

EVALUATION OF OTHER CRITICAL VARIABLES IN THE SUSTENANCE OF BRAND LOYALTY BEYOND THE PROMOTION MIX

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ABSTRACT: In the globalised world, thousands of brands are trying to gain new customers and tend to retain them. In this competitive environment where customers have a wide range and variety of choices and availability of a huge amount of information related to the product which makes them excessive aware of the goods and services and their functionalities and uses so, it is difficult for the managers to stop them switching to other brands and to make them loyal it also difficult to decide that what factors should be focused to get their attention and to make them loyal. Therefore, building brand loyalty has become very important in gaining long-term profitability and competitive advantage. The objective of this study was to determine the key element and their contribution towards making brand loyalty. To achieve that, many firms have relied on promotional strategies. However, consumers are exposed to thousands of promotional messages every day. Organisations compete heavily for the attention and custom of the consumer through their advertising, and competitors offering similar products have all begun aggressive marketing and creating awareness to customers that these products considering the high budget and relative effectiveness of the promotional strategy, this paper reviews other critical factors that enhance consumer loyalty to brand other than promotional mix elements. Following a review of existing literature, so many factors that influence brand loyalty beyond promotional mix were observed, but some were extracted, including brand name, customer satisfaction, price, product involvement, perception of product quality, trustworthiness and uniqueness, and brand awareness. It was recommended that management should improve on and spend more resources on factors like brand name, customer satisfaction, price, product involvement, perception of product quality, trustworthiness and uniqueness, and brand awareness. These factors can complement promotion, and not replace it.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Promotion Mix, Brand, Customer, Brand Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Literature is abundant on the importance of brand loyalty for companies and other marketable entities. Evidence in those bodies of the literature suggests that brand loyalty brings many benefits (Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2019; Dick & Basu, 1994), and many of those studies have applied various theories to identify the antecedents of brand loyalty (Sharma & Jain, 2019; Mohsan et al., 2011). Hence, this study reviews the various bodies of literature, and extracts the factors that have been identified by those researchers that are critical to brand loyalty.

Loyalty is associated with a feeling of devoted attachment and affection, and brand loyalty captures this very essence but from a commercial perspective. From the commercial perspective, loyalty implies the commitment of a customer to repurchase a firm's products

and services, despite all actions of competitor businesses, and to commit to becoming a client of that business regularly in the future (Pahlevi & Suhartanto, 2020; Dick & Basu, 1994). Brand loyalty implies a consumer's successful emotional attachment and long-term commitment to a brand. True brand loyalty exists when customers have a high relative attitude toward the brand exhibited through repurchase behaviour. This type of loyalty can be a great asset to the firm: customers are willing to pay higher prices, may cost less to serve, and can bring in new customers to the firm (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990).

For as long as it can be remembered "brand loyalty" has been a measurable performance indicator for businesses around the globe. Manufacturers and companies are always trying to create a niche in marketing by constructing their base of loyal customers who over the period have accepted the product wholeheartedly. It is also a critical tool in retaining customers and measuring their propensity to repurchase your brand. These brand loyalists would spend their money devotedly to acquire the particular product and would also carry a feeling of immense satisfaction on the purchase (Song et al., 2019; Agrawal & Siddharth, 2010).

Brand loyalty is amongst the key factors critical for managers so that they can improve their customers' retention which will in turn have a favourable impact on the profit margin. A consumer is considered brand loyal whenever they perceive that a brand is offering them the right product features and the desired level of quality hence repeatedly making a conscious or subconscious repurchase of that particular brand. In today's competitive business environment building brand loyalty is becoming more complex to achieve. Companies are trying hard to keep their brand loyal customers loyal and avoid means of making room for competitors to grab these customers (Gupta et al., 2018).

Several studies have examined the influence of promotion mix elements on brand loyalty. Promotion is based on communication and includes all the communicative tools that pass on a particular message (Khazaei & Baloe, 2011). A promotion mix is a blend of communications tools used by a firm to carry out the promotion process and to communicate directly with target markets. These promotional mix tools include advertising, the internet, direct marketing and commerce, sales promotion, event sponsorships, public relations, and personal selling. Promotion is an exercise in information, persuasion, and influence (Abimbola et al., 2020; Anyadighibe et al., 2021). So, the purpose of promotion is to reach the targeted consumers and pervade them to buy.

