Kapferer, 2004). Kapferer and Laurent (1992) note that this sensitivity can be described by only one dimension: the fact of looking at the brand, of being attached to it, of giving it importance. Overall, they favour an approach based on events that reflect the vision of cognitive sensitivity to the brand. Indeed, a consumer is sensitive to brands if he/she considers it important to consult the information "which is the mark?" Thus, the brand is an "information chunk": the only entity which summarizes all the information relating to the choice and consumption experiences, to the communicational exposures with the product (Hoch and Deighton, 1989).

The sensitivity to brands is a psychological variable since it refers to the process of consumer decision. It is different from loyalty which is behavioural concept that can be measured by examining patterns of repeated buying over time (Kapferer and Laurent, 1983, 1992; Lachance et al., 2003). It is also an individual variable that varies from one individual to another and from the same individual, from a product to another. Finally, sensitivity to brands has several components: commitment to a brand, the weight of the brand compared to that of other product attributes, the place of the brand in the purchase decision process. D'Astous and Gargouri (2001) refer to brand sensitivity, attaching great importance to brand names when choosing and purchasing.

## The enduring involvement in a category of products

The involvement is behind any consumption decision. It has been introduced in marketing by Krugman (1967) to measure the reaction mode and information processing during an advertising exhibition. Involvement refers to a feature, a state or a process (Costley, 1988). In this work, involvement is considered as a feature which is a permanent individual characteristic for product category independent from the influence of the context (Bloch, 1981; Engel and Blackwell, 1982; Higie and Feick, 1989). We retain enduring involvement rather than specific; first, because it is essentially based on the individual and not on the nature of the product (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Warrington and Shim, 2000); thus a continuous interaction between the individual and the product. It takes into account the cognitive and affective components

(Buck, 1988). This involvement is doomed to comparisons between individuals and not for comparisons between products (Houston and Rothschild, 1978; Strazzieri, 1994). Then, enduring involvement is expressed at an aggregate level (or in the category of products) as well as sensitivity to brands. Lastly, the durable components are preferred to the contextual components (Valette-Florence, 1989).

The influence of enduring involvement on brand sensitivity has been recognized by several authors (Kapferer and Laurent, 1992; Amine, 1998; Muratore, 2002; Lachance et al., 2003). We hypothesize that enduring involvement is the prerequisite of a potential sensitivity to brands. This is because consumers who find important a product category, are influenced by the performance of this category. They are motivated to actively seek and process the information on that category (Warrington and Shim, 2000). They thus consider the brand as a determining benchmark, hence our first hypothesis:

H1: The enduring involvement of the consumer in a given category of products is positively associated to the consumer's sensitivity to the brand.

### **Perceived differences between the brands**

The Perceived differences between brands in a category of products represent the consumer's ability to discriminate between brands in this category. There is a situation of perceived differences among brands, when one or various brand are perceived as been highest than others in terms of achievement or quality (Van Trijp et al., 1996). In the contrary, the concept of parity (even) of brand means that differences among brand in a product category are very, very small (Jensen and Hansen, 2006). Kapferer and Laurent (1992) insist that marketing is after all sensitivity to an attribute. This attribute is or is not possessed by certain brands. This brings forward the necessity to look at what is the brand. Differences between brands must be veritably or genuinely perceived by consumers (Ries and Trout, 1986) and valued by enterprises (Carpenter et al., 1994). These differences must not be only functional but also symbolic and/or emotional (Broniarczyk and Gershoff, 2003).

The work of Kapferer and Laurent (1992) shows that the perceived differences between brands have a major impact on the sensitivity to the brand. This conclusion seems logical since a consumer believes that the brand in relation to other information best suited to his expectations, will consider as a decisive criterion of choice compared to other possible criteria (Dick and Basu, 1994; Muncy, 1996). The decision making process of a consumer is influenced by his perception of the similarity of the brands within a category of products (Assael, 1987). Likewise, similarity between brands is more likely to create confusion when sensitivity to brands and product involvement are low (D'Astous and Gargouri, 2001).

