

ASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND PERSONALITY BRAND CHOICE AND BRAND LOYALTY AT A SELECTED RETAIL ORGANIZATION IN NDOLA

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the empirical relationship between brand personality, brand choice and brand loyalty among clients of a selected organization in the retail industry. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was used in this study. The sample consisted of clients of the selected retail organization in Ndola (N=180). Research participants were drawn through convenient sampling. Pearson correlation and linear multiple regression techniques were used to analyze the data. High reliability coefficients were found for all the three scales used in this study. Significant correlations were found among brand personality, brand choice and brand loyalty. Results from a linear regression analysis indicated that brand personality and brand choice are antecedents of brand loyalty. These results suggest that brand personality and brand choice play a significant role in enhancing brand loyalty. Brand managers should pay attention to marketing strategies that promote brand personality and choice given the need for customer loyalty among business clients in this ever-competitive retail industry. The retail industry always strives to gain competitive advantage through client loyalty which is also a predictor of financial gain for an organization. This study in Zambia will add value to already existing knowledge within marketing and consumer psychology. It will also pave the way for future research.

Keyword: Brand personality, Brand choice, Brand loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

Brand Loyalty is an important latent variable in the retail industry in that it builds consumer retention and eventually boosts sales which significantly determinants the financial performance of an organization (Usman, Rida, Madiha & Mohsin, 2012; Krishnamurthi & Raj, 1991; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001; Jorgensen, Mathisen & Pedersen, 2016). Improved quality retailer service, sustainability and cost effectiveness are some of the other outcomes of brand loyalty. If brand loyalty has important organization outcomes it is therefore important to explore its antecedents. There are many predictors of brand loyalty such as brand experience (Siwale, Chikampa, Kabanda, Chindele & Lubinda, 2023), brand personality (Aaker, 1997), customer satisfaction (Aaker 1996), brand awareness (Kotler & Keller, 2016) and brand image (Keller, 1993). Although there are numerous latent variables that acts as antecedents of brand loyalty due to practical and theoretical reasons as well as limiting the scope of the study to a governable and meaningful level a selection of variables was necessary. Two considerations were used. The first one was to consider known antecedents of brand loyalty and second was to examine available brand loyalty literature for future research direction. Based on the above, two variables were considered namely, brand personality and brand choice.

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study primarily aimed at analyzing the empirical relationships between brand personality, brand choice and brand loyalty at a selected retail organization.

Secondly the study aimed at determining if brand personality and brand choice are antecedents of brand loyalty.

Conceptualizing Brand Loyalty

Brand Loyalty is an important feature of consumer behavior that influences brand's success (Dick & Basu, 1994). It shows the degree to which consumer continuously choose and repurchase a specific brand over time, indicating a strong commitment and attachment to it. Consumers exhibit four distinct types of brand loyalty. Cognitive loyalty is founded on consumer's reasonable evaluations of a brand's characteristics, benefits and performance. Consumers that display cognitive loyalty are likely to choose a brand again because they believe it provides the best value for their money (Jacoby, 1973). Affective loyalty is motivated by a customer's emotional attachment to a brand. Affectively loyal customers frequently have high feelings of trust, admiration and affinity for a brand, which influences their purchasing decisions (Fournier, 1998). Conative loyalty refers to a customer's behavioral loyalty to a brand. These customers buy items or services from a specific brand out of habit or convenience, rather than a strong emotional attachment or rational appraisal (Oliver, 1999). Behavioral loyalty is a sort of loyalty in which people actively connect with a brand beyond making purchases. Actions loyal clients may participate in loyalty

programs, refer friends and family, or interact with the brand on social media, all of which contribute to brand advocacy and awareness (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner & Gremler, 2002).

Brand loyalty can be influenced by a variety of variables that lead to consumer loyalty. Some frequent brand loyalty antecedents include the following. Brand image; a strong brand image conveying positive connotations, values and attitudes can help consumers develop brand loyalty (Keller, 1993). Customer satisfaction occurs when customers are pleased with a brand's products, services and overall experience, they are more likely to remain loyal to it. Brand trust is an essential component in developing brand loyalty. Consumers who trust a brand are more likely to stay loyal and prefer it over competitors. Brand engagement comes about when brands actively connect with customers through numerous touch points such as social media, events and personalized messaging can cultivate loyalty among consumers (Bowden, 2009). Brand loyalty is a multidimensional term shaped by cognitive, affective (emotional), conative and behavioral elements (Oliver, 1997). Thus, understanding the various types of brand loyalty and applying tactics to improve important antecedents can help brands develop strong customer relationships and foster long term loyalty.

