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Gender Differences and Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty

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Capstone Approval Page

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HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT

Little is known about apparel brand loyalty regarding satisfaction of clothing purchase. This study was developed to examine whether brand satisfaction and brand reputation influence brand loyalty. Another objective of this study was to compare clothing satisfaction of a loyal brand between males and females. Following a focus group interview, a survey questionnaire was developed. A total of 106 participants consisting of 46 males and 58 females completed the survey questionnaire.

Results of Pearson Correlations showed brand loyalty was positively related to brand satisfaction ($r = .37, p < .001$) and brand reputation ($r = .33, p < .001$). A strong positive correlation ($r = .51, p < .001$) was found between brand satisfaction and brand reputation. Independent sample t-tests indicated significant differences between males and females in trend ($M_F = 4.46, M_M = 3.98$), promotion ($M_F = 3.60, M_M = 2.90$), return policies ($M_F = 3.98, M_M = 3.20$), display ($M_F = 4.08, M_M = 3.02$), fitting rooms ($M_F = 3.64, M_M = 2.68$), store environment ($M_F = 4.21, M_M = 3.54$), sales associates ($M_F = 4.02, M_M = 3.39$) and overall experience ($M_F = 3.15, M_M = 2.63$) on a 5-point scale. This study had implications for apparel retailers and marketers and they could develop brand loyalty for male and female customers. In order to develop customer loyalty, apparel brand should focus on trendy apparel, sales and promotions, return policies, displays, fitting rooms, merchandise layout, sales associates and an overall good store experience.

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Gender Differences and Factors Affecting Brand Loyalty

Introduction:

Brand loyalty is a “form of repeat purchasing behavior that reflects a conscious decision to continue buying the same brand” (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009, p. 339). True brand loyalty exists when consumers have a positive attitude toward a particular brand which can be exhibited towards repurchase behavior. Researchers have studied brand loyalty and found that customer loyalty is driven by customer satisfaction, regarding services, brands and products. A satisfied customer tends to be more loyal to a brand/store over time than a customer whose purchase is caused by other reasons such as time restrictions and information deficits (Ndukwe, 2011).

Loyalty is one of the ways with which the consumer expresses his/her satisfaction with the performance of the product received (Ndukwe, 2011). Brand loyalty is related to satisfaction with services. According to Reynolds and Arnolds (2000), “firms are increasingly seeking to enhance service quality and build store loyalty by implementing salesperson-customer relationship programs.” Having a strong relationship with the store’s sales associate can impact how much consumers buy at a store and how often consumers go to a particular apparel store. Reynolds and Arnolds (2000) suggest that a relation between retail sales associates and customers makes a customer’s loyalty. “The salesperson affects customers developing positive attitude towards the brand” (Reynolds & Arnold, 2000). Macintosh and Locksin (1997) suggest that an interpersonal relationship will be associated with purchase behavior over the affects that occur through one’s feeling about the store.

Over time, consumers relate their loyal brand to a certain reputation or image. According to Huddleston, Cassill & Hamilton (1993), “demand for brand name apparel products has been

significant and continues to increase” (p. 51). Product characteristics are influenced by the consumer to develop perceptions of the brand, impacting the purchase decision. The brand name is more influential on the consumer’s perception of quality than the price. In a past study done by Huddleston, Cassill & Hamilton (1993), when brand name was included on an item it received a higher quality rating than non-labeled or manufactured labeled items. According to them, “if a consumer is aware of a brand, he/she will opt for the branded product and try it out, as opposed to a consumer who is not brand aware and will buy any product, regardless of the brand” (p. 52). Some evaluative criteria that consumers have used in the past for selecting an apparel brand include fiber content, quality, label usage and country of origin. From their research, Huddleston, Cassill & Hamilton (1993), confirmed that quality and county of origin were significant indicators of brand orientation. These brand loyalty factors may simplify the selection process of consumer decision making.

According to Beaudoin (2004), “adolescent women are more expected than men to be concerned with beauty, appearance and fashion” (p.23). Men are regarded suspiciously if they seem to have interest in their looks or in fashion. While males may be the late majority and laggards of consumer adoption, females are the innovators and early adopters. The innovators and early adopters are eager to try new products and quickly adapt to them. The late majority and laggards are slow to adopt new products and approach them once they know it is fully accepted (Solomo & Rabolt, 2009).