Zaichkowsky (1985) argues that the perceived differences between brands due to the strong involvement, may lead consumers to prefer one brand over another. Thus, a consumer will be encouraged to compare several brands if the differences between these brands are perceived as sufficiently important and beneficial. We can thus say that perceived differences between brands have a positive effect on the sensitivity of the Cameroonian consumer to the brand, from the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived differences between the consumer's brands are positively associated to his/her sensitivity to the brand.

### **The perceived risk in a category of products**

The risk is a key factor in understanding consumer behavior (Gabbott, 1991). In a simple way, the risk is the uncertainty of the result (Kunle, 2011). According to Bauer (1960), consumer behavior involves risk in the sense that each purchase will result in consequences, sometimes negative, that he cannot predict with any certainty, for numerous researchers (Bauer, 1960; Cunningham, 1967; Volle, 1995) perceived risk is based on two components (uncertainty and loss severity) and is subjective. In addition, the perceived risk may be specific (Stone and Gronhaug, 1993) or general (Cox, 1967). The measurement of overall risk differs depending on the researchers: financial risk, functional, psychological, physical and social (Jacoby and Kaplan, 1972; Peter and Tardy, 1975; Shimp and Bearden, 1982; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004), the risk of wasted time (Roselius, 1971) and the opportunity risk (Mitchell and Greatorex, 1993). Therefore, the perceived risk can be described as a multi-dimensional concept (Sitkin and Weignart, 1995).

The relationship between perceived risk and sensitivity to brands has been verified in most research (Cunningham, 1967), and today it is widely established that, the perceived risk is considered to be a major determinant of sensitivity to brands (Kapferer and Laurent, 1992). This corroborates the assertion of Kapferer (1998) that there is brand when there is risk. The brand serves as a reference when the consumer perceives risk. The brand is one of the effective methods of risk reduction (Sheth and Venkatesan, 1968; Roselius, 1971; Aaker, 1992; Ailawadi et al., 2003). Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) argue that this is especially true for high value and high involvement. This is logical because the perceived risk is composed of the probability of making a bad choice and the importance of the negative consequences of this bad choice (Amine, 1998). Thus, in the Cameroonian context, we think that perceived risk has a positive influence on sensitivity to brands, whence our third hypothesis:

H3: The consumer's perceived risk in a category of products is positively associated to his/her sensitivity to

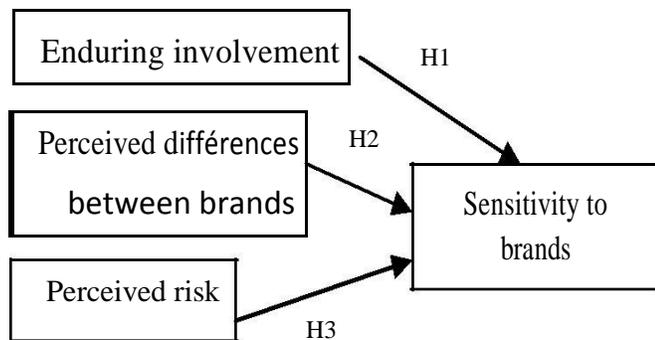


Figure 1: Research model.

the brand.

Figure 1 represents the research model.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sampling and data collection

In the absence of an exhaustive list of body lotion consumers, we opted for a sample reasoned choice that aims to make it look like the sample of the population from which it comes (Evrard et al., 2003). Included in our sample, any woman likely to bring relevant information while remaining as close as possible to contextual reality. At the same time, we make sure that the sample is diversified in terms of age, profession, area, religion and educational level. The data collection tool was a questionnaire administered face to face in the towns of Yaounde, Douala, Bafoussam and Ngaoundéré. We chose this mode of administration mainly because of the context of the study since it is important that the risk of non-response be minimized. Indeed, in Cameroun, as in several African countries, access to information from the consumers is not an easy thing. To facilitate answers for the questionnaire, an initial contact, precise explanations and most especially the creation of a reliable climate are sometimes necessary for a better understanding of the terms of the respondent. In the same way, two reasons justify the choice of these cities: concentration of industries of body lotions and the presence of universities or higher schools. These contain many students belonging to our sample since the Cameroonian population is essentially young (Central Bureau of the Census and Population Studies, 2010). In addition to descriptive and identification information, our questionnaire also included the collection of information on the explanatory reasons for the sensitivity of Cameroonian consumers to brands. 400 questionnaires were administered during a one month period. 39 wrongly filled questionnaires were eliminated after analysis. We preserved 361 of them to carry out our study. This gives us a response rate of 90.25%.

