The Effectiveness of Brand Personality & Affective Commitment in Capturing Brand Loyalty: A Study of Retailers in UK

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ABSTRACT

Marketing research theorists have concentrated their focus in studying the emblematic meaning consumers attach to certain brands. One such concept is brand personality. The brand personality scale proposed by Aaker is a popular tool for the measurement of different product categories; however, its application on retailers has been a rarity. Moreover, researchers have also called for adopting a multi-dimensional approach towards the study of brand loyalty which includes loyalty dimensions of both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty in conjunction with the brand personality concept. The specific objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of brand personality in capturing consumers’ loyalty towards a retailer. Stratified random sampling was applied for gathering the data from 120 consumers belonging to the three retailers in UK. The results showed a direct influence of brand personality on dimensions of loyalty. In addition, the three retailers were found to have different brand personality dimensions. The study suggests that managers should work towards building a retail brand personality to influence the loyalty of consumers. The scope of this study can be further widened by investigating ways of building a brand personality for retailers. The results of this study have contributed to the area of retail branding in a way that this research is performed in a different setting.

Keywords: Brand Personality, Attitudinal Loyalty, Behavioral Loyalty

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1. Introduction

The concept of retailer loyalty has been viewed as an integral component towards the development of a productive and long-lasting customer relationship. Samli (1989) has highlighted retailer loyalty as the essence of sustainable success. Retailer loyalty has been a keen research area among scholars and practitioners (Zhao and Huddleston, 2012). In research on retail, store loyalty has been found to be the main varying factor and researchers have been striving to pinpoint the antecedents.

Although consumers often patronize stores for one reason or the other, but (Rhee and Bell, 2002) their chief association remains with a certain store where they spend the most of their budget. Knox and Denison (2000) are also of the view that shoppers who are devoted to a specific store for their regular purchases, tend to spend double the time in their main store than any other store. Therefore, from a retailer’s perspective, it is imperative to unearth the motives which led to this type of loyalty.

Another recent development in the marketing research is the concept of retailers having distinct personalities (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). The studies on brand personality measurement have highlighted this tool as an effective basis for positioning and
differentiation (Merrilees & Miller, 2001). This paper will investigate brand personality’s direct impact on loyalty dimensions in varying retail outlets.

2. Literature Review & Hypotheses Development

2.1. Brand Personality and Attitudinal Loyalty

According to Schiffman et al. (2008), consumer’s commitment towards a brand can be measured by looking at the repeat purchase habit or attitudinal commitment. It means that consumers who are spurred by attitudinal loyalty, holds a uniformly positive opinion regarding a brand. Baldinger and Rubinson (1996) articulated the need for inclusion of attitudes together with behaviour to propose a more comprehensive measure of loyalty. They concluded that once the loyalty of consumer is determined to be behavioural in nature, it becomes easier to link it to their inherent attitudes directed towards the brand. Previous studies by Hieronimus (2003) and Villegas, Earnhart and Burns (2000) have found ’competence’ (a brand personality dimension in Aaker’s brand personality theory) having a strong effect on brand loyalty. Similarly, other factors in Aaker’s scale have also showed positive influence on human behaviour. Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004) maintains that brands that are sincere with their consumers, will enjoy a healthy relationship. As studies have detected, certain facets in the ‘sincerity’ (another factor in Aaker’s brand personality scale) factor have positively influenced the relationship bond with consumers. Yet another reason provided by Hieronimus (2003), recognizing the brand personality as an important element in assisting consumers in recalling the functional benefits of the brand as brand personality tends to influence consumers’ knowledge pertaining to a certain brand. On the basis of the above evidence, following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Brand personality directly influence attitudinal loyalty

2.2. Brand Personality and Behavioral Loyalty

Behavioral loyalty as defined by Dodd (2002) is characterized by repeat purchase but this does not essentially mean that a positive attitude will be portrayed by the consumer towards the brand. There can be various underlying reasons for this consumer behavior including factors like switching cost, ease of access or habit. Researchers (Ehrenberg, 2000, Kahn et al., 1986) believe that repeat purchase can lead to loyalty. Several hypothetical arguments can be put forward to justify brand personality’s impact on human behavior. First of all, brand personality scale items proposed by Aaker in 1997 are constructed in a way to elicit favorable and positive responses. The positive nature of the scale has come under criticism from Daviese et al. (2001) claiming that the scale will always have a positive influence. Furthermore, according to Zentes, Morschett and Schramm-Klein (2008), even though the positive factors might not be in line with the consumer’s self-concept, they will still have to take those positive factors in to account Therefore the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H2: Brand personality directly influence behavioural loyalty

