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The Church of Mac: An Initial Examination on the Loyalty of Apple Customers

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The death of Apple's CEO Steve Jobs left many in the business world wondering if Apple would also face a decline in health. However, the subsequent release and over-whelming demand of the new iPhone and iPad showed the world how much this product brand is loved by consumers. Yet what exactly makes Apple consumers loyal to Apple products with an array of similar, yet less expensive, products on the market? Understanding what makes Apple users loyal is important to all companies striving to replicate the kind of brand loyalty that Apple generates. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the antecedents of Apple's brand loyalty including brand identification, brand personality congruence, and reputation using the theory base of social identity (Halliday and Kuenzel, 2010).

Marketing literature has long recognized the importance of brand loyalty, yet what comprises loyalty is still debated (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) found that a consumer's emotional attachment to the brand, the purchasing behavior, and the consumer's normative influences are three factors on which brand loyalty is dependent. Research has also found that social identity can be a helpful tool in understanding a firm's consumers as they may view goods as an extension of themselves (Ahearne et al., 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Halliday and Kuenzel, 2008, 2010). According to social identity theory, groups will often form into communities that congregate around brands that communicate who they are collectively (Carlson & Donovan, 2008).

Data were collected using an online survey composed of questions regarding brand identification, brand personality, reputation, brand loyalty, and demographics. Respondents were strongly favorable to Apple's attractiveness, favorability, and distinctiveness. Results also support the hypothesis that brand identity has a positive significant effect on reputation. It was also supported that brand identity is positively related to brand personality congruence, but there does not appear to be congruence between brand personality and an individual's persona. These results agree with Ahearne, Battacharya, and Gruen (2005) who found consumers are more likely to identify with a company that has a good reputation.

With regard to brand loyalty, nearly 78% of the respondents agreed that it is important for them to buy a brand with a good reputation and that Apple possesses a good reputation, a construct that previous literature has found to be important in gaining loyalty (Argenti & Drunkenmiller, 2004). Results also show Apple brand identity and brand personality congruence is positively related to Apple brand loyalty. Almost all of the respondents agree that they would continue to use the Apple brand because they are acquainted, and satisfied, with the brand. However, although respondents expressed price sensitivity to technology a strong majority indicated they would buy additional products from Apple. Overall, it can be said that it appears the Apple brand

has a strong reputation and strong loyalty from users which will help promote repeat purchase patterns.

About the Authors:

Caroline Pinson recently received her Master's degree in Retailing and is currently employed as a Property and Marketing Manager for a major housing firm in Columbia, SC. This paper is from her Master's thesis research. Dr. Deborah J. C. Brodahl received her PhD from Iowa State University and is in her 4th year as an Associate Professor in the Dept. of Retailing at the University of South Carolina and until recently, served as the Director of Graduate Studies. Before taking a position at USC she was an Assoc. Professor at Kansas State University. She has published extensively in the area of consumer behavior,