In order to better apprehend the concept of sensitivity to brands, we choose body lotions. The choice of this category of products has been dictated by criteria such as a variety of brands on markets, the high purchase frequency, personal utilization character, high competition between brands, popular and current character of the product. In fact, according to the investigations of the Economic mission carried out in Cameroun (2004b; 2006), body lotions are primarily sought by women. Conscious of this reality, most of the companies in this field propose body lotion bottles with pictures of beautiful women having a clear and fair complexion; for example, *Maxi light*, *Clair Liss* and *Bioclair* body lotions to name a few. Since 2008, a series of body lotions' advertisements (and even of

children's body lotions likely to captivate the attention of mothers) take place before, during and after the broadcast of TV series loved by Cameroonian women consumers. Without being exhaustive and based on our personal observations, we can name *Primo et Essential* for "Paloma", *Poupy Bébé* and *New Skin +* for "Whirls of passion", *White Express* for "Between justice et vengeance", *Clair et Net* for "Vaidehi", *Pediaderm* for "El Diablo", *Kloès* for "Jacob Cross", *Golden Clear* for "India", *Rapid Clair*, *Moby bébé* and *Biopur* for "Redemption", *Vaseline* for "The long expectation", *Kloès* and *Peau nette* for "Intimate enemies", *Sephora* for Teresa and *Claraderm* for El-Capo (in the Canal2 TV channel), *Talangaï* before "In the heart of sin", *Vaseline* for "Broken heart" (in the CRTV TV channel) and *Absolute White* for "Marina", *Trompy* for "The roman of life" (in the Equinox TV channel).

The consumers were questioned in the towns of Yaounde (29.1%), Douala (41.3%), Ngaoundéré (16.1%) and Bafoussam (13.6%). The exclusive choice of the women is explained by the consumption reality of beauty lotions by the population such as previously evoked. 67.9% of the sample has a university level of studies. 71.7% of those questioned are single. Several factors can explain this high rate of singles: increase in the duration of studies, the difficulty in finding a job and an increasing individualization of the society. 51% of those questioned are aged between 15 and 25, 41.2% between 26 and 40 and 7.8% are above 40. Thus, the majority of the respondents of our sample are young. This result is in conformity with the characteristics of the Cameroonian population which is extremely young (CBCPS, 2010). Besides, according to the Africa 24 Magazine published in 2011, more than 70% of Cameroonians are less than 25 years old. This is also the case in many African countries. In 2005, 56% of the West African population was less than 20 and 65% (that is to say nearly two thirds), was less than 25 (Koffi and Kone, 2010). With 44% of the population being under 15 in 2006, sub-Saharan Africa is unmistakably the youngest region of the world (Lori, 2007). Indeed, in 2010, the most striking remark when one considers the demographic characteristics of the sub-Saharan African population is its youth: according to projections, 63% of this population is less than 25 while 20.4% cover the age group from 15 to 24 years old (Kofi and Kone, 2010). The great number of teenagers (students, labourers and the jobless) and young adults (employees, higher staff) is justified by their early use of cosmetic products. Let us specify here that the socio-professional categories (SPC) retained here are an adaptation of the nomenclature from the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) in 2005. This adaptation is justified by the fact that the body lotion is known and accessible to all the social categories. Lastly, 67.8% of those questioned have an income ranging between 25.000 F CFA and 50.000 F CFA (Table 1).

