

Brand personality and its influence on brand loyalty - Do sophisticated brands have more brand loyal customers?

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Abstract

Objectives. Creating loyal customers is one of the most important aims organisations have. However, most marketing departments try to create loyal customers through customer loyalty programmes only. This study aims at investigating the influence of the brand's image (i.e., brand personality; Aaker, 1997) on brand loyalty.

Method. Study 1 ($N = 360$) was used to derive a valid single-item measure from a multi-item scale for the three inter-culturally stable brand personality dimensions (sincerity, excitement, sophistication; Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001).

Study 2, using an automobile customer sample ($N = 1032$), assessed the influence of brand personality on brand loyalty while controlling for previous purchases and customer personality.

Results. Previous purchases and customers' conscientiousness were significant determinants of brand loyalty. Additionally, all three brand personality dimensions explained incremental variance ($\Delta R^2 = .28$) of customers' loyalty.

Conclusion. Practical implications for the application of brand personality in loyalty campaigns are derived.

Introduction

Furnishing a company's brand with a strong image is an effective way of creating loyal customers. Confirming this, previous research indicates a direct association of the brand's image with customer loyalty (e.g., Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Ball, Coelho, & Machás, 2004). The image of a brand, in turn, can best be assessed through brand personality (Moser, 2001), which can be defined as a set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997).

The aim of this study is to deepen our understanding of this association between brand loyalty and brand personality, as a central determinant of the brand's image, by additionally including the number of previous purchases of products of the brand as well as customer personality. Customer personality was shown in previous studies to be an important predictor of consumer behaviour and consumer attributes (e.g., Chang, 2001).

Method

Study 1: 360 participants (180 male, 180 female) with an average age of 25.82 years ($SD = 8.01$, Range: 13 to 73) rated three brands (Apple, Mercedes, Nike) on three brand personality dimensions (sincerity, excitement, sophistication). These particular brand personality dimensions were chosen as they proved to be stable across culturally very diverse countries (USA, Japan, Spain; Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001). The most representative single-item was selected for each dimension, respectively, by using the corrected item-to-total correlation (which should be high) as well as correlations with the remaining two brand personality dimensions (which should be low).

Study 2: 1032 customers (877 male, 155 female) of an automotive company with an average age of 43.58 years ($SD = 12.18$, Range = 18 to 79) completed an online questionnaire regarding their loyalty towards the company (Aydin, Özer, & Arasil, 2005; Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2001; Narayandas, 2005; Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$), their previous purchasing behaviour of products of this company („Did you ever buy a car of [company]?“), their personality (Single-Item measure; Woods & Hampson, 2005) as well as the company's brand personality along the three items (sincere, exciting, elegant) derived from Study 1.

Results

Study 2: A multiple regression analysis, $F(11, 1020) = 52.28$; $p < .001$; $R^2_{adj.} = .35$, indicated that only conscientiousness had a significant influence on customers' loyalty. When entering brand personality, conscientiousness did no longer significantly predict loyalty. Previous purchasing behaviour had a strong and significant influence on loyalty. Additionally, all brand personality dimensions incrementally predicted customer loyalty ($\Delta R^2 = .28$).

		β	SE	β	SE	ΔR^2
Customer personality	Age	-.07*	.03	-.03	.03	
	Sex	.03	.03	.04	.03	
	Extraversion	.05	.03	.04	.03	
	Neuroticism	.00	.03	.03	.03	
	Conscientiousness	.07*	.03	.05	.03	
	Agreeableness	.06	.03	.04	.03	
	Openness	.04	.03	.02	.03	
	Purchase behaviour	.27***	.06	.23***	.05	
Brand personality	Sincerity			.28***	.03	
	Excitement			.15***	.03	
	Sophistication			.22***	.03	.28***

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis predicting customer loyalty
* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$

Discussion

The results indicated that customer personality had only little influence on brand loyalty. Previous purchasing behaviour, however, emerged as a relevant predictor of brand loyalty. Most important for companies, brand personality substantially contributed to the prediction of brand loyalty. If further studies can replicate these results, companies would be well advised to create strong brand images in addition to customer loyalty programmes in order to increase loyalty.

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