Brand loyalty is related to product satisfaction. Fit is a key factor in determining apparel satisfaction for both men and women. The country of origin can indicate fit (Binkley 2013). For example, slightly built women will find that Italian brands often fit them better than American brands. German brands often have room for broad shoulders; whereas garments made in China

and southeast Asia have usually been resized for petite bodies (Binkley 2013). According to Wang, (2004), “customers who prefer to buy imported brand clothing tend to have a unique lifestyle and shopping orientation” (p. 248). They tend to be younger and highly educated, more brand loyal, brand conscious and quality conscious. According to Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph (1998), female customers stated the most important criteria they used to evaluate the garment during purchase decisions were aesthetics such as style, color and fit. Color/pattern, styling and fabric were most critical in influencing selection of garments from the display racks. Fit, styling, and appearance on the body were more important in determining rejection or adoption of the garments in the dressing rooms (Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph, 1998). Customers are motivated to impress others with their ability to pay high prices for prestige products. They are inspired by the social rather than the economic or physiological utility products (Wang, 2004).

Intrinsic and extrinsic cues are used in the process of brand satisfaction. Intrinsic cues include product composition, performance, quality and sex appropriateness. Extrinsic cues include price, brand name and country of origin. According to Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph (1998) “intrinsic criteria were used more often than extrinsic criteria for clothing evaluation” (p. 18). After gathering data, results concluded that style, color/pattern, fit, fabric, appearance and price were the most frequently mentioned criteria for evaluating specific garments (74% of the 296 responses). After purchase, the majority of the positive feedback (68%) was color/pattern, fabric and price. Negative feedback focused on style, fit and workmanship (60.7%) (Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph, 1998). Tactile aspects are more influential on product perception than visual factors. Consumers like to touch apparel products to evaluate them realistically before a purchase (Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph, 1998). When consumers try apparel on in the fitting room, some garments may require direct viewing on the body of the lines, colors and form of the

visual, aesthetic product. According to Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph (1998, p. 19), “color may be one of the most important criteria to satisfy when trying to move a consumer towards a positive purchase decision. Buyers want to pay attention to the variety of colors in the merchandise mix as colors are the initial instinct decision of selection off the rack (Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph, 1998).

Little is known about apparel brand loyalty regarding satisfaction of clothing purchase. This study was developed to examine whether brand satisfaction and brand reputation influence brand loyalty. According to Bilaras (2012), “men’s and women’s shopping behaviors are greatly different. Men want to finish the task hurriedly, while women love this job and it is difficult for them to leave the store.” The factors that influence satisfaction of brand loyalty can vary from men and women and this study was made to find the significant factors pertaining to his/her brand. This study would benefit fashion retailers and marketers by knowing how to satisfy consumers and develop brand loyalty. The benefits of brand loyalty are long term customers and low sensitivity to price (Lindstrom, 2010). Thus, another objective of this study is to compare clothing satisfaction of a loyal brand between males and females.

Method:

This study involved a focus group that included a convenience sample of 3 men and 3 women. The demographic age ranged from 20-28 years. The demographic college school year was from junior to graduate student with variety of majors: Pre-medicine, journalism, engineering, special education, sociology and biology. The demographic races included 3 Caucasian/White, 1 Hispanic/Latino, 1 African American/Black and 1 Asian/Pacific Islander. All the participants were located in DeKalb, Illinois. A questionnaire was created for the participants to fill out before the group discussion began. The discussion consisted of the participant’s

favorite apparel brand, what he/she typically purchases, how much he/she spends in the store per month, how often he/she shops in the store per month, what makes her/him buy from the brand (e.g., quality, price, style, reputation, customer service) and a time he/she had a good and bad experience with their favorite apparel brand. Each of the participants spoke openly about their loyal brand and what factors make them satisfied with their chose brand. Speaking in a smaller group setting made the participants able to influence ideas with a discussion they can relate to. The discussion lasted about 2 hours. The vibe of the discussion was friendly and outgoing, where the participants were approachable to talk about their loyal brand. The result of the focus group was that 4 out of the 6 participants are loyal to a brand by its quality and 2 out of the 6 participants are loyal to a brand by its style.

