

Are Brand Experience, Satisfaction and Brand Trust Possible Solutions to Brand Loyalty Challenge? An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract: From a marketer's point of view, there is no doubt that brand loyalty is crucial for an organization's survival. It has been continuously asserted in literature that customers who exhibit loyalty reduce the marketing costs of doing business by reducing the customer acquisition costs, increase in positive word-of-mouth by loyal customers and less degree of price sensitivity in loyal customers. Thus, companies are frantically searching for ways to face this challenge of brand loyalty. With this background in mind, this paper empirically explored brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust as possible solutions. For understanding these relationships, a thorough literature review was done. Based on this review, a regression model was developed where brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust were included as the predictors/independent variables and brand loyalty as the outcome/ dependent variable. All the three predictors collectively accounted for a relatively very high percentage of variance (69.2 per cent) in brand loyalty.

1. INTRODUCTION

In their annual global survey of Management Tools & Trends (2013) to track executives' behaviours and attitudes through a full range of economic cycles, Bain & Company have reported among 1,208 global executives surveyed, 67% said they believed their customers had become less loyal to their brand. In other words, at a time when record numbers of companies are investing more in ways of tracking and improving customer loyalty, two-thirds of the executives indicated that customers are becoming less loyal to any one brand. For many, that creates pressure to reduce prices or to invest in greater innovation and differentiation to strengthen their devotion. More than any other industry, consumer products executives reported that they had experienced a reduction in brand loyalty. Thus, brand loyalty has gained recognition as a key factor for success (Rigby and Bilodeau, 2014).

From a marketer's point of view, there is no doubt that brand loyalty is crucial for an organization's survival. It has been continuously asserted in literature that customers who exhibit loyalty reduce the marketing costs of doing business by reducing the customer acquisition costs, increase in positive word-of-mouth by loyal customers and less degree of price sensitivity in loyal customers. Also, it has been proved that loyalty provides fewer reasons for consumers to engage in extended information search among alternatives (Rundle-

Thiele and Mackay, 2001). Moreover, it is known to facilitate customer retention efforts by providing a substantial entry barrier to the competitors (Aaker, 1991; Amine, 1998; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Pritchard, Havitz and Howard, 1999; Reichheld and Scheffer, 2000).

Further, Dick and Basu (1994) suggested the other loyalty-related marketing advantages, such as favourable word of mouth and greater resistance among loyal consumers to competitive strategies i.e., a customer base less sensitive to the marketing efforts of competitors. A lot of eminent scholars including Athanassopoulos, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2001); Jacoby and Chestnut (1978); Pessemier (1959); and Reichheld (1996) are of the view that brand-loyal consumers may be willing to pay more for a brand because they perceive some unique value in the brand that no alternative can provide. Further, Assael (1998) observed that brand loyalty leads to greater sales and revenue leading to greater market share when the same brand is repeatedly purchased by loyal consumers, irrespective of situational constraints.

2. WHY BRAND EXPERIENCE, SATISFACTION AND BRAND TRUST CONSIDERED AS SOLUTIONS TO BRAND LOYALTY CHALLENGE?

Advocating brand experience as one of the differentiation tools to ensure brand loyalty, Meyer and Schwager (2007) observed, "The companies should realise that consumers have a greater number of choices today than ever before, more complex choices, and more channels through which to pursue them. In such a scenario, ensuring meaningful experiences with the brands will only win the allegiance of the time-pressed consumer". Similar views were put forward by various other scholars. For instance, Pullman and Gross (2004) reported, "Evidence suggests that properly executed brand experiences will encourage loyalty by creating emotional connections through an engaging, compelling and consistent context". Similarly, Ha and Perks (2005) stated greater brand experience is not only associated with familiarity, but also impacts crucially on understanding, enjoying, enhancing and fostering the brand. The same view was put forward by

Schmitt (2011), "Marketing practitioners have come to realize that understanding how consumers experience brands and, in turn, how to provide appealing brand experiences for them, is critical for differentiating their offerings and ensuring loyalty in a competitive marketplace". Thus, literature clearly provides support to the fact that in today's competitive era, where companies are frantically searching for ways to ensure brand loyalty, one should not ignore brand experience as it might turn out to be an effective differentiation tool in the long run (Ramakrishnan and Vohra, 2015 a).