3. Methodology

The data was collected from 120 respondents of three different retailers in UK. This study used the stratified random sampling procedure to gather an equal number of...
consumers from each of the three retailers. The retail consumers from the three retail outlets were handed over 40 self-administered questionnaires each. In order to analyze the data, SPSS software was used for assessing the numerical data. The first step in the process of statistical analysis was to perform correlation analysis to establish the relationships between the variables and then regression analysis was used in order to identify the impact of independent variables on dependent variables.

3.1. Measurement

In order to ensure the content validity of the scales, only well-established scales were adopted from the literature which ensures the content validity of these scales. The multi-dimensional concept of loyalty i.e. attitudinal and behavioural loyalty was adapted from Bridson, Evans and Hickman (2008). The brand personality scale was adapted from Janifer Aaker (1997) that is regarded as the most widely used brand personality scale to date (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Parker, 2009). Though, a shorter version of the scale was adapted as the original scale was too long and could have caused fatigue to the respondents as pointed out by theorists (Hieronimus, 2003; Koebel and Ladwein, 1999).

4. Result and Interpretation

Table 1
Model Summary of Model 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R-Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R-square</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1, the results of the tests highlights value of r-square. Here ‘r^2’ is 0.117, meaning that 11.7% of the variation in attitudinal loyalty is caused by brand personality dimensions.

Table 2
Model Summary of Model 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R-Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R-square</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.309</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 2, the results of the tests highlights value of r-square. In the table the value of ‘r^2’ is 0.095, implying that 9.5% of the variation in the dependent variable behavioural loyalty is caused by the independent variable i.e. brand personality dimensions.

4.1. Discussion

The hypotheses were proposed to analyse the impact of brand personality on attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. The results of this study found that there is a direct influence of brand personality on both behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. The hypotheses H1 and H2 were accepted after regression analysis. The findings of this study are consistent with the previous researches, as brand personality dimensions have been identified as a direct source of influence on attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. The empirical studies by Helgeson and Supphellen (2004) and Hieronimus (2003) have reported a direct relationship between the brand personality and consumer loyalty behavior. In another study, Villegas, Earnhart and Burns (2000) detected ‘competence’ making a considerable impact on brand loyalty. The present study is also consistent with the findings of Villegas et al. (2000). As the correlations in chapter 4 suggests that the impact of ‘competence’ on attitudinal loyalty was only second to sincerity. In our results with regards to brand personality, the impact of ‘sincerity’ was the strongest on both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. This study supports evidence from previous studies of Aaker et al. (2004) and Merrilees and Miller (2002) as they found sincerity to be the strongest influence on attitudinal loyalty.
4.2. Managerial implications

This study presented evidence that brand personality has the power to influence consumer loyalty behavior and establish a long-term relationship with the consumer. The results of this research support the idea of establishing a retail brand personality. The current study emphasizes the need for managers to lessen their concentration on the functional benefits and recognize the emblematic persona of the retail store. Sirgy and Samli (1985) stressed on the formation of a unique image as it enhances the loyalty of consumers towards the store. This strategy would broaden the horizon of managers and assist the formulation of more dynamic strategies in the industry.

5. Conclusion

The examination of literature reveals that there is dearth loyalty research in retail sector while theorists also stressed for adopting a multi-domain approach towards the measurement of loyalty. Literature also indicated that application of brand personality concept in retail is also a top research priority among researchers. The results of this study have contributed to the area of retail branding in a way that this research is performed in a different setting. The research focused on three retailers from the same industry which is consistent with the calls of Davies, Chun, and Vinhas da Silva (2001) for the application of brand personality scale on the retailers of the same industry. Therefore, this study is expected to make a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature.

5.1. Recommendation

This study has demonstrated the influence of commitment and loyalty dimensions in retail context. However, one question that needs to be answered here is how retail outlets should go about developing a brand personality (Zentes, Morschett and Schramm-Klein, 2008). A further study could assess the development of brand personality in detail. Also, there is need for a more comprehensive sample size as this will give a clear and more authentic view which would eventually allow the study to be generalized.

References


Samli, A., Retail Marketing Strategy, Quorum, Westport, CT, 1989.