Based on the results of the focus group interview and review of literature, a survey questionnaire was developed to measure apparel brand loyalty and satisfaction and reputation of the brand. The survey consisted of 36 questions and took about 5-10 minutes to finish. Brand loyalty was measured with 2 items: Asking "Have you repurchased from the same brand?" and if yes, respondents were asked to indicate the brand. Brand satisfaction was measured with an 11-point scale from 0-10% asking "How much are you satisfied with the apparel brand indicated above?" Brand reputation was measured with a 5-point scale (1=very negative, 5=very positive). Clothing satisfaction reflected 20 items (e.g., fit, style, price, etc.) and was measured using a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Participants answered how satisfied they were with the overall appearance of the apparel, how trendy the apparel is, how it creates their personal style, its quality, how easy it is to take care of (washable), how well the apparel fits, how comfortable the apparel is, the pricing of the products, the promotions they offer, their country of origin, the brand's image, the brand's reputation, how close the store is located to the

participants, the brand's other purchase options, the brand's easy return policy, the way the store displays apparel, the fitting room experience, the store environment, the brand's sales associates' attitudes of the store and how satisfied participants were of the brand even if they had a bad shopping experience in the store.

Brand loyalty was measured using a 5-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) with 3 items: loyalty to only one apparel brand, buying the same apparel brand in the next purchase and always buying the same apparel brand. One example is "During the next apparel purchase, I will buy the same brand as the last time."

Apparel shopping behavior was measured with 3 questions pertaining to the amount spent, frequency of shopping and number of items purchased per month. The amount spent was measured with a \$20 interval from "spending less than \$20 per month" to "spending \$200 or more per month." Purchase behavior was measured using an 11-point scale from "shopping 0-10 or more times per month" and "purchasing 0-10 or more items per month." The survey also asked demographic information of the participants including gender, ethnicity, age, school year, marital status and work status.

Upon approval of IRB from Northern Illinois University, data was collected through online and paper surveys. A convenient sampling method was used to collect data. For data collection through online, the survey questionnaire was uploaded through surveymonkey.com. The website was linked to Facebook, where 28 subjects completed the survey. For data collection through face-to-face, the survey questionnaire was given to friends, family, classmates, school events and organizations.

Results:

A total of 106 college students completed the survey questionnaire. Two participants who ignored demographic questions were not part of the analysis. The sample consists of 46 males (44.2%) and 58 females (55.8%). The majority of the ethnicity was Caucasian/White (71.7%) followed by African American/Black (13.2%), Asian/Pacific Islander (6.6%), other ethnicity (4.7%), Hispanic/Latino (2.8%), and American Indian (.09%). The majority of the sample aged between 20-23 years (70.5%). There was a greater demographic of college juniors and seniors (69.8%). The majority was single (85.3%). Most of the sample was employed (73.6%).

Descriptive statistics show that of the total, 96 (90.6%) indicated that consumers have repurchased from the same brand. Thus, 96 respondents were included for further analysis. The majority of the sample indicated that they spend on clothing per month ranged from \$20-\$79 (53.8%). They shop their loyal brand ranged from 1-3 times per month (79.2%) and buy from their loyal brand ranged from 1-3 items per month (76.2%).

Brand loyalty questions were given to males and females asking about a brand they have repurchased. The majority of the sample stated a brand they most often purchased (90.7%) and had a positive reputation with their brand (47.2%). To examine factors that are related to brand loyalty, Pearson Correlations were utilized. Results indicated that brand loyalty was positively related to brand satisfaction ($r = .37, p < .001$) and brand reputation ($r = .33, p < .001$). A strong positive correlation ($r = .51, p < .001$) was found between brand satisfaction and brand reputation.

To compare males and females in brand satisfaction regarding product apparel, customer services and store environment, independent sample t-tests were conducted. Based on a 5-point scale, females had significantly higher scores than males on trend ($M_F = 4.46, M_M = 3.98$),

promotion ($M_F = 3.60$, $M_M=2.90$), return ($M_F = 3.98$, $M_M=3.20$), display ($M_F = 4.08$, $M_M=3.02$), fitting rooms ($M_F = 3.64$, $M_M=2.68$), store environment ($M_F = 4.21$, $M_M=3.54$), sales associates ($M_F = 4.02$, $M_M=3.39$) and the overall experience ($M_F = 3.15$, $M_M=2.63$). Results of the t-test were summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Independent samples *t*-tests between Males and Females