More so, promotion helps to establish relationships with customers to inform people of products, encourage the buyers in the target market to buy particular brands, stimulate attention, and sometimes arouse interest. Evidence in existing studies shows that promotion techniques have a great impact on encouraging the customers to test and consume a brand (Pourdehghan, 2015).

Therefore, to keep up with the competition and changing consumer needs and wants, firms are continually persuaded to adopt effective promotional strategies to promote growth across realms, and as a result, this creates awareness and increases usage rates of their products and services. Promotional strategies enable firms to attract and retain customers, thus increasing growth in terms of return on investments due to an expanded client base (Kotler & Keller, 2005). However, consumers are exposed to thousands of promotional messages every day. Organisations compete heavily for the attention and custom of the consumer through their advertising. Marketing communication attempts to provide information to the consumer

about the organisation's products and service offerings. Companies are using integrated marketing strategies to promote their goods and services and facilitate brand loyalty. Therefore, since competitors offering similar products have all begun aggressive marketing and creating awareness among customers that these products and considering the high budget and relative effectiveness of the promotional strategy, attention has begun to be drawn to other critical factors that enhance consumer loyalty to the brand? What other factors, other than promotional mix elements, make consumers stick to that particular brand of the product when there are others?

Objective

The general objective of this paper is to determine and evaluate other critical variables that contribute to the sustenance of brand loyalty beyond the promotion mix and to find the various ways that those factors impact brand loyalty and affect customers' decision-making while choosing the brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand

Brand means the symbol, sign, and name of the product. The term brand has attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners and it was defined as a supplier's guarantee that it will consistently and continuously transport on its promises including promises implicitly or explicitly produced by convenience and benefits to the consumer, specific quality thresholds, and tangible features (Davicik et al., 2015). Some factors are extending beyond the functional characteristics that are intrinsic to services and goods that are traded under those brand names (Aaker, 1991). These added intangible values might tell the difference between a product to its competitors having an effect not only on the consumer's preferences but increase the satisfaction levels of customers which is always leading to much greater loyalty among customers (Davicik et al., 2015).

In the changing world, brands have become a more important element in the purchase decision. Companies try to enhance the image of the brand and this image increase the loyalty of the brand. The brand name is the creation of an image or the development of a brand identity. The development of a brand name is an essential part of the production process since the name is the basis of a brand's image (Tien et al., 2021; Thakor, 2006).

A company's success can be measured depending on its capability to attract consumers to its brands. This can be achieved by identifying customer needs and requirements and meeting those needs in a better way than their competitors. The globalisation of competition, a saturation of markets, and the development of information technology have enhanced customer awareness and created a situation where long-term success is no longer achieved through optimised product prices and qualities. Instead, companies build their success on long-term customer relationships. This long-term customer relationship depicts customer loyalty to a particular brand.

Brand Loyalty

Like the other key concepts in this paper, there is no consensus on the brand loyalty definition in literature. It has been a debatable topic among marketers and researchers recently (Huang & Cai, 2015). Brand loyalty could be defined in several ways, but mostly brand loyalty is when the consumers became committed to their favourite brand and repeat their purchases over time (Bilgin, 2018). Brand loyalty is the result of consumer behaviour and is affected by consumers' preferences. Brand loyalty could also be defined as the strength of preference for a brand compared to other available options that are similar, which is often measured in terms of repeated purchase or price. A similar definition puts brand loyalty as a commitment that is deeply held to consistently rebuy or re-patronise a service or preferred product in the future despite situational impacts and marketing efforts that gain the potential to create switching behaviour (Singh, 2021; Oliver, 1997).

The terms brand loyalty and customer loyalty have been consciously or unconsciously mixed and used in various studies. In the context of this study, they refer to the same meaning and they are used interchangeably. A review of existing definitions of brand loyalty shows that authors have on many occasions focused on the behavioural aspects of the brand, attitudinal aspects, emotional attachment, and repeat purchases based on attitude toward the brand (Kosiba et al., 2018).