The consumers of our sample use their body lotions "2 to 3 times daily" (61.2%); "1 time" (36%) or "more than 3 times" (2.8%). The majority of them buy their body lotions themselves (81.4%); preferably in small and medium-sized sales floors (85%). They prefer perfume shops in order to preserve the warm human contact which characterizes Africans. In fact, one often finds over perfume counters, salesmen attentive to the needs of customers and ready to make a small "sacrifice". The setting up of these sales points also promotes bargaining, an archaic practice which has almost disappeared in Europe, but currently practiced in Cameroon and in Africa in general (Bekolo, 2007). On the other hand, the position "of the hawker" is clearly explained by the study of Tsapi and Gilardi (2011) which show that consumers avoid this system of distribution since according to them, the beauty lotions which are sold are often counterfeited, i.e. "mixed with cassava juice". 40.4% of those questioned confide in a close relation for the purchase of a body lotion (Table 2). This result is in conformity with the reports of the exploratory study and the literature according to which consumers frequently seek the opinion of other people before a purchase (Price and Feick, 1984). Cameroonian consumers attach an importance to "word of mouth" which is the most used source of

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of consumers of beauty lotions.

Variable	F	%
Total sample	361	100
City		
Yaounde	105	29.1
Douala	149	41.3
Ngaoundere	58	16.0
Bafoussam	49	13.6
Level of Education		
Primary	9	2.5
Secondary	105	29.0
Higher	245	67.9
None	2	0.6
Marital status		
Married	90	24.9
Divorced	5	1.4
Widows	7	1.9
Singles	259	71.7
Profession		
Managerial	37	10.2
Self-employed	28	7.8
Employees	45	12.5
Labourers	2	0.6
Househelps	3	0.8
Students	198	54.8
Small trades	25	6.9
Unemployed	23	6.4
Age		
15-25 years old	184	51.0
16-40 years old	149	41.2
>40 years old	28	7.8
Monthly Income		
<25000 f CFA	111	30.7
25001-50000 f CFA	134	37.1
50001-100000 f CFA	51	14.2
100001-200000 f CFA	48	13.3
>200000 f CFA	17	4.7

SPSS output version 17.0.

information for the choice of a product (East et al., 2005).

#### Measurement of the variables

The measurement indicators of the concepts are from the literature. Some of them have been adapted and refined after semi-directing

talks with twenty-five beauty lotion consumers. The adaptation of the scales consisted in reformulating some of the items so that they are well understood by the Cameroonian consumers. The transposition of the scales without this effort of contextualization did not seem relevant to us insofar as it would negatively influence the answering rate. That being, in Table 3, the items in italic are those which were adapted.

We use the P.I.A involvement measurement (Personal relevance, Interest and Attraction towards the product) suggested by Strazzeri (1994). It is a scale made up of six items whose total coherence and validity have been shown in many studies (Russet-red et al., 1997; Gouteron, 2006). To measure the concept of perceived differences between brands, we chose the scale of Kapferer and Laurent (1992). It is apprehended using a battery of five items. For a measurement of perceived risk, we use works of Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) as well as those of Roselius (1971) which validate a six items-structure relative to the above-mentioned risks types. The final solution retains four items because the suppression of two items (in relative with psychological and functional risks) made it possible to improve the reliability of the instrument. The items concerned are: *"The purchase of a body lotion can lead to a disappointment with oneself"*; *"The quality of a body lotion can appear to be below my expectations finally"*. Concerning brand sensitivity, the five items retained are from the direct measurement gotten from Kapferer and Laurent's scale (1992). This measuring instrument has been used in a great number of studies (Lachance et al., 2003; Perrin-Martineng, 2004; Beaudoin and Lachance, 2006; Bouhlel et al., 2011) which have shown the stability of its factorial structure. In these studies, it seems that the scale is reliable, valid, of unidimensional type and in full coherence with the definition of the construct. For all the constructs of the model, the women questioned were requested to give their opinion on the scales of the Likert type having five points. The answers varied from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (fully agree) passing through 3 (fairly agree). Finally, the data collected were analyzed by using the (SPSS) version 17.0. The principal components analysis enabled us to purify measurements and to structure the variables. The reliability of the items forming each component was verified by Cronbach's alpha ( ). In order to identify the factors influencing brand sensitivity, we used correlation analyses and multiple regression. In our opinion, it is important to verify firstly the existence and the sense of the relation between each independent variable and the dependent variable by means of the Pearson's linear correlation coefficient (r). We can then appreciate globally, the relevance of these relations by means of the linear regression coefficients.

