

Marta GROSSMANOVÁ – Mária VOJTKOVÁ – Pavol KITA

ROLE OF BRAND LOYALTY IN PURCHASE OF SPORTS SHOES

This article reports the results of a study of consumer attitudes to brand loyalty. An empirical investigation is based on the sample of 872 individuals aged from sixteen years and located in the cities with upper and lower ten thousands inhabitants in sports shoes market. First, the creation of brand loyalty is defined, followed by an overview of theoretical works in the field. Finally, the study itself is presented. The study concludes that there is a significant dependence on the degree of loyalty determined by the environment in which consumers live and expenses connected with a specific sport. It also reveals the dimensions of brand selection that is influenced by a reflection of self-image of consumer in spite of the increase of price.

Keywords: brand loyalty, brand trust, brand personality, consumer relationship, consumer behavior, product involvement, analysis of variance, principal factor analysis

More than a million of brands appear daily within the European economic area. Several tens of thousands are being offered by large shopping centres. More and more brands active in the Slovak sports shoes market is reaching the maturity stage of the life cycle whilst the number of consumers in the market is not increasing as quickly as the supply of the products in the market. For this reason the brand loyalty becomes an important instrument of enterprise strategic marketing because it has an impact on the enterprise profit, accelerates the spreading of the brand in the market and manages the strategies of market penetration. The aim of this article is to characterize the theoretical approaches to the brand loyalty and the results of the survey of attitudes to the brand of Slovak consumers in the Slovak market.

Loyalty as the part of consumer-brand relation

The term brand loyalty is very complex. As far as the enterprise is concerned, the analysis of approaches to the brand calls for a question concerning the consumer-brand relation and how this relation influences the process of creating the loyalty. If the loyalty is created by means of relation to the brand, it is necessary to consider this problem within the perspective of consumer habits. In this context the consumer behaviour is being increasingly considered from several aspects which indicates that the term brand loyalty is very difficult

to define. From theoretical point of view it is defined mainly on the basis of an individual's relation to the brand. From this point of view the definition is very simple: a loyal customer is the individual who shows a long-term inclination to the brand and prefers it to other brands on the basis of its unique character. But it is necessary to stress that an individual keeps this relation supposing he has never been disappointed, resp. it is really a rare case when his need has not been satisfied. The definition given in spite of its simplicity has two problems (Lewi – Lacoueilhe, 2007: p. 399.):

- in the first case the loyalty is not guaranteed by uniqueness which conditions some instability in the brand loyalty as far as the consumer is concerned, mainly if there is a wide supply of goods,
- in the second case it presumes that the brand loyalty includes two aspects, i.e. an subjective one – the attitude to the brand, and the objective one – the behaviour characterising the consumer relation to the brand in the course of time. It results in the brand loyalty not being considered a characteristic of a consumer and therefore it should rather be considered a mark of some permanent attitude of a consumer and his experience.

The term brand loyalty lies in maintaining the recent consumers. The brand loyalty leads a consumer to:

- a) getting used the brand and its contents,
- b) requirements concerning the brand as far as the transparent information is concerned.

Each difference between the promise and reality is considered to be breaking the trust. The consumer's disinterest in the brand corresponds to the degree of his loyalty. Such an approach to the brand as far as the product and consumer are concerned underlines the complexity of the tasks which the brand may have in the marketing approach.

Approaches of searching the brand loyalty on the basis of selected variables influencing the consumer – brand relation

Increasing the share of loyal consumers is becoming the main aim of marketing policy of enterprise. Therefore building the consumer – brand relation is encouraging many theoretical approaches searching this relation on the basis of e.g. consumer behaviour and unique character of the brand.

a) A Brand loyalty based on consumer behaviour.