Conceptualizing Brand Choice

Brand choice is a critical decision-making process that consumers go through when selecting a particular brand over others (Keller, 2008). Kinjal, (2014) defined brand choice as the selection of one brand from a set of alternative brands. Brand choice is conceptualized as a five-dimension construct namely perceived quality, brand image, price, promotion and consumer satisfaction (Isk, 2013). When making brand choices consumers are to a certain extent influenced by the quality of the product (Keller, 1993). Perceived quality is all about durability of the product, service quality, packaging as well as how user friendly it is (Keller, 2008). Price is the second brand choice dimension. According to Petruzzellis, (2010), consumers who focused on the external attributes of a product such as the color of the packaging, size of the product paid more attention to the price rather than the quality of the product. Customer satisfaction is the third brand choice dimension. It involves the emotional responses consumers have when a brand meets their expectations (Isk, 2013). Consumers who are satisfied are likely to choose the same brand in future and this may indirectly influence their future purchases and overtime building brand loyalty. Brand image is the fourth brand choice dimension. A strong brand image is important in order to have a competitive advantage in today's fast paced market. Consumers have perceptions of what they expect from a brand and this includes the brands reputation, value as well as its personality (Isk, 2013). When a brands values and personality do not align with a consumer they are less likely to choose that brand. A strong and positive brand image creates a competitive advantage and attracts consumers to

choose one brand over another (Aaker, 1996). Promotion is the fifth brand choice dimension. Promotion of a brand is crucial since it educates people about the brand, which can be accomplished through positive word of mouth. When people speak well of a brand, they are more inclined to want to try it. This can be done by using eye-catching graphics or logos, as well as marketing.

Conceptualizing Brand Personality

Brands personality is defined as a set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997; Freling, Crosno & Henard, 2011). Brands are conceptualized as having personalities or human like characteristics that distinguish them from other competitors (Goldsmith & Goldsmith). Through branding, products have identities, images or personalities that prevent them from being just mere commodities but competitive brands that facilitate strong bonds with consumers and eventually leads to long term value and also bolster the organizations image and reputation (Davies, Rojas-Mendez, Whelan, Mete & Loo, 2018; Kim, Han & Park, 2001; Thomas & Sekar, 2008). According to Aaker, (1997) brand personality has five dimensions namely excitement, sincerity, ruggedness, competence and sophistication. Excitement represents brands that are youthful, modern, creative, carefree and spirited (Aaker, 1997). Sincerity indicates that the brand is used by family-oriented people, provides physical and mental satisfaction, is genuine, is used for sentimental reasons and is also used for practical purposes (Sundar & Noseworthy, 2016; Thomas & Sokar, 2008). Ruggedness represents a brand that is perceived to be strong, tough, rough, outdoor and athletic while competence represents brands that are reliable, dependable, efficient, intelligence and responsible (Aaker, 1997; Wirunphan & Ussahawanitchakit, 2016). Sophistication is all about elegance, prestige, exclusiveness, charming and romantic (Aaker, 1997). Understanding and utilizing these brand personality qualities allows businesses to strategically position their brands, establish emotional connections with customers and differentiate themselves in a competitive marketplace. In the end, creating a powerful and recognizable brand identity can increase consumer loyalty, influence buy intent, and cultivate enduring relationships with customers (Aaker, 1997).

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BRAND PERSONALITY, BRAND CHOICE AND BRAND LOYALTY, BRAND PERSONALITY AND BRAND CHOICE

Brand personality is an important marketing latent variable grounded in the notion that consumers are more inclined towards the usage of brands and products matching their personality (Govers & Schoormans, 2005). Consumers store in memory experiences they have had with a particular brand (personality) and that these memories may be accessed during decision making (Freling, Crosno & Henard, 2011). For this reason, brand personality is vital in understanding the choice of a brand (Plummer, 2006). In (Alusa, 2018) all the dimensions of brand personality statistically

predicted brand choice. The relationship between brand personality and brand choice is an important consideration in consumer decision-making, that is brands that effectively convey their unique personality can attract and keep customers ultimately driving brand choice and in turn building brand loyalty in a competitive market. In today's highly competitive market, when consumers are bombarded with multiple options, having a distinct brand personality can help a business stand out (Kapferer, 2012). Consumers are more inclined to choose a brand that speaks to them on a personal level and is consistent with their values and beliefs.

Brand Personality and Brand Loyalty

Through brand personality consumers are likely to build emotional attachment with the brand and eventually repeated purchase, positive word of mouth and loyalty especially to a brand that they believe reflects their own values, beliefs and goals (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998). A brand that consistently communicates its values, beliefs and qualities across all touch points establishes authenticity and dependability (Aaker, 1997). Furthermore, such a brand increases brand loyalty because consumers are confident in their decision to buy from a brand considered genuine and trustworthy (Keller, 1993).