## RESULTS

The examination of our survey questionnaire indicates that 25 consumers (that is 6.9%) of our sample are weakly sensitive, 135 are moderately sensitive (that is 37.4%) and 201 are highly sensitive (that is 55.8%).

Table 3 gives details about the scales used and the usual validation evidence for the estimation of reliability. Reading this table, the principal components analysis carried out on the items of each concept reveals a factor having an eigenvalue higher than 1 (Kaiser Criterion). At the end of this procedure of processing of the variables, all the concepts are unidimensional and all the scales are reliable.

The Pearson's correlation coefficient between Enduring involvement and brand sensitivity is  $r = 0.840$  and significant with the threshold  $p = 0.01$  (Table 4). In the

**Table 2.** Behavioral characteristics of consumers of beauty lotions.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Total sample	361	100
Nature of respondent		
Rarely	14	3.9
Often	38	10.5
Always	309	85.6
Type of buyer		
Yourself	294	81.4
Your family (spouse/friend/relative)	67	18.6
Frequency of daily use		
1 time	130	36.0
2 à 3 times	221	61.2
>3 times	10	2.8
Place of purchase		
Perfume shops/supermarkets/mini-markets	307	85.0
Hawkers	2	0.5
Hairdressing/beauty salons	11	3.0
Neighborhood shops	8	2.2
Outdoor market	6	1.7
Pharmacy	27	7.4
Recommendation		
Dermatologist	21	5.8
Close (friend/relative)	146	40.4
Media	18	5.0
Seller	94	26.0
Yourself	80	22.1
An unknown	2	0.5

SPSS output version 17.0.

same way, the correlation analysis reveals that perceived differences are significantly associated to brand sensitivity ( $r = 0.852$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ). Lastly, there is a significant correlation between perceived risk and brand sensitivity ( $r = 0.819$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ).

### Hypothesis testing

A regression analysis shows that the total adjustment of the model is of good quality. In fact, the values of the correlation coefficient  $R$  (0,916) and of the determination coefficient  $R^2$  (0,840) are all satisfactory since they are above 0.5. The test of robustness of this regression model reveals an  $F$  of Fisher value of 622,963 with a threshold of significance of 0,000 for 3 to 357 degrees of freedom. We note that this calculated threshold of significance is lower than 0.05. Moreover, the  $t$  values for the variables

introduced into the regression model (perceived risk, enduring involvement and perceived differences) are satisfactory (with the threshold  $p = 0,000$ ), that is, 8,860; 8,132 and 9,976 respectively. From the results, it arises that perceived differences are the main antecedents of sensitivity to brands ( $\beta = 0,373$ ). Moreover, perceived risk, enduring involvement and perceived differences are explanatory sources of sensitivity to brands. Consequently, the assumptions H1, H2 and H3 are validated. These three variables explain 84% of this sensitivity ( $R^2$ ). These results are illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 2. The results under SPSS are in the appendix.

The regression equation between these variables and sensitivity to brands which we note as  $Y1$  is written as follows:

$$Y1 = - 0.004 + 0.303 \text{ RISK} + 0.307 \text{ IMPL} + 0.373 \text{ DIFCE} \\ (-,118) (8.860) (8.132) (9.976)$$