	Males (n = 41) Mean (SD)	Females (n = 52) Mean (SD)	<i>T</i>
Trend	3.98 (.88)	4.46 (.64)	-3.081**
Promotion	2.90 (1.00)	3.60 (1.13)	-3.099**
Return	3.20 (1.02)	3.98 (1.07)	-3.569***
Display	3.02 (1.26)	4.08 (1.12)	-4.273***
Fitting Rooms	2.68 (1.04)	3.64 (1.15)	-4.195***
Store Environment	3.54 (1.00)	4.21 (.89)	-3.440***
Sales Associates	3.39 (1.16)	4.02 (1.16)	-2.593*
Overall Experience	2.63 (1.03)	3.15 (1.21)	-2.214*

*** $p < .001$; * $p < .01$ **; $p < .05$ *

Results of t-tests show that women had a higher score for trend ($t = -3.081$, $p < .01$), promotion ($t = -3.099$, $p < .01$), return ($t = -3.569$, $p < .001$), display ($t = -4.273$, $p < .001$), fitting rooms ($t = -4.195$, $p < .001$), store environment ($t = -3.440$, $p < .001$), sales associates ($t = -2.593$, $p < .05$), and overall experience ($t = -2.214$, $p < .05$).

Conclusion:

Findings of this study indicated significant differences between males and females in trend, promotion, return policies, display, fitting rooms, store environment, sales associates and overall experience. The results were consistent with a previous research (Beaudoin, 2004) that females are expected to be concerned with beauty, appearance and fashion. With these results, females agreed that trends impact their loyal brand much more significantly than males ($M_F = 4.46$, $M_M=3.98$). Along with trends, females are more likely than males to be attracted to a brand because of sales and promotions ($M_F = 3.60$, $M_M=2.90$). If a customer does not like an item they

bought or received from someone, the easiest way for satisfaction is to return it. Each store has a different return policy and from this study females are more likely to appreciate a store's return policy than males ($M_F = 3.98$, $M_M=3.20$). The displays in the store, whether on the shelves, racks or mannequins, can impact the brand's image and the customer's influence of purchase. Based on the results of the study, females are more impacted by the brand's display than males ($M_F = 4.08$, $M_M=3.02$). Decision of purchase can be influenced by a fitting room's lighting, space and brand atmosphere. As previously confirmed by Eckman, Damhorst & Kadolph, (1998) fit, styling, and appearance on the body are important in determining rejection or acceptance of apparel in the fitting room. Based on the study, females are more influenced of a brand purchase by the store's fitting rooms than males ($M_F = 3.64$, $M_M=2.68$). This could be due to the fact, confirmed previously by Bilaras (2012), that men's and women's shopping behaviors are greatly different. Whereas males want to finish the task hurriedly and head out, females enjoy it and can stay in a store for a longer period of time; hence taking the time to try things on in the fitting rooms. Due to this study females appreciate a store's environment, such as the merchandise layout and cleanliness more than males ($M_F = 4.21$, $M_M=3.54$). Reynolds & Arnold (2000) previously confirmed that sales associates affect customers developing a positive attitude towards the brand. A sales associate's attitude and helpfulness at the store is more influential for a female's than a male's apparel brand ($M_F = 4.02$, $M_M=3.39$). The overall store experience can impact how a customer recognizes a loyal brand, how long he/she will stay at the store and how many items he/she will purchase the brand. Based on the findings of my study, females appreciate their experience at a store more than males ($M_F = 3.15$, $M_M=2.63$).

Clothing satisfaction and customer service influence brand loyalty. Referring back to Reynolds and Arnolds (2000), having a strong relationship with the store's sales associate can

impact how much consumers buy at a store and how often consumers go to a particular apparel store. With good customer service and satisfaction of a brand he/she has repurchased, brand loyalty can impact the sales of a particular store. As Lindstrom (2010) has confirmed, the benefits of brand loyalty are long term customers and low sensitivity to price. This study confirms that keeping the customer satisfied with his/her product(s) and store experience will keep a customer loyal to their brand. A loyal customer means mean profit for the store, hence more brand merchandise for the customer to continue to shop their brand. From this study, sales associates can keep customers, especially women, satisfied with apparel of the current trends, promotions at the brand's store, a convenient return policy, attractive window and floor displays, spacious fitting rooms with good lighting, a clean and organized store environment, friendly and helpful sales associates and an overall good store experience to keep the customer coming back for more brand merchandise.