Brand loyalty has also been described as a behavioural response and as a function of psychological processes (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). This means that brand loyalty is a function of behaviour and attitudes. Brand loyalty is the repeat purchase of any customer that reflects his or her conscious decision to continuously purchase that product in the future. It, therefore, implies that the customer will purchase that brand most often and also refuse to purchase any other brand of the same or better quality as compared to the old one he or she is loyal to that brand (Rehman, Rehman & Aktar, 2011).

Agrawal and Agrawal (2019) defined brand loyalty, "as a favourable attitude of the customer towards a brand which is a result of the consistent purchase of the brand over time". In other words, brand loyalty is nothing but a realisation by the customer that a particular brand provides him with maximum satisfaction. It is the extent of trust and belief in a particular brand that is represented by the repeat purchases of the brand by the customers despite the knowledge and availability of the other brands existing in the market. Therefore, it is the discretion on the part of the customer to purchase a specific brand repeatedly in a particular product category. Brand loyalty is dependent upon the needs and aspirations of a customer from a particular brand (Mehta & Tariq, 2020). If the customer believes or feels that his requirements and needs are being satisfied by a particular brand, then they indulge themselves in repeat purchases of the very same brand in the same product category.

Loyalty can be measured by three different indicators as opined by Oliver (1999). These include (a) purchase repetition from the organisation, (b) purchasing the available brand from others, and (c) motivating others to acquire the brand and use it.

Scholars identified two dimensions of brand loyalty: behavioural and attitudinal loyalty (Aaker 1991). Behavioural loyalty is the behavioural dimension of the procurement procedure which includes repetitive buying behaviour and continuation of this behaviour (Lee & Leh, 2011; Rundle-Thiele and Mackay 2001). Attitudinal loyalty, on the other hand,

refers to a specific commitment to the brand and the intention to re-purchase. It is the tendency to be loyal to a focal brand, which is proved by the intention to purchase the brand as the main choice (Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

Promotional Mix

There is an avalanche of definitions existing in marketing, business, communication, and economic literature on promotion and the promotional mix. There is a point of view that puts promotional mix is a blend of communications tools (advertising, the internet, and commerce, sales promotion, event sponsorship, direct marketing, and personal selling) used by a firm to carry out the promotion process and to communicate directly by with target markets (Abimbola et al., 2020; Karunanithy & Sivesan, 2013). Promotion has also been seen as the direct way an organisation attempts to reach its public and is performed through the promotional mix elements (Ekanem, 2021). Furthermore, promotion in the marketing mix refers to establishing relationships with customers to inform people of products, encourage the buyers in the target market to buy particular brands, stimulate attention, and sometimes arouse interest. Promotion techniques have a great impact on encouraging the customers to test and consume a brand (Pourdehghan, 2015). Promotion is based on communication and includes all the communicative tools that pass on a particular message (Khazaei & Baloe, 2011)

The promotion element of the marketing mix of the organisation includes all the relevant “activities, materials, and media used by a marketer to inform and remind prospective customers about a particular product offering” (Connett, 2004, p.11). The goal of promotion is to persuade the target consumer to buy or consume the product offering. The promotional element of the marketing mix is also referred to as the marketing communication or promotional mix and includes various communication methods and activities aimed at the target consumer (Ekanem, 2021). The integration of the promotional elements is called integrated marketing communications, or IMC.

One thing that is common in the definitions is that various authors agree that the promotional mix includes the elements of advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing, events, and sponsorship marketing, as well as Internet/interactive marketing (Belch & Belch, 2007). Additional elements that are specifically noted by certain authors include database marketing (Clow & Baack, 2010, p33), packaging and customer service (Ouwensloot & Duncan, 2008,p.12), while O'Guinn et al. (2009, p.11) list blogs, podcasting, branded entertainment, and influencer marketing as aspects that are commonly referred to as promotional tools.