**Table 3.** Principal component analysis of independent variables and brand sensitivity.

Scale items	Factor loading	Item to total correlation	Cronbach	Eingalue	% of variance
<b>Enduring involvement</b>			0.915	4.240	70.672
The body lotion is a product which really counts for me.	0.865	0.784			
The body lotion is a product to which I attach a particular importance.	0.875	0.801			
The body lotion is a product about which I particularly like to speak	0.676	0.574			
The body lotion is a product which interests me.	0.873	0.806			
The body lotion is a product which attracts me particularly.	0.869	0.805			
The body lotion is a product whose purchase pleases me.	0.867	0.802			
Perceived differences between brands	0.874			3.378	67.553
There are brands of body lotions which are by far superior to others.	0.723	0.596			
<i>I believe that most brands of body lotions are comparable.</i>	0.830	0.709			
Presently, all the brands of body lotions are good.	0.803	0.691			
<i>As a whole, i find that all the brands of body lotions resemble each other.</i>	0.900	0.813			
<i>I think that there are great differences between the brands of body lotions.</i>	0.842	0.735			
<b>Perceived Risk</b>			0.883	2.979	74.479
<i>The body lotion that I buy can give a bad indication of me to my entourage.</i>	0.892	0.782			
The use of a body lotion can be dangerous for my health or that of my entourage.	0.911	0.816			
The purchase of a body lotion can represent a bad expenditure.	0.750	0.605			
The purchase of a body lotion can make me waste time.	0.889	0.790			
<b>Brand Sensitivity</b>			0.853	3.200	63.991
I do not choose a body lotion according to the brand. I look at the brand when I buy a body lotion.	0.668	0.529			
<i>For body lotions, the brand is not very important to me.</i>	0.849	0.721			
I consider the brand when I buy a body lotion.	0.746	0.617			
<i>I look at the brand first when I am choosing a body lotion.</i>	0.897	0.797			
	0.819	0.687			

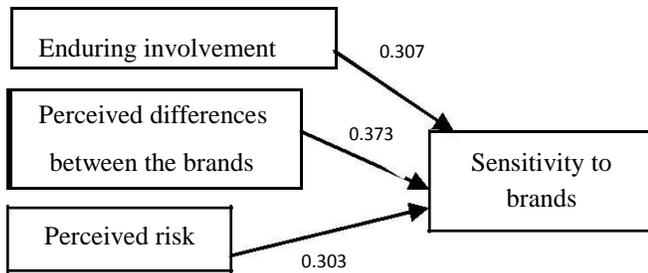
SPSS output version 17.0.

**Table 4.** Summary of the Pearson's correlations between the various antecedents of the sensitivity to brands.

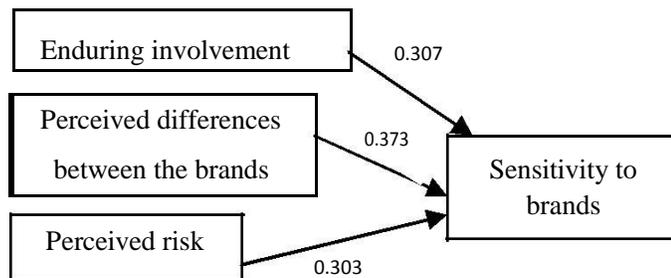
	Sensitivity to brands
Enduring involvement	0.840 **
Perceived differences	0.852 **
Perceived risk	0.819 **

SPSS output version 17.0. \*\* p = 0.01.

Concretely, the more a consumer feels that a bad purchase would have serious consequences for her, the more she regards the brand as a decisive purchase criterion. The consumers attach a great importance to the purchase of body lotions. They therefore constantly use the brand as a reference mark. Lastly, it appears that the more the consumer sees differences between brands, the more he is sensitive to brands. This result seems to be explained mainly by the phenomena of imitation and



**Figure 2.** The final model including all significant relations.



**Figure 3.** The results of the multiple regression test.

counterfeiting. Indeed, in the world of the body lotions brands, alternative choices are very numerous. The perception of differences between brands is expected to stimulate the research of varieties. However, in front of a significant number of possibilities of counterfeited or imitated choices, the consumer makes her decision of purchase within a set of brands which satisfy her need for safety. To end it up, the constant of the regression line is negative. Thus, if the beauty lotion firms do not set out to discriminate their brands more, to arouse the enthusiasm of consumers and to maximally reduce risk, the brands will no longer have any importance in the eyes of these consumers.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the multiple regression test state that perceived risk and enduring involvement significantly influence sensitivity to brands (Figure 3). These results match up with those obtained by Kapferer and Laurent (1992) as well as those of Froloff-Brouche and Ben-Miled (1995). However, their measurement of the two concepts is different from ours. In fact, to measure enduring involvement in a category of products, they resorted to the Laurent and Kapferer's involvement profile scale (1985). Although in conformity with the results of pre-ceding research, our conclusions nevertheless take their importance from the fact that they are obtained by a detailed approach of measurements of perceived risk and