Implications:

Findings of this study have implications for fashion retailers that develop brand loyalty for both male and female customers. Fashion retailers should provide trendy apparel, sales and promotions, easy return policies, attractive and creative apparel displays, spacious fitting rooms, organized merchandise layout, friendly and helpful sales associates and an overall good store experience for female consumers. After talking to the men in the study, they do not purchase their loyal brand as often as women. Men tend to prefer a convenient store where they can buy what they need and move on. Retailers should keep in mind that men prefer convenience more than women and could layout their store with easy access to the brand's merchandise. Since men like to shop only when they need an item, sales associates could sell them merchandise in units for an easy purchase if they don't intend to shop for a few months. The layout of a store can

make an impact on the brand, so it is important to not overwhelm men with too many colors and product placement. A simple, easy layout can do the store justice and easy shopping for the store's customers. In the study, men do not care for promotions as much as women so purchasing in bulk could be an advantage for the fashion retailers. During the study, a few men noted that they shop for the season and purchase their brand in bulk. Having store mannequins and displays of outfits for men can make it easier for a man's purchase. As men could be influenced by a sales associate, girlfriend or friend, having an outfit in front of them could be more convenient and create more ideas of what to wear in the future. Shopping for what a man needs could easily turn into shopping for what a man wants.

Women in my study enjoy browsing and shopping without a time limit. Since women appreciate the store experience more than men, sales associates should keep them informed about the latest trends and help them find what they need. During their fitting room experience, sales associates should suggest more apparel options that appeal to their personal style. As women like promotions, sales associates should them informed of the latest deals for an increase in purchase of their loyal brand. From the study, women stated that they appreciate good service while they shop and how it can influence their time at a store. Getting to know brand loyal customers besides their style, can make them relate to the brand, making them a part of their lifestyle. To make women feel pampered, snacks and drinks could be served and attained while they shop. Feeling good in a store can impact they way a customer feels about the brand. In the study, women stated that they enjoy shopping socially and by themselves. Finding a loyal brand can be hard but once a customer does, they hold on to them like a best friend.

This study has implications for apparel marketers. The study provides knowledge of brand loyalty between females and males. The marketers could make use of the findings to know

how to incorporate brand loyalty factors into the brand's product and design. They need to know their customer in order to keep a brand's reputation and image up to the customer's standings. In order to keep the brand in business, the marketers have to produce the brand's merchandise at its peak and be the leader of other apparel brands. Marketers of leading apparel brands will be able to communicate with their target customers. Knowing what males and females look for in a brand, helps make the task easy to satisfy a customer and keep its loyalty to the brand.

This study could develop brand loyalty for male and female customers. Men and women have different significant factors when they look into a brand. Learning about other factors they may not have been aware of before can change the way they think of a certain brand. Knowing a store's goal for their customer and brand they sell could increase sales and invite more customers to a store. A brand can give off a certain image to its customers and shoppers. Loyal customers can give positive word-of-mouth feedback to their family and friends. With a promising brand comes promising customers that stay loyal to their brand.

As this study was only done through surveys, some changes and other forms of studies are recommended. Some changes that could have been made could be the location. DeKalb is a small location and the demographic of fashion orientation was rare. Other major cities could have been used in the study such as New York and Los Angeles to increase the amount of fashion-oriented consumers. The online survey could also have been changed. The link that was provided did not have much use as only 28 participants took the survey online. The best way is to hand surveys is in person because feedback about the topic and survey was usually provided. Another change that could have been made is the amount of questions that were given to the participants. Some of the questions could have been combined as one. Also, a lot of the survey participants were overwhelmed by the amount of questions.

Other forms of studies could further increase the results of brand loyalty between men and women. One study could include observation of customers at apparel stores in Chicago. Chicago has a lot of shopping centers and a variety of demographics. I would observe customers in well-known apparel brand stores such as Express, H&M, Nike and J. Crew. I would also observe customers in designer apparel brand stores such as Chanel, Dior, Burberry and Louis Vuitton. Another study that could be done is talking to the store managers of well-known apparel brands about customer brand loyalty. With their experience in customer service, store managers should be aware of the kinds of factors that go into purchasing for men and women. Each store may have brand loyal customers with different factors. Having a study in different countries such as France, Italy and Dubai could also have different brand loyalty factors that vary from males to females. Brands, along with their loyal customers are all around the world. Customers of different countries and cultures could impact the way a brand is perceived. Men and women might shop at certain apparel brands, depending on what is located in a certain country. Customers of different countries have different taste in style and their loyalty to a brand may be affected by their culture. Further investigation on brand loyalty around the world could reinforce this study into new ideas and strategies to make a males and females feel satisfied with their brand.

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