Promotion can help to establish perceptions or ideas in consumers' minds as well as differentiate the product from others. It also stated that promotion is a key role in determining profitability and market success. According to the researcher, promotion is an important element to make marketing strategies and use to communicate with customers concerning product offerings and also encourage the purchase of products and services (Wong & Sidek, 2008). Promotion especially in form of a well-targeted advertisement not only makes them less price sensitive but also makes them loyal to the brand, furthermore, it changes the knowledge, behaviour, and attitude of customers towards the brand (Mise, Nair, Odera, & Ogutu, 2013).

METHOD

This paper is a review of existing literature on factors that enhance brand loyalty other than promotional mix elements. The purpose of reviewing the existing framework is also to identify the factors that have been used by other researchers in developing their frameworks. It is found that factors that affect brand loyalty are varied. While some of the researchers followed the traditional predictors of loyalty such as perceived value, perceived quality, and trust (Matzler et al., 2008; Aurier, 2012; Thompson et al., 2014; Torres et al., 2015), others have extended the scope of loyalty and incorporated factors related to personality trait such as peacefulness, sincerity, sophistication, love (Lin, 2010; Drennan et al., 2015). Some studied the individual factors that are related to the perception of the customers while others emphasised the factors related to the brand itself such as quality, value, etc. In this review, the researchers looked at the various bodies of literature and review some of the most compelling variables in the sustenance of brand loyalty beyond the promotion mix.

Variables that Sustain Brand Loyalty among Consumers

Brand Name

Famous brand names can disseminate product benefits and lead to a higher recall of advertised benefits and more product benefits than brand names that are not popular (Keller, 2003). Many alternatives are available with a lot of different unfamiliar brand names in the market. As a customer myself, we customers prefer bigger brand names with more powerful and trusted brand names with good reputations. Prestigious brand names attract more consumers to the brand with their image and encourage customers to purchase the product of the brand and bring repeat purchasing behaviour. These behaviours also provide the consumers with reduced price-related switching behaviours (Cadogan & Foster, 2000).

Furthermore, any links to the brand's emotional and self-expressive utilities of differentiation are given by brand personality. This is crucial for brands that are consumed in a social setting and have minor physical differences where a visible image is created about the customer by the brand itself. Usually, customers could evaluate each of the products and the attributes of the brand name (Keller, 2003). It is noteworthy that this information is mandatory for marketing managers to taking information-based decisions about differential advantages, positioning of the product, and repositioning of product. A brand's image is based on its name. Brand name is one important aspect for the company to promote repeat purchasing habits and encourage customers to purchase the product.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product/service (Otto et al., 2020). Customer satisfaction is “seen as an attitude-like judgment following a purchase act or a series of consumer product interactions” (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007). Customer satisfaction depends on the product's perceived performance relative to the buyer's expectations. If the product's performance falls short of expectations, the customer is dissatisfied. If performance matches expectations, the customer is satisfied. If performance exceeds expectations, the customer is highly satisfied or delighted (Kotler & Armstrong,

2010). Because customers buy satisfaction, not just parts, marketing managers must be constantly concerned with product quality.

Quality means a product's ability to satisfy a customer's needs or requirements. Quality and satisfaction depend on the total product offering (Borishade et al., 2018). Fornell (1992) points out that although customer satisfaction and quality appear to be important for all firms, satisfaction is more important for loyalty in industries such as banks, insurance, mail order, and automobiles. Alabar (2011) opines that highly satisfied customers will be brand loyal, remain customers longer, provide favourable word of mouth advertising, increase the purchase of offerings and ultimately enhance sales. Spreng and Mackoy (1996) view overall satisfaction as integrated as a dominant factor of purchase intentions concerning brand loyalty (1996). In the viewpoint of Bloamer & Kasper (1995), customer loyalty is one of the considerable paths with which customer satisfaction about products or services received is expressed. For this reason, brand loyalty is at the heart of strategic marketing. Solomon (1994) explored those purchase decisions of a loyal customer may become a habit in nature, even quite simple, and provide satisfaction with the current brand(s) as a result. Consumers who have a high purchase frequency are most likely considered satisfied with the products.