Brand Choice and Brand Loyalty

The relationship between brand choice and brand loyalty is complex and interdependent (Kotler & Armstrong, 2019). When a consumer chooses a specific brand, they embark on a series of experiences and interactions with the brand which when expectations are met leads to trust, happiness and eventually recurrent purchases and brand loyalty (Homburg, Klarmann & Schmitt, 2010). If these encounters meet or surpass their expectations, they acquire trust and happiness, which leads to recurrent purchases and eventually, brand loyalty (Homburg, 2010).

From the above discussion the following hypotheses was formulated to guide the study:

- There is a positive relationship between brand personality and brand choice
- There is a positive relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty
- There is a positive relationship between brand choice and brand loyalty
- Brand personality and brand choice predict brand loyalty

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A survey design was used to achieve the research objectives set in this study.

Research method

Sampling/Sample/procedure

A non-probability sampling method specifically the convenient sampling method was used to come up with the sample. The population comprised of all clients of the retail organization operating in Ndola. 250 questionnaires were distributed with 180 completed questionnaires returned. The sample comprised of 109 (60.6%) women and 71 (39.4%) men. Most of the participants were in the age segment of 15-25 years (39.4%).

Instruments

A self-administered questionnaire with four sections was used to collect demographic information whereby respondents were requested to provide information with regards to their age and gender.

Brand Personality

Brand personality was measured using a 32 item Aaker brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997). The instrument measures five dimensions of brand personality namely sincerity, excitement, ruggedness, competence and sophistication using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). (Aaker,1997). reported an acceptable reliability coefficient of .702.

Brand Choice

Brand choice was measured using the consumer preference scale (CPS) consisting of five dimensions. Brand image has 4 items, perceived quality has 5 items, price has 2 items, promotion has 4 items and consumer satisfaction has 5 items. In (Yee,2016). the scale had a Cronbach alpha of .801 for brand image, .782 for perceived quality, .748 for price, .770 for promotion and .867 for customer satisfaction.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty was measured using the brand loyalty scale (BLS) developed by Oliver (1991) it consisted of four dimensions cognitive loyalty had 4 items, affective loyalty had 5, conative loyalty had 3 items and behavioral loyalty had 4 items. The scale in Cheng (2014) had an acceptable reliability coefficient of .804.

DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Reliability analysis

The statistical package for social Sciences version 25 was used to determine the reliability of the measuring instruments through reliability analysis. As seen in **Table 1**, all the instruments had satisfactory Cronbach alphas of above .70 (Pallant,2010 Nunnally & Berstein, 1994) except the brand choice scale with .65. The relatively low reliability coefficient for the brand choice scale is noted as a limitation for this study. Total scores were calculated to be used in the correlation and regression analyses. To either

reject or confirm the hypotheses in the study Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses were performed.

Table 1. Inter-construct correlations.

Scale	Mean	SD	1	2
Brand Loyalty	28.82	6.146	6.146	0.797
Brand Choice	19.14	3.771	0.512	0.648
Brand Personality	20.70	5.669	0.581	0.717

*Note: Cronbach’s alpha coefficients are presented diagonally and in bold. 1= Brand loyalty, 2 =brand choice, 3= brand personality. N=180, SD, standard deviation. **, p < 0.001.*

Correlation and Regression Analysis

Pearson correlation was used to assess the degree to which the latent variables in this study are linearly related (Maxwell & Moores, 2007). In interpreting correlational outputs, (Cohen, 1988) guidelines were used. Significance values were set at $p \leq 0.05$ with r values between 0.10 and 0.29 indicating small correlations; between 0.30 and 0.49 indicating medium correlation and between 0.50 and 1 denoting large correlation. Pearson correlation results are shown in **Table 1**. A strong positive relationship was found between brand personality and brand choice ($r= 0.549$; $p < 0.01$; large practical effect). A strong positive relationship was found between brand personality and brand loyalty ($r= 0.581$; $p < 0.01$; large practical effect). A positive and strong relationship was also observed between brand choice and brand loyalty ($r= 0.512$; $p < 0.01$; large practical effect).

To determine the extent to which brand personality and brand choice predict brand loyalty linear multiple regression analysis was performed. Model summary Results of regression analysis are shown in **Table 2**. The R value of 0.618 indicates a high degree of correlation. The R² or the adjusted R² indicates how much of the total variance in brand loyalty is explained by the model (Satardien, Jano & Mahembe, 2019). The model according to the results explains 37.5% of the variance in brand loyalty.

Table 2. Model Summary.