Underlining the role of satisfaction in ensuring brand loyalty, satisfaction has traditionally been regarded as a fundamental determinant of long-term customer behaviour (Oliver, 1980). It is well documented in literature that it is an antecedent of repurchase intentions, word-of-mouth, customer loyalty, and ultimately long term profitability of a firm (Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003). Additionally, several researchers (Biong, 1993; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Oliver and Linder, 1981; Patterson and Johnson, 1997) have empirically concluded that satisfaction affects loyalty and it can be a strong predictor of attitudinal loyalty measured through repurchases intentions. Therefore, there seems to be a consensus among the scholars that in today's increasingly competitive world of business, it is essential for firms to effectively manage satisfaction to ensure brand loyalty.

Brand trust is taken as the third possible solution as it is considered that trust evolves from past experience and prior interaction with a brand and helps in developing positive and favourable attitudes towards a brand. In consumer-brand domain, the scholars have proposed that, trust may be an important contributor to the kind of emotional commitment that leads to long-term loyalty (Hess, 1995). Reichheld and Scheffer (2000) observed "that to gain the loyalty of customers, you must first gain their trust". Further, reinforcing its relationship with brand loyalty Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Aleman and Yagüe-Guillén (2003) observed "Consequently, in addition to the widely supported positive effect that satisfaction has on brand loyalty, it seems reasonable to expect that the higher the feeling of trust in a brand the more the consumer is committed to it".

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(a) Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is one of the most-cited concepts in marketing literature since the idea was first identified (Knox and Walker, 2001; Lau and Lee, 1999) in the seminal work of Copeland (1923) around 90 years ago as brand insistence (Ramakrishnan and Vohra, 2015b). Brand insistence combines the behavioural index of exclusive purchase with an out-of-stock decision that another brand would only be purchased in the case of an emergency. One of the earliest conceptual definitions of brand loyalty was proposed by Jacoby and Chestnut (1978). They defined brand loyalty as: "The (a) biased, (b) behavioural

response, (c) expressed over time, (d) by some decision-making unit, (e) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (f) is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes".

Oliver (1999) made an attempt to explain the satisfaction-loyalty conundrum, where he investigated what aspect of the consumer satisfaction response has implications for loyalty and what portion of the loyalty response is due to this satisfaction component. In this paper, brand loyalty was comprehensively defined as, "A deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronise a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour." The analysis concluded that satisfaction is a necessary step in loyalty formation but becomes less significant as loyalty begins to set through other mechanisms.

On basis of a thorough analysis, Davis-Sramek, Mentzer and Stank (2008) summarised that brand loyalty has been defined in terms of repeat purchasing, a positive attitude, long-term commitment, intention to continue the relationship, expressing positive word-of-mouth, likelihood of not switching, or any combination of these.

(b) Brand Experience

Marketing scholars are unanimous in agreeing that the notion of experience entered the field of consumption and marketing with Holbrook and Hirschman's pioneering article of 1982. Since then, the scholars have been defining experience in various contexts, namely, consumption experience, product experience, aesthetic experience, service experience, shopping experience and customer experience. However, a holistic definition of the term "brand experience" has recently been proposed by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009). They conceptualised brand experience as, "subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli (such as brand-identifying colours, shapes, typefaces, background design elements, slogans, mascots, and brand characters) that are part of a brand's design and identity (e.g., name, logo, signage), packaging, communications (e.g., advertisements, brochures, Web sites), and environments in which the brand is marketed or sold (e.g., stores, events)".

(c) Satisfaction

One of the earliest definitions of consumer satisfaction was provided by Hunt (1977), quoted in Babin and Griffin (1998), "Consumer satisfaction with a product refers to the favourableness of the individual's subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with buying it or using it". Bloemer and Kasper (1995) investigated the relationship between consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty, and defined satisfaction specifically in the context of a brand. They defined brand satisfaction as, "The outcome of the

subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative (the brand) meets or exceeds expectations". We have used the definition of Oliver (1996) for our research purpose. He defined satisfaction as, "An emotional post-consumption response that may occur as the result of comparing expected and actual performance (disconfirmation), or it can be an outcome that occurs without comparing expectations".

