

A Survey on Brand Loyalty of Sportswear in Pune

Amol Kangude¹, Dr. Subhash J. Jadhav (Director)²

¹*MET's, Institute of Management, Bhujbal Knowledge City*

²*Dr. B.V. Hiray College of Management & Research, Malegaon, Nashik*

Abstract- This paper presents the results of brand loyalty of 3000Puneresidents, aged from 18 to 24 years old. This study explores brand loyalty behaviour on sportswear and examines key brand loyalty factors: brand name, product quality, price, style, store environment, promotion, and service quality. Consumers are classified into two categories by their degree on brand loyalty: hard-core loyal consumers and brand switchers. The study concludes that brand name, style, and promotion are the key brand factors which can distinguish hard-core loyal consumers and brand switchers. Brand name and style have more influence on the brand loyalty of hard-core loyal consumers, while promotion influences more on that of brand switchers. Product quality is perceived by both groups as the most important factor affecting their brand loyalty.

Keywords- Brand Loyalty, Hard-core Loyalty, Brand Switching, Sportswear Market

I. INTRODUCTION

The market trend for wearing sportswear is particularly emerging in Pune. Nowadays, sportswear becomes a common and popular category as it gives young people a more relaxed lifestyle and greater versatility and comfort. Consumers wear athletic apparel not only in sports activities, but also at home, in school, at work, or at leisure time. Moreover, there is a prominent trend in the sportswear industry, for which the casual design and athletic design is converging. Sports lovers combine their sports activities with leisurewear in order to look smart and fashionable when they do exercise. A positive trend is confirmed in Italy on sales of sportswear for spring/summer 2018. Consequently, different line of fashionable sportswear targeting the youth market has been successfully launched by Adidas, a traditional sporting goods company, teaming up with a well-known fashion designer [1]. Now a days in many Indian cities, brand loyalty is recognized as an asset and consumers are willing to pay more for a brand [2]. However, there are fewer but more powerful retailers in the sportswear market, so the competition is fierce in the sports wear market. Well-established brand names continue to contribute investment and time in upholding brand identity, preserving brand loyalty and developing new sports product lines so as to occupy more market share. Marketing managers realize the rising trends of brand switching and recognize customer retention as an easier and more reliable source of superior performance. Therefore, it is important for marketers to acquire more knowledge in brand loyalty. Much of the previous research has focused on the distinction between spurious and true loyalty [3], relationship among service quality, consumer satisfaction and store loyalty [4]; purchase patterns (Lawrence, 1969); or characteristics of consumers based on buying behaviour, self-image, and

demographics, and multi-brand buying [5]. Research using factors on brand loyalty to distinguish hard-core loyal consumers and brand switchers has not yet been explored. Thus, the aim of this research is to distinguish brand loyal consumers and brand switchers in the Pune youth sportswear market. From this study, we can provide useful information to brand companies for developing their competitive branding strategies. This paper has four sections. First, we depict a theoretical background of brand loyalty, its factors, and put forth a conceptual model to demonstrate relationships of the variables. Then, we describe our research hypotheses, methodology on research instrument design and data collection. A survey questionnaire is administered to collect data from people. Subsequently, we base on our findings to classify respondents into hard-core loyal consumers and brand switchers, and to distinguish consumers by different factors of brand loyalty. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of our recommendation on strategies for sportswear marketers and future research directions.

II. FACTORS OF BRAND LOYALTY

To create brand loyal consumers and to retain them, it is essential to understand the major factors that influence brand loyalty among them. This study focuses on the six brand loyalty factors: brand name [6], product quality [7], price [8], style, store environment, promotion and service quality [9].