Price

Some average customers consider the price as the most significant factor, according to Cadogan and Foster (2000). Customers who have high brand loyalty are usually ready to pay the additional price for their favourite brand's products that they wanted, as price can not affect their purchase intention easily. In addition, several customers believe that the price and value of their favourite brands would be the best to be considered so that they could compare and evaluate the prices with the competing brands (Keller; 2003). The satisfaction of the consumers can be built by comparing the price with the value and the perceived cost. It has been observed that consumers will buy product that has good value for money according to their will.

Loyal customers tend to be willing to pay higher prices, even if the price is increased because of the high risk. They also prefer to pay in higher price avoiding the risk of any change (Yoon & Kim, 2000). Long-term relationships of service loyalty make loyal customers more tolerant toward the pricing of a product since it discourages customers from making price comparisons with other brands' products. Price has increasingly become a focal point in consumers' judgments of the value that is offered, as well as their overall assessment of the retailer (De Ruyter et al., 1999).

Product Involvement

Product involvement is the perceived relevance of a product class based on the consumers' inherent needs, interests, and values (Zaichkowsky, 1994). Researchers of consumer behaviour attribute a great deal of importance to the product-involvement variable. Studies have shown that product involvement can influence the decision-making process regarding a product, the extent to which consumers will search for information about the product, the timing of the adoption of the product, and how the consumers' attitudes and preferences regarding the product are influenced, the consumers' perception of alternatives in the same product category and brand loyalty (Bauer, Sauer & Becker, 2006; Charters & Pettigrew, 2006; Lin & Chen, 2006).

Evidence in the literature reveals that brand loyalty interacts positively with product involvement variables in the sustenance of brand loyalty. According to Quester and Lim (2003), one's involvement in a product class is directly related to one's commitment or loyalty to a brand within that product class. Besides that, they also suggested that involvement with a product is a necessary precondition for brand loyalty. On the other hand, Charles (1998) suggests that the characteristics of the products/brands themselves or their usage contexts may thoroughly act to stimulate consumers' involvement. Therefore, product involvement is taken into consideration as one of the factors that affect brand loyalty. Tsiotsu (2006) posits that there exists a direct relationship between product involvement and perceived product quality stating that product involvement affects the way quality cues operate and reports that product involvement is a significant predictor of perceived quality.

Perception of Product Quality

Product quality covers the features, aroma, aesthetics, and characteristics of a product that allows for satisfying the definite or inferred needs of customers. Russell and Taylor (2006) explain product quality as the fitness of use of the conformance to the requirement of customers. How the product being offered satisfies the needs of the customers and how the product communicates that brand image to build brand loyalty is crucial factors. The reason perceived quality was included was that quality becomes an important framework when choosing which brand to buy. Jesujoba and Adenike (2021) opine that the importance of a product brand can be seen primarily in its impact on consumers' choice and their loyalty towards the brand through identifying and differentiating quality. In other words, customers will more likely become loyal to a brand when the particular brand is perceived to provide the level of quality that can meet customers' expectations. Similarly, Ruyter, Wetzels and Bloemer (1998) found that there was a positive relationship between perceived service quality and service loyalty when they conducted a series of studies for five different service industries. The same goes for perceived quality and brand loyalty as well because customers' perception of quality towards a product or service may enhance their loyalty towards a brand.

Trustworthiness and Uniqueness

Morgan and Hunt (1994) described that "trust is an important factor in the development of marketing relationships and exists when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity". Ballester and Aleman (2001) described that trust and satisfaction are conceptually connected. As variables that generate consumer commitment, especially in the situation of high involvement. Anderson and Naris (1990) argued that trust arises when someone holds a belief that the second person's actions would cause affirmative effects for his/herself. Accordingly, to trust a brand, consumers should perceive quality as a favourable object.