(d) Brand Trust

Simply defined, trust is a feeling of security and confidence. One of the earliest definitions of trust was given by Deutsch (1958) as cited in Lau and Lee (1999). He defined trust as, "The expectation of the parties in a transaction and the risks associated with assuming and acting on such expectations". According to him, "trust" involves the notion of motivational relevance as well as the notion of predictability. However, predictability is clearly not sufficient to characterise the meaning of "trust".

In context of brands, considering available literature on "trust" as the base, Lau and Lee (1999), defined trust in a brand as, "A consumer's willingness to rely on the brand in the face of risk because of expectations that the brand will cause positive outcomes". Further, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) defined brand trust, "As the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function". The most comprehensive definition has been proposed by Delgado-Ballester *et al.* (2003). They defined brand trust as, "a feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perceptions that the brand, as a personified entity, is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer".

4. METHODOLOGY

Measurement of the Variables

Brand loyalty- was measured through-attitude towards intention to repurchase, willingness to recommend the brand to others, brand commitment and willingness to pay a price premium for the brand. Bennett and Rundle- Thiele (2002) have reported that these have all appeared in prior research to measure attitudinal brand loyalty and have been used to predict behaviour.

Brand Experience- the four-dimensional brand experience scale developed by Brakus *et al.* (2009) was primarily used to measure brand experience with some additional items adapted from the studies of Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001. It is worth mentioning here that this scale had to be modified to a large extent to make it suitable for use in the Indian context.

Satisfaction- Oliver's (1980) widely used satisfaction scale which consists of a set of six Likert-format items was adapted for this research. Also, certain additional measurement items were adapted from the studies of Davis-Sramek *et al.*, 2008; Lau and Lee, 1999; Patterson and Johnson, 1997.

Brand Trust- The operationalisation of trust in the brand involved asking the respondent if the brand can be counted on to do what it is supposed to do and if he or she is willing to rely on it. The items were adapted from the studies of Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2003.

Selection of Test Brands

Based on a two-stage exploratory research, two product categories – Shampoo and Tomato Ketchup were taken as test categories and Dove and Head & Shoulders in the Shampoo category, Kissan and Maggi in the Tomato Ketchup category were used as the test brands for this study. Convenience goods group was deliberately chosen as brand loyalty becomes a challenge in this group due to shorter purchase cycles and availability of a high number of alternative brands.

Sample

The sample consisted of individuals who were above 18 years of age and had used at least any one of the four test brands in last one year or were using at the time of data collection. Regarding sample size, Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998) recommended a sample size of 200 as a 'critical sample size' that can be used in any common estimation procedure for valid results. They also stated that for multivariate sampling, at least 15-20 responses per variable are required to have an appropriate representation. Based on these two requirements, we targeted a sample size of 200. A total of 276 questionnaires were sent out of which 216 were usable responses.

Development and Testing of Data Collection Instrument

Once the specific test brands were finalised, a structured questionnaire based on an extensive review of literature was developed to understand the relationships of brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust with brand loyalty. The questionnaire consisted of four sections and comprised measures of brand experience, satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty. To be consistent and to make it easy for respondents to complete the questionnaire, all items were measured using the Likert scale. This scale is a highly used rating scale that requires respondents to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with each of a series of statements about the variables. The standardised five-point Likert scale was used anchored by "Strongly Disagree" (1) and "Strongly Agree" (5) to allow an extensive range of scoring. Additionally, the basic demographic variables- gender, age, income and education- were also included in the questionnaire to obtain the respondents' characteristics.

An initial version of the questionnaire was developed for all the brands for pretesting and was administered to 20 respondents who were not included in the final sample (5 respondents for each test brand). Thus, during pretesting of the questionnaire, we requested the respondents to indicate

whether the questions were clearly and non-ambiguously worded. On the basis of feedback received from our respondents during pretesting, we reworded six statements in the questionnaire and changed the sequence of four statements. For instance, one item measuring brand trust originally was, “This brand will respond constructively if I have any product/service-related problems”. Many respondents were not able to understand it and provided feedback that it should be asked in a simpler way. Thus, it was reframed as, “This brand will give me a solution if I have any product/service-related problem”.

Data Collection Procedure The data for this study was obtained by a field survey of the actual consumers. Both online and offline survey methods of data collection were deemed to be most appropriate for a widespread research programme to ensure a better representation of the population.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In this section, we present our analysis of the collected data. It covers sample demographics, reliability of the scales used, and regression analysis.