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R	Standard error of the estimate
Regression Model	.618	.382	.375	4.84270

According to Pallant, (2010) as well as Satardien, (2019) the analysis of variance (ANOVA), tests the null hypothesis that multiple R in the population equals 0, and reports how well the regression equation fits the data (predicts the dependent variable). Results in **Table 3** indicates that the regression model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Analysis of variance.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean squares	F	Significance Regression
Residual	2538.404	2	1269.202	54.120	.000*
	4104.051	175	23.452		
Total	6642.455	177			

*Dependable variable: brand loyalty; Predictors(constant): brand personality (BP) and brand choice (BC). Df: degree of freedom; F, variance of the group means; *, the regression model is statistically significant at $p = 0,000$ ($p < 0.001$).*

The third step involves determining whether brand personality or brand choice predicts brand loyalty. According to Satardien, (2019) tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values indicate whether the variables are correlating too high (above $r=0.90$) an indication of multicollinearity. Tolerance values less than 0.10 indicate that the correlation among the variables is high a suggestion of multicollinearity. VIF values above 10 would also be an indication of multicollinearity (Satardien, 2019). Results in **Table 4** indicates that the VIF and tolerance values are within the acceptable range.

Table 4. Regression Analysis: Brand personality, brand choice.

Model	Beta	t	Significance	Collinearity Statistics	
				Tolerance	VIF
BP	.428	5.832	.000	.655	1.526
BC	.261	3.552	.000	.655	1.526

BP: brand personality; BC: brand choice.

Results in **Tables 2 & 3** (significance column) indicates that both brand personality and brand choice are making a statistically significant and unique contribution to brand loyalty. Brand personality accounts for 42.8% of the variance ($\beta=0.428$; $t=5.832$; $p<0.001$), while brand choice explains 26.1% ($\beta=0.261$; $t= 3.552$; $p<0.001$).

DISCUSSION

In this study the relationship between brand personality, brand choice and brand loyalty were examined through Pearson product moment correlations. Correlations reflect how the three constructs relate with each other. Furthermore, the study aimed at establishing whether brand personality and brand choice predicts brand loyalty. In line with hypothesis one, results indicate that brand personality positively relates to brand choice. This means that the more attractive the personality of a brand is to a consumer the higher the level of brand choice will be. These results are consistent with previous empirical research studies. In Alusa (2018) all the dimensions of brand personality analyzed in the study were positively

associated with brand choice. Huang, Wong & Gong, (2014) conducted a study on brand personality of smart phones in China. The study involved 1335 online customers. Findings from the study revealed that brand personality dimensions of competence and excitement helped improve the brand value of smart phones and generally influenced brand choice. Hypothesis two was also confirmed as a strong positive statistically significant relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty was established. These results suggest that client's loyalty to certain brands is determined by the five personality dimensions of excitement, sincerity, ruggedness, competency and sophistication. Consumer behavior and marketing literature has shown that brand personality and brand loyalty are empirically related. In Lin (2010) a significant positive relationship between brand personality and affective loyalty was found. Hypothesis three was also confirmed. A strong positive statistically significant relationship was established between brand choice and brand loyalty. Other findings from this study suggest that both brand personality and brand choice are antecedents of brand loyalty.

Theoretical and practical Implications

Theoretically the study provides empirical support for the importance of brand personality and brand choice as determinants of brand loyalty thus making a significant contribution to marketing and consumer psychology literature. From a managerial marketing perspective, it is important to acknowledge that brand loyalty can be enhanced by brand choice through creating memorable customer experiences with the brand and the services provided. Furthermore, it would be helpful to understand the context within which brand personality can enhance brand choice. Managers should receive training so as to ensure that they understand the practical implications of the relevant marketing policies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A research study with a higher number of participants can be beneficial so as to increase the strength of the research results. A bigger sample size of more than 200 as demanded by most software's would have allowed for the usage of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the control of measurement error as well as structural equation modelling (SEM) for path analysis. A sample size of 180 in this study though big enough yet falls short of the requirement. Future studies should consider increasing the sample size. The study was cross sectional and therefore no conclusion regarding cause and effect could be drawn (Geldenhuis & Henn, 2017). This study made use of self-administered questionnaires that are susceptible to social desirability hence biases and misinterpretations such as under-reporting behavioral tendencies (Satardien, 2019). Furthermore, as advocated by Terre Blanche and Durrheim, (1999) as well as Satardien, (2019) collecting data at a single point in time does not address maturational effects longitudinal studies may resolve this problem.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that brand personality and brand choice acts as antecedents of brand loyalty. Brand personality correlates significantly with brand choice and brand loyalty. The two predictors explained reasonable significant proportion of variance in brand loyalty. Understanding how the three variables relate can assist consumer psychology and marketing practitioners in effectively designing marketing interventions and policies such as customer retention strategies.

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