Trust of a customer on brand trust leads to brand loyalty that results in commitment and association of that customer with that brand which then creates highly valued exchange relationships (Rehman, Rehman & Akhtar, 2011). The commitment of loyalty of customers that results from the brand trust is very important to continue maintaining the valuable relationship with customers. According to Curran (2003) brand trust creates satisfaction. Brand trust is a factor that makes an average user believes that a brand will perform its stated purpose whatsoever (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Brand loyalty is developed if there is an element of trust (Berry, 1993; Reicheld & Schefter, 2000). Brand loyal consumers are more willing to pay more for a brand because they perceive some unique value in the brand that other brands cannot provide (Schouten et al., 2020). This uniqueness is most probably derived from greater brand trust in the reliability of a brand or a more favourable effect when customers use the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In the commitment trust theory, Morgan and Hunt (1994) stated that trust is a key variable in the development of an enduring desire to maintain a relationship in the long term e.g. the long-term relationship might be developed towards a brand due to the trusting relationship that the customer has.

Likewise, Ballester and Aleman (2001) found that there are possible conceptual connections of trust to the notion of loyalty and this drives the authors to focus on analyzing the relationships existing among these concepts. Subsequently, the results suggested that brand trust plays an imperative role in generating customers' commitment towards a brand or brand commitments towards a particular product. Brand loyal customers are more willing to pay more for a brand because they perceive some unique value in the brand that the other brand cannot provide (Reichheld, 1996). This uniqueness is most probably derived from greater brand trust in the reliability of a brand or a more favourable effect when customers use the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Brand Awareness

In today's competitive business environment, the first step for marketers is to concentrate on brand management and niche strategies to improve brand awareness by strengthening consumer brand/product connection. When consumers are uncertain about product attributes, brands can be used to inform them about product positions and to ensure them that product claims are credible. The reduced uncertainty can lower information costs and perceived risk by consumers but increase consumers' expected utility (Wang et al., 2008). Globally, the phenomenal growth in the availability of various media (internet, TV, cell phone, music video, and magazine) and their coverage of brand effectiveness has contributed to the increase in global brand consciousness among consumers (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Brand awareness impacts consumers' perception of brand, products and their preferences, attachment and brand loyalty toward a brand.

Conclusion

This study explains some factors that enhance the brand loyalty of consumers. There are so many factors that influence brand loyalty beyond the promotional mix. They seem inexhaustible. But in this paper, most related studies were reviewed and the writer extracted the most frequently researched influencing factors. They include brand name, customer satisfaction, price, product involvement, perception of product quality, trustworthiness and uniqueness, and brand awareness. Consequently, this review then gives an insight into how the brand name, customer satisfaction, price, product involvement, perception of product quality, trustworthiness and uniqueness, and brand awareness enhances brand loyalty in general.

In terms of brand names, famous brand names can disseminate product benefits and lead to a higher recall of advertised benefits and more product benefits than brand names that are not popular. As for customer satisfaction, if performance matches expectations, the customer is

satisfied, and highly satisfied customers will be brand loyal, remain customers longer, provide favourable word of mouth advertising, increase the purchase of offerings and ultimately enhance sales. Regarding price, the satisfaction of the consumers can be built by comparing the price with the value and the perceived cost. It has been observed that consumers will buy product that has good value for money according to their will. Loyal customers tend to be willing to pay higher prices, even if the price is increased because of the high risk.

On the subject of product involvement, one's involvement in a product class is directly related to one's commitment or loyalty to a brand within that product class. Product quality was included because quality becomes an important framework when choosing which brand to buy. Also, the trust of a customer on brand trust leads to brand loyalty that results in commitment and association of that customer with that brand which then creates highly valued exchange relationships. In terms of brand awareness, it impacts consumers' perception of the products and their preferences, attachment, and brand loyalty.

Recommendations/Implications to Management

This study implies that management should improve on factors like brand name, customer satisfaction, price, product involvement, perception of product quality, trustworthiness and uniqueness, and brand awareness. These factors can complement promotion, and not replace it. Management can stimulate consumers to elaborate upon their brand choice by stimulating the motivation and the capacity of the consumers to evaluate their brand choice. This can be done by linking the brand to some involving issue or personal situation by making clear the differences between different brands and by stressing the important characteristics of the brand. Also, clear and understandable information should be provided about the brand. Management should also be concerned about true brand loyalty which is also based on commitment and avoid any of the factors that may cause the consumers' loss of loyalty to brands.

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