Sample Demographics- Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of our final sample of 216 respondents for the four test brands.

TABLE 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Frequency	Per cent
Gender		
Male	98	45.4
Female	118	54.6
Age group (years)		
18-28	89	41.2
29-38	90	41.7
39-48	25	11.6
49-58	7	3.2
Above 58	3	1.4
Missing	2	0.9
Monthly Household Income (Rs.)		
Below 25000	28	13.0
25001-50000	50	23.1
50001-100000	67	31.0
Above 100001	67	31.0
Missing	4	1.9
Education		
School	1	0.5
Undergraduate	3	1.4
Graduate	42	19.4
Post Graduate	169	78.2
Missing	1	0.5

Number of respondents= 216

5. RELIABILITY OF THE SCALES USED

Reliability tests were carried out to ensure the scales used in the questionnaire were reliable i.e., they would produce consistent results for the variables if measured again under the same methodology. The internal consistency method (using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient) was used to examine the reliability of the measurement scales used. The value ranges between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability. A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.7 or more is generally considered reliable (Nunnally, 1978; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

TABLE 2: Reliability Analysis

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient
Brand Experience	14	0.893
Brand Satisfaction	11	0.956
Brand Trust	13	0.939
Brand Loyalty	10	0.948

Number of respondents= 216

As seen in Table 2, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for all the four variables- brand experience, satisfaction, brand trust and brand loyalty-ranging from 0.893 to 0.956 far exceeded the reliability threshold level of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994) indicating the four scales used were highly reliable. Thus, the measurement of this study was acceptable in terms of reliability.

6. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

A hierarchical regression was conducted to analyse the relationships of brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust with brand loyalty. But before proceeding to final regression analysis, we first checked for the major assumptions of multiple regression- Multicollinearity and Auto correlation.

7. MULTICOLLINEARITY

TABLE 3: Collinearity Diagnostics

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Brand Experience	0.662	1.511
Satisfaction	0.286	3.494
Brand Trust	0.281	3.558

The Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) were computed in order to detect presence of multicollinearity among independent variables in this study. Table 3 shows the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values of the variables. As a rule of thumb, if tolerance is less than 0.10, a

problem with multicollinearity is indicated. On the other hand, as VIF is the reciprocal of tolerance, very large VIF values denote high multicollinearity. A common cut-off threshold is a VIF of 10.

As seen in Table 3, none of the Tolerance levels was less than 0.1 and all VIF values were well below 10. Thus, the measures selected for assessing collinearity among independent variables indicated no major problem of multicollinearity in this study.

Auto Correlation

The Durbin- Watson Statistic is the most commonly used test to check autocorrelation. Its acceptable range is between 1.5 and 2.5. For the three independent variables of this study, the

Durbin – Watson value was 2.248, which was well within the acceptable range, indicating there were no auto correlation problems in the data.

The Regression Model

Once we checked for the above mentioned assumptions of multiple regression, we applied hierarchical multiple regression. We entered our independent variables in steps in a predetermined order based on theory drawn from the literature. In Model 1, we had brand experience as the only predictor. In Model 2, satisfaction was added. In Model 3, brand trust was added in the regression model for the study. Table 4.1.45, shows the output of the hierarchical regression with all the three models listed with their respective R square values and change statistics.

TABLE 4: Model Summary (Hierarchical Regression) of the Relationship of Brand Loyalty (DV) with Brand Experience, Satisfaction and Brand Trust (IVs)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.548 ^a	.300	.297	7.311	.300	91.811	1	214	.000
2	.810 ^b	.655	.652	5.142	.355	219.643	1	213	.000
3	.832 ^c	.692	.688	4.874	.036	25.035	1	212	.000

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Experience
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Experience, Satisfaction
- c. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Experience, Satisfaction, Brand trust
- d. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty.

In Model 1, where brand experience was the only predictor, 30 per cent of the variance in brand loyalty (dependent variable) was explained. In Model 2, when satisfaction was added as a predictor, the variance explained in brand loyalty increased by

35.5 per cent to a total of 65.5 per cent. In Model 3, in addition to satisfaction and brand experience, brand trust was added as a predictor. This model explained an overall 69.2 per cent of variance in brand loyalty as there was an increase of 3.6 per cent in the variance explained. Importantly, the *additional* contributions to the variance explained in Model 2 and 3 were statistically significant as indicated by the Sig. F value, displayed in the last column of Table 4. The ANOVA table indicated that all the three models were statistically significant ($p < 0.0005$).

TABLE 5: Coefficients^a (Hierarchical Regression) of the Relationship of Brand Loyalty (DV) with Brand Experience, Satisfaction and Brand Trust (IVs)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.609	2.413		4.396	.000
	Brand Experience	.555	.058	.548	9.582	.000
2	(Constant)	-1.188	1.875		-.634	.527
	Brand Experience	.155	.049	.153	3.182	.002
	Satisfaction	.697	.047	.715	14.820	.000
3	(Constant)	-3.487	1.835		-1.900	.059
	Brand Experience	.103	.047	.102	2.172	.031
	Satisfaction	.430	.070	.441	6.192	.000
	Brand trust	.337	.067	.360	5.004	.000

- a. Dependent Variable: Brand Loyalty

Table 5 depicts coefficients of all the three models. The Sig. column showed that beta coefficients (standardised coefficients) for all the three independent variables in all the three models were statistically significant. These beta values represent the unique contribution of each variable, when the overlapping effects of all other variables are statistically removed. The beta coefficient for brand experience in Model 1 was 0.548. In Model 2, where satisfaction was added as a predictor, the beta coefficient for satisfaction was 0.715 but the beta coefficient for brand experience reduced to 0.153. In Model 3, when brand trust was introduced, the beta coefficient for satisfaction reduced substantially and became 0.441 but the reduction in beta coefficient for brand experience was negligible; it reduced to 0.102 from 0.153. Thus, for Model 3, the highest Beta value was for satisfaction (0.441), followed by brand trust (0.360) and brand experience (0.102). This indicated satisfaction made the strongest unique contribution in explaining brand loyalty, followed by brand trust and brand experience.

Thus, the final regression equation (based on unstandardised coefficients) for predicting brand loyalty was formed as under:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Brand Loyalty} = & -3.487 + 0.103 X (\text{Brand Experience}) \\ & (1.835) \quad (0.047) \\ & + 0.430 X (\text{Satisfaction}) + 0.337 X (\text{Brand Trust}) \\ & (0.070) \quad (0.067) \end{aligned}$$

8. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The objective of this study was to assess whether brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust could be taken as possible solutions to face the brand loyalty challenge. For understanding these relationships, a thorough literature review was done. Based on this review, a regression model was developed where brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust were included as the predictors/independent variables and brand loyalty as the outcome/ dependent variable. All the three predictors collectively accounted for a relatively very high percentage of variance (69.2 per cent) in brand loyalty. The values of the Beta coefficients were 0.441 for satisfaction, 0.360 for brand trust and 0.102 for brand experience. Thus, based on their importance in explaining brand loyalty, the order of the predictors was satisfaction, brand trust and brand experience. The results clearly show that all the three variables- brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust - are positively related to brand loyalty and each of them makes a unique contribution in explaining variance in brand loyalty.

It is worth noting, though there seems to be an apparent consensus among researchers that brand loyalty is a complex phenomenon and is expected to be the outcome of a number of factors including the level of prior experience, satisfaction,

perceptions, relationship quality, brand attitudes, switching costs, brand awareness, and familiarity (Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2002) and product superiority, personal fortitude, social bonding, and their synergistic effects (Oliver, 1999), our model explain a relatively very high percentage of variance in brand loyalty with just three variables - brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust- in our study.

In other words, brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust are possible solutions to face the challenge of brand loyalty. These results have important managerial implications because they suggest that if brands want to create loyal customers, they need to focus on activities which increase satisfaction and brand trust with brand along with improving the entire brand experience.

9. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although our model received strong empirical support, still there remains a possibility of alternative models. As reported earlier, in the present study, 69.2 per cent of the variance was explained in brand loyalty by brand experience, satisfaction and brand trust taken collectively. Thus, we recognise that there are other determinants of brand loyalty that could be included in more comprehensive models thereby making the model more robust. Also, the study can be strengthened by increasing the sample size and taking into consideration various brands in different product and service categories.

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