2.1. Brand Name.

Famous brand name can disseminate product benefit and lead to higher recall of an advertised benefit than anon-famous brand name. There are many unfamiliar brand names and alternatives available in the marketplace. Consumers may prefer to trust major famous brand names. Hard-core loyal consumers trust their favourite brand names and consistently repurchase these brands. Those prestigious brand names and their images attract consumers to purchase the brand [6], affect repeat purchasing behaviour, and reduce price related switching behaviours [7]. On the other hand, brand personality provides links to the brand's emotional and self-expressive benefits for differentiation.

This is important when those brands have only minor physical differences and are consumed in a social setting where the brand can make a visible image about the consumer itself. On the other hand, fashion magazines and fashion press elaborate on the designer's collections to the full extent and thus reinforce better images to facilitate consumer recognition.

2.2. Product Quality

Consumers may repeat purchase the single brand or switch around several brands due to the tangible quality of the product sold. The components of product quality of fashion merchandise include size measurement, cutting or fitting, material, colour, function, and the performance of merchandise. Fitting is a crucial aspect in garment selection because some fitted garments such as swimming suits and aerobic wear can ideally enhance consumers' general appearance [8]. Material is important in product quality because it affects the hand feel, texture and other performance of the product. Also, consumers relate personally to colour, and usually select or reject a fashion because the colour does or does not appeal to them or flatter their own colouring[8]. In addition, technologically advanced and functional garments are growing in demand, so modern technology in terms of fabric function plays an important role in sports wear market where new fabrics and applications are used to complement styles

Functional attributes in sportswear include quick-dry, breathable, waterproof, odour-resistant, lightweight, and/or, antimicrobial. Finally, durability is the use life of the garments. For instance, some consumers wear their sportswear for heavy work and some for leisure and sports, so they need a lot of movement, and durability becomes an important consideration in purchasing sportswear.

2.3. Price.

Price is probably the most important consideration for the average consumers. Price serves as the strongest loyalty driver (Ryan et al., 1999). Consumers with high brand loyalty are less

2.4. Price sensitive

Purchase intention of consumers cannot be easily affected by price if they have built brand loyalty into the brand. These consumers are willing to pay a premium price for their favoured brand. In addition, they may have strong beliefs in price and value of their favourite brands so that they can compare and evaluate price with alternative brands. Consumer's satisfaction can also be built by comparing price with perceived costs and values. If the perceived values of the product are greater than cost, consumers will purchase that product.

2.5. Style.

Style is a visual appearance, which includes line, silhouette, and details affecting consumer perception towards a brand [8] A composite list of apparel attributes has been generated and one of the conceptual categories is style. Consumer's judgment depends on the consumer's level of fashion consciousness, so judgment will be conditioned by their opinion of what is currently fashionable. Brands that supplied stylish sportswear attract loyal consumers who are fashion conscious. Fashion leaders or followers usually purchase or continually repeat purchasing their fashion garments in stores that are highly fashionable. They gain satisfaction of wearing the latest fashion and style which can also fulfil their ego needs. Duff (1999) [10], who investigated the niche market in women's sportswear, found that sportswear shoppers were becoming more fashion conscious and were demanding products with more style. As a

result, consumers tend to prefer those items that they can wear on different occasions or for different social situations.

2.6. Store Environment.

Retail stores are relatively closed environments. Positive attributes of the store, which include store location, store layout, and in-store stimuli, affect brand loyalty to some extent. Store location and number of outlets are crucial in altering consumer shopping and purchasing patterns. If consumers are highly accessible to stores during their shopping trip and are satisfied with the store's assortment and services, these consumers may become loyal afterwards. Thus, store atmosphere is one of the factors involved in consumer decision making. The stimuli in-store, such as the characteristics of other shoppers and sales people, store layout, noises, smells, temperature, shelf space and displays, signs, colours, and merchandise, affect consumers and serve as elements of apparel attributes, which may in turn, affect consumer decision making and satisfaction towards the brand. In-store stimuli also influence the degree of how long consumers stay in the store, how many products consumers come into visual contact with, and what routes consumers travel within the store. On the other hand, music played in the background of the stores affects attitudes and behaviour. The slow-beat musical selections leads to

higher sales volumes as consumers spend more time and money. Promotion is a component in marketing mix which is a kind of communication with consumers. Promotion includes the use of advertising, sales promotions, personal selling and publicity. Advertising is a non-personal presentation of information in mass media about a product, brand, company or store. It greatly affects consumers' images, beliefs, and attitudes towards products and brands, and in turn, influences their purchase behaviour. Advertisements can help establishing ideas or perceptions into consumers' minds and differentiating products against other brands. Thus, good advertisements can attract brand switcher and create brand loyalty. Moreover, effective communication can persuade and motivate consumers to think about and even take action to purchase the product the advertisement promoted. Brand switchers may turn into loyal consumers towards the brand. Eventually the success comes when the marketer employs effective promotion strategies.

2.7. Service Quality.

Service quality is a kind of personal selling and involves direct interactions between a salesperson and a potential buyer. Consumers shopped at specific stores because they like the service provided and they are assured of certain service privileges. Salesperson performances stimulate bonding through trust among sales representatives and consumers and will affect consumers' perception towards the stores or brand. The impacts of salesperson-consumer relationships will generally result in long-term orientation of consumers towards the store or brand. Trust in salespersons appears to relate to overall perceptions of the store's service quality, and results in consumer total satisfaction with the stores at the end. Additionally, personalization.

III SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Model Used in This Survey Study

Reviewing the extant literature on brand loyalty, a research model was constructed to better explain on the two major consumer types. The two different consumer types will have different perceptions towards the factors of brand loyalty. When consumers are satisfied by the aforesaid factors that affect their brand loyalty, brand loyalty will be reinforced. Figure 1 displays the model used in this research study.

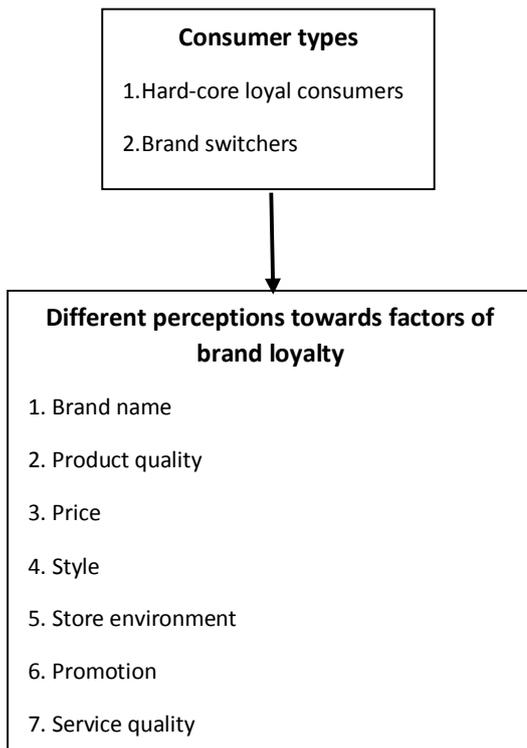


Figure 1. Research Model of Brand Loyalty and Consumer Types

Sampling and Data Collection

A pilot study using in-depth interviews was conducted with 20 people who were aged from 18 to 24 years old. The purpose of this pilot study was to gather information about the usual brands that students were loyal to, and factors affecting brand loyalty which were useful in constructing the questionnaire. Results showed that brands that people usually purchased are Nike, Reebok, Fila, and Adidas. According to the respondents, factors that affecting brand loyalty included brand name, product quality, price, style, store environment, promotion, and service quality. Subsequently, we conducted a pretest questionnaire survey in university campus. Based on the experiences with this pretest, the questionnaire was modified.

A self-administered questionnaire was directly distributed to 290 people aged from 18 to 24 years old. The survey was conducted in the canteens of a university in Pune through a convenience, non-probability sampling method. We chose this age group because students from higher education are perceived as reasonable surrogate for the population of 18 to 24 years old. Finally, 280 people accepted the participation of interviews. The completed questionnaires were used for this analysis.

IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classification result of hard-core loyal consumers and brand switchers

The sample was classified into hard-core loyal consumers and brand switchers according to the question of "Are you especially loyal to a brand of sportswear?".

Large majority of the respondents were brand switchers (80.7%) and the rest of them are hard-core loyal consumers (19.3%). Classification results of a discriminant analysis later in this study indicated that 68.6% of respondents were correctly classified into two groups: hard-core loyal consumers were accurately classified the case as 64.8%, while brand switchers were accurately classified as 69.5%. They were both larger than 50%, and they were said to be accurately classified. It is reasonable that the majority of the respondents are classified as brand switchers because there are little loyal consumers in the market. Since brand switchers use two or more brands and are willing to buy new brands, they contribute to a higher market potential for new brands or new market entrants.

Table 1: Structure Matrix on Hard-core Loyal Consumers

Brand name	.710
Product Quality	.332.
Price	.190
Style	.410
Store environment	.130
Promotion	-.381
Service Quality	.021

Table 2: The Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients of Two Groups According to the Discriminating Factors

	Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients
Brand name	.789
Style	.440
Promotion	-.682

III. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Managerial Aspects

Consumers from 'late teens' and 'early twenties' have the highest interest in clothing. They are also the big spenders in the sporting goods market. They are in the period of expressing individuality and beauty and wear up-to-date and trendy

apparel. They dispose their old-style apparel frequently and results in frequent wardrobe replacement. This period represents a change in lifestyle and represents a phase of new wardrobe demands. As they have high interest in personal appearance, they tend to have greater clothing expenditure. Nevertheless, most of the respondents aged from 18 to 24 years old are brand switchers. This can be explained by previous researches that this age group is widely determined as low loyal when compared with other age groups (Day, 1969; East et al., 1995; Uncles & Ehrenberg, 1990; Wood, 2004). Therefore, marketers have to concentrate their efforts and resources on this consumer segment, such as introducing new lines of fashion sportswear to target the youth market (HKTDC, 2004). On the other hand, creating brand loyal consumers is difficult. Marketers need to continually improve their marketing programs to attract and retain consumers. As competition in the marketplace is getting increased, consumers are supplied with information on different brands. Thus, important views between “making more consumer satisfied” and “making specific groups of consumers more satisfied” raised. Making specific groups of consumers more satisfied is more significant related to company’s profitability level. Therefore, marketers now focus on brand switching behaviour in the marketplace. As a result, they concentrate on gaining knowledge in factors that can affect consumers to become and remain loyal to their own brands. Loyal consumers may be willing to pay more for a brand. Consequently, branding gives marketers an opportunity to develop and maintain a loyal and profitable consumer base. It is important that a sportswear company promises to consistently deliver specific sets of features, benefits and services to its consumers.

Furthermore, marketers must launch consumer retention program because the cost of consumer retention is five times less expensive than the cost of recruiting a new customer. There are three main benefits of consumer retention: costs of consumer acquisition are reduced, higher margin are gained as long lasting consumers are less price sensitive, and sales are raised because

consumers buy more products from the company they are loyal to. Instead of attracting new consumers, companies would like to do more business with consumers in order to retain current consumers and build-up long-lasting consumer relationship. Thus, brand loyalty programs are designed to turn one-time buyers into buyers that will purchase the product again.

Moreover, after analysing the data, it was found that promotion is the most efficient strategy in attracting brand switchers. In the sportswear market, promotion tends to reinforce brand switchers to develop more solid brand loyalty towards sportswear. Youngsters follow the moves of their favourite sport celebrities, so they buy the same brand used by sport idols. Sporting goods companies promote their brand images by spending huge amount of money in sponsoring major sports events and individual sports celebrities in Mumbai (HKTDC, 2004).

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