enduring involvement. This approach seemed judicious to us for a better apprehension of these two concepts since the body lotion is a product with a rather high perceived risk and strong involvement. It is important to add that, through this approach, we share the opinion of several authors (Sherif and Cantril, 1947; Zaichkowsky, 1985; Valette-Florence, 1989; Strazzieri, 1994) which think that enduring involvement should be distinguished from its antecedents (among which is perceived risk) and its consequences.

Besides, the conclusions of this study about the perceived differences between brands once more go in line with those of Kapferer and Laurent (1992). These authors' results reveal an explanatory capacity of 0.38. The  $t$  value is 14.65 with the threshold of significance  $p = 0.01$ . This explanatory capacity is almost identical to the one we obtained (0.37 with  $t = 0.976$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In fact, the more the consumer thinks that the brands are unequal on the level of their performances (ability to respond satisfactorily to a sought-after advantage or to provide a great total satisfaction) the more the brand will intervene as a decisive criterion of choice. We think, just

like Amine (1998) that sensitivity to the brand is nourished and reinforces the perception of quality differences between the alternatives. The perceived differences between brands thus significantly favour the sensitivity of Cameroonian consumers to brands as regards body lotions. This result makes it possible to confirm and enrich previous work on the subject.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this research was to lead to a better comprehension of the concept of sensitivity to brands and its antecedents during the purchase of a body lotion. The empirical work carried out shows that Cameroonian consumers are sensitive to the brand. Thus, enterprises anxious about guaranteeing their permanence should be aware of this fact. It results from this research that small and medium-sized sale floors are preferred for the purchase of body lotions as they are places of friendliness. In the same way, recommendation by a close relation is appreciated by consumers of body lotions. It also results that perceived differences between brands, enduring involvement and perceived risk in body lotions positively influence sensitivity to brands. Lastly, perceived differences between brands are the fundamental precursor of sensitivity to brands.

Such results are rich in terms of managerial implications. Firstly, the managers of the enterprises present or desiring to settle in Africa should reinforce the place of the brand in their marketing strategies since it is a considerable action lever for them. In the same way, they would gain more by highlighting interpersonal communications and the use of opinion leaders perceived as competent and credible (this is already done with the Cameroonian artist, Lady Ponce, for the brand *Golden*

*Clear* and with Dr. Charles Arnaud for the brand *Moby Bébé*). The dominant explanatory capacity of perceived differences should lead Cameroonian marketing experts not to underestimate this variable in the field of body lotions where the quality of the product is often opaque (in the light of imitation). This is one of the major concerns of consumers because the quality control legal and administrative system is almost non-existent. It seems necessary to reassure consumers by showing during advertisements, the visible and unfalsifiable signs which make it possible for consumers to avoid incidents caused by the use of "fake" body lotions (This is already the case of the *Roberts* glycerin).

In spite of its contributions, the present research has some limits. It is important firstly to stress that the sample is made up exclusively of women who do not meet the conditions of representativeness of the population. Moreover, the empirical research has been carried out in some Cameroonian cities with a sample of convenience. Even if the results are interesting, their generalization to all fields should be made with great prudence.

Considering these limits, the study deserves to be continued in other categories of products with a significant number of women and men. Other explanatory variables of sensitivity to brands could be identified. The study of the sensitivity of Cameroonian consumers to foreign brands compared to their sensitivity to local brands could be made. Lastly, an intercultural validation of the scale of sensitivity to brands in sub-Saharan Africa is possible.

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