Building the consumer's relation to the brand requires much endeavour and many financial means by an enterprise because it is influenced by numerous factors:

- on the basis of searching the dependence of loyalty on demographic factors, in many theoretical works an important influence has not been seen,
- there have been different results in searching the dependence between the age and brand loyalty. In his work G. Day (1969: p. 29–35.) proved that elderly people were more brand loyal than young consumers.
- the influence of price as a factor influencing the relation to the brand was characterized by R. East (1955). According to this author there are more possibilities, e.g. the buyers who are much interested in the price are less loyal, with increasing income the brand loyalty is increasing and it is higher than with the buyers with low income. Then, by means of repeating regressions, he proved the relation between the income and age, i. e. the older the consumer is, the more brand loyal he is. According to the above mentioned researches, people of the age from 25 years to 44 years are inclined to the brand but the lack of money makes them seek cheaper goods in sales out. On the basis of the mentioned results of these researches it is demanding to say if younger consumers are less loyal than the elderly ones and vice versa, which

regards to the situational factors as e.g. income, consumer's age, environment, etc.

- the loyalty may be different with regard to the importance of the product category for a consumer. S. Rudle-Thiele and R. Bennet (2001: p. 25.) have proved that the market with short-term consumer goods is characterized by purchase of different brands, while in the market with long-term consumer goods the consumers do not switch to another brand so often.
- Other authors have proved that in their purchase decisions consumers are influenced by the members of their social group. V. Miller (1975: p. 93–101.) and E. Moore-Shay and R. Lutz (1988: p. 461–467.) identified the influence of parents and family members as an important factor influencing the brand loyalty. Other authors consider the endeavour of a consumer to save time as a factor, which, to great extent, influences the purchase behaviour and may lead to some degree of inertia. According to Mitchell (1999: p. 165–195.) consumers may prefer brand loyalty to maximizing of the effect of the purchase to avoid disappointment.

b) The consumer's brand loyalty resulting from its uniqueness

It is generally assumed that the brand uniqueness changes the consumer behaviour in his relation to it.

In the consumer's perception the brand uniqueness is formed on the basis of additional characteristics, which contribute to increasing the product value (Konštiak, 2006: p. 29.). In this context, brand uniqueness can be used to strengthen the relation with consumers which the enterprise wishes to create or maintain.

J. Aaker gives the brand human characteristics. It means that the consumer takes the brand for human being with certain characteristics. Next definition emphasizes the connection between the consumer's own image and the image of the brand.

The uniqueness of the brand should increase its preference and utility for the consumer and according to some authors at the same time evoke emotions to increase the level of consumer's loyalty to the enterprise through the brand.

c) Brand loyalty

As far as the consumer is concerned, brand loyalty is a psychological variable defined according to the authors as a position of persuasion (Gurvies – Korchia, 2002: p. 41–46.) who emphasizes a double access, namely a cognitive one and affective one. According

to these authors the trust in the brand can be seen in the consumer thought his persuasion, i.e. he understands the brand as a personalized entity which through an expected ability to reach the consensus with his expectations, keeps his positive attitude for a long time. They have elaborated a range of brand loyalty which is formed in a three-dimensional space “reliability” “honesty” and “altruism”. Consumer believes in brand as he perceives the given space as something reliable, harmless and good. It must be explained what each individual dimension represents. The first dimension “reliability” represents evaluation of the brand from the point of expertness and competence as far as its ability to satisfy the expectations of the consumer is concerned. The second precondition “honesty” represents the commitment to keep promises. The third dimension “altruism” represents the commitment of the brand to take into consideration long-term interest of consumer.

In the literature there is no consensus of opinions on the number of dimensions which create brand loyalty.

R. Larzelere and T. Huston (1980: p. 595–604.) say that dimensions of altruism and honesty seem to be too closely connected and they are difficult to separate. In the latest works they separate the individual dimensions “honesty” and “altruism” on the basis of data analysis (Gauteron, p. 55.). From this point of view, P. Gurviez (2000: p.41–61.) differentiates only the dimensions reliability and loyalty: reliability is connected with the trust in the brand abilities, loyalty covers either the meaning of honesty and altruism which conform to good intentions of the brand.

General methodology of research

The mentioned works illustrate a number of attitudes to research of the consumer – brand relation. On their basis the following hypotheses, verified in the research made by 872 respondents, have been formulated:

- hypothesis 1: dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the territory in which the respondent lives,
- hypothesis 2: dependence of expenditures on the sports shoes on the kind of sports for which the shoes have been designed,
- hypothesis 3: consumer will do his best to be satisfied on the basis of brand qualities.

With regard to the fact that the brand loyalty is a complex and multidimensional fact in the analysis of the chosen hypotheses, different statistical methods have been used:

- analysis of variance which analyses the differences of means of the dependent variable between the

groups which are determined by one categorial independent variable (or factor). It investigates if the groups formed by this classification factor are similar or if individual means form some identifiable compounds.

- factor analysis which enables a simple interpretation in the way avoiding the substantial loss of information included in the original variables. Factor analysis seeks a simpler structure in a set of variables and the original variables are expressed as linear combinations of the factors.

The sample was made on the basis of a quota selection of households which are characterized by the following:

- minimum age from 16 years,
- differentiation of habitat form 10,000 and over 10,000.

Including too young respondents in the research is due to the fact that the Slovak teenagers, in spite of limited income, accept the brand products very positively and even influence the purchases of their parents and household expenses to great extent (Collective, 2008: p. 34.). The aim of dividing the respondents according to the size of the habitat is to reveal the differences in purchasing behaviour of inhabitants living in towns and in the country.

Hypothesis 1: dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the administrative area of the respondent

The analysis of variance has been used to search the dependence of the variable researched, i.e. the expenditures on sports shoes on the administration area in which the consumers lives. The fact if the groups formed by this classifying factor are similar or if individual mean figures form some identifiable clusters are being researched.

Table 1 contains a total division of variability of expenditures on sports shoes into variability which is caused by the influence of the factor of administration area of the respondent (Between groups) and the remaining variability (Within groups), which is not influenced by the factor mentioned above or the unexplained variability. F-test has proved the influence of the factor of administration area on expenditures on sports shoes at any significant level higher than 0.0031. Table 2 characterizes the total influence of the factor of administration area of the respondent on expenditures on sports shoes which is statistically significant but represents only 2.45% of the expenditure variability.

Table 1

Analysis of variance of the influence of the factor of administration area on expenditures on sports shoes

Source of variability	Degree of freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-value	P-value
Between groups	7	35914728	5130675	3.10	0.0031
Within groups	864	1429348949	1654339		
Corrected Total	871	1465263678			

Table 2

The influence of the factor of administration area of the respondent on expenditures on sports shoes

Coefficient of determination	Coefficient of variation	Root mean square error	Purchase expenditures (Mean)
0.024511	51.79222	1286.211	2483.406

Table 3

Verifying the equality of variance condition among groups in different administration areas of Slovakia

Bartlett's test of homogeneity of variance purchase expenditures			
Source of variability	Degree of freedom	Chi-square	P-value
Residence area in which the respondent lives	7	10.8887	0.1435

Table 4

The largest differences between the mean expenditures on sports shoes individual administrative areas

Comparisons significant at the 0.05 level are indicated by ***.				
Comparison of administration areas	Difference between Means	Simultaneous 95% Confidence Limits		
1 - 2	705.0	141.3	1268.8	***
2 - 1	-705.0	-1268.8	-141.3	***

Explanations: (1) Trenčín county, (2) Banská Bystrica county

Use of parametric analysis of variance requires meeting several conditions whilst one of them, the condition of normal distribution of individual categories, has not been kept. Therefore to confirm the results reached, a more non-parametric analysis of variance has been used, which proved the preceding conclusion of statistically significant dependence of mean expenditures on sports shoes on the administration area. To verify the condition of variance equality in different administration areas of Slovakia, the Bartlett's test has been used (Table 3).

On the basis of p-value 0,1435 we can claim that the mentioned condition has been met. The last condition of independence has been kept with regard to the fact that in each administration area a different group of residents has been addressed.

Another analysis of individual pairs of mean expenditures on sports shoes has been made using the Scheffé's method. Table 4 shows that the largest differences between average expenditures on sports shoes are between the Trenčín and Banská Bystrica administration areas (Table 4).

In the Table 5 are given the average expenditures on sports shoes and their standