

Loyaliteit en tevredenheid : een studie naar de relatie tussen merktrouw en consumententevredenheid

Citation for published version (APA):

Bloemer, J. M. M. (1993). *Loyaliteit en tevredenheid : een studie naar de relatie tussen merktrouw en consumententevredenheid*. Datawyse / Universitaire Pers Maastricht.
<https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.19930519jb>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/1993

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.19930519jb](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.19930519jb)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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Summary

Loyalty and Satisfaction

A study into the relationship between brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction

This summary is structured along the various phases of our research. Firstly, the problem will be elucidated. Secondly, we will present the main hypotheses of this study. Thirdly, we will describe our empirical research project and we will present the major findings. Finally, we will draw some conclusions.

Problem statement

In the past, much research has been done on each of the two concepts of brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction separately. However, little attention has been given to the relationship between the two. Studies on brand loyalty concentrated on the conceptualization and measurement of brand loyalty and the (economic and psychological) antecedents of brand loyalty. Research on consumer satisfaction focused on the factors that cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction as well as on the ways to express (dis)satisfaction. The consequences of brand satisfaction, in terms of brand loyalty, did not receive much attention. Therefore the central problem statement is:

Does consumer satisfaction explain brand loyalty and if so, how?

Based on the literature, we claim it is necessary to distinguish between two types of brand loyalty: true brand loyalty and spurious brand loyalty. True brand loyalty can be defined as:

*the biased (i.e. nonrandom), behavioral response (i.e. purchase), expressed over time, by some decision making unit, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of **brand commitment**, which, in turn, is a result of psychological (decision making; evaluative) processes.*

whereas spurious brand loyalty can be defined as:

*the biased (i.e. nonrandom), behavioral response (i.e. purchase), expressed over time, by some decision making unit, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of **inertia**.*

The commitment concept makes the difference between the two definitions. Brand commitment is a necessary condition for true brand loyalty to occur. We define brand commitment as:

As a result of explicit and extensive decision making processes, as well as evaluative processes, a consumer becomes committed to the brand (when the brand is positively evaluated): he or she is pledged or bound to his/her brand choice. By definition, such a committed consumer is truly brand loyal when he/she buys the particular brand again. (On the other hand the non-committed consumer might just rebuy the brand without being bound to that brand.)

Brand satisfaction can be defined as:

the outcome of the subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative (the brand) meets or exceeds the expectations.

This definition is in line with the many definitions of satisfaction based on the disconfirmation paradigm that can be found in the literature. The notion that stands out in almost every definition of satisfaction is the notion of comparison, meaning that a consumer is able to compare expectations and (product) performance. Consequently, a consumer must have the motivation and the capacity to evaluate the brand relative to his/her frame of reference. This means the consumer must be able to elaborate upon the evaluation to be consciously satisfied. This view is in line with the way of reasoning in the Elaboration Likelihood Model. In that model the concepts of motivation and capacity are central in the sense that they determine the degree of elaboration. The central route (high degree of elaboration) in this model leads to a permanent attitude change; the peripheral route (low degree of elaboration) in this model leads at most to a temporary attitude change.

Sometimes, it may be very hard for consumers to generate expectations, to evaluate performance, and to compare the two as if they were independent elements. To the extent that an explicit comparison can be made between expectations and performance, the consumer is likely to be aware of the outcome of his/her evaluation and his/her satisfaction. To the extent that no explicit comparisons can be made, because of a lack of motivation or ability of the consumer to evaluate his/her brand choice, the consumer is not likely to be fully aware of his/her satisfaction. For this reason, we consider it necessary to make a distinction between manifest and latent satisfaction.

Manifest satisfaction is the outcome of the explicit subjective evaluation of the brand, which the consumer is well aware of (a kind of central route). In the case of latent satisfaction, the consumer does not realize his/her satisfaction and merely accepts the brand (a kind of peripheral route).

Now that the central concepts of our research have been defined, hypotheses about the relationship between brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction, can be formulated.

Hypotheses

Manifest satisfaction is the result of the explicit and extensive evaluation of the brand choice, an evaluation which is well elaborated upon and the consumer is fully aware of. We assume that manifest satisfaction will be clearly related to future buying behaviour. Latent satisfaction is the result of an implicit evaluation of the brand choice, which is not elaborated upon and the consumer is not fully aware of. We assume that latent satisfaction is not so unequivocally related to future buying behaviour.

This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: The amount of satisfaction is positively related to true brand loyalty.

H2: Manifest satisfaction is positively related to true brand loyalty.

H3: The positive relation between manifest satisfaction and true brand loyalty is stronger than the positive relation between latent satisfaction and true brand loyalty.

The last two hypotheses are based on the following assumption:

A1: The greater the amount of elaboration, the more manifest the satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1 is based on the traditional opinion that satisfaction and brand loyalty are positively related. This has already been confirmed by a number of studies, although, it is not true that every satisfied consumer will be brand loyal. Therefore, our study explicitly focuses on true brand loyalty, while most studies carried out in the past did not make the crucial difference between true brand loyalty and spurious brand loyalty. Hypothesis 2 stresses the positive relation between one type of satisfaction and one type of brand loyalty. Especially, manifest satisfaction will lead to brand commitment, which is a necessary condition for true brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 3 points out that latent satisfaction can be related also to true brand loyalty. However, the positive relation between manifest satisfaction and true brand loyalty is expected to be much stronger than the positive relation between latent satisfaction and true brand loyalty.

The assumption makes clear that we assume that those consumers who evaluate their brand choice explicitly and extensively will be manifestly satisfied. Those consumers elaborate upon their choice extensively. As stated before, the amount of actual elaboration depends on the motivation and the capacity of the consumer to elaborate upon the brand choice. In line with the Elaboration Likelihood Model motivation can be operationalized by brand choice involvement and capacity can be operationalized by brand deliberation.

In our empirical research we concentrate on the degree of true brand loyalty and the difference between manifest and latent satisfaction in order to solve our general problem statement and to test the hypotheses.

Empirical research

The empirical research is based on a mail survey among Dutch consumers. The sample (838 consumers) was found to be representative for the Dutch population and for the market shares of the two products used: blank audio cassettes and hair shampoo.

The measurement instrument is based on scales validated in other research projects, and some new questions. It was revised on the basis of various pilot tests.

In order to create the subgroups needed (one group manifestly satisfied and the other latently satisfied), the sample was split based on the degree of involvement (as an indicator of the motivation of the consumer to evaluate the brand) and the degree of deliberation (as an indicator of the capacity of the consumer to evaluate the brand).

Findings

Five hundred and eighty-nine respondents have bought at least one blank audio cassette during the last six months. Whereas 809 respondents have bought hair shampoo in the last three months. In both cases about ninety-five percent of them were satisfied with the brand they bought. Of these satisfied respondents, about one third are 100% satisfied about and one fourth are 75% or less satisfied. Only 2% of the respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied with the brand they bought and a more or less similar number did not know whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied.

Thirty (audio cassettes) to forty (hair shampoo) percent indicated that they were 100% sure to buy the same brand again, the next time they had to buy it. About 30% were not so sure they would do so. These respondents indicated only a 50% chance that they would buy the same brand again.

Concerning the relationship between true brand loyalty and consumer satisfaction, we find that a direct and positive relationship exists between the amount of consumer satisfaction and true brand loyalty in general (meaning no distinction has been made between manifest satisfaction and latent satisfaction). This confirms our first hypothesis. However, as expected, the correlation is not at all perfect. Additional analyses depicted a moderator effect of the type of satisfaction (manifest or latent) on the relationship between the amount of consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. It can be concluded that the positive relationship between manifest satisfaction and true brand loyalty is stronger than the positive relationship between latent satisfaction and true brand loyalty. Therefore, hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3 can be confirmed.

Conclusions

The answer to our problem statement, "Does consumer satisfaction explain brand loyalty and if so, how?" is affirmative: brand satisfaction does positively affect brand loyalty. However, it appeared that it is important to differentiate between the impact of manifest satisfaction on true brand loyalty and the impact of latent satisfaction on true brand loyalty. The impact of manifest satisfaction on true brand loyalty is larger than the impact of latent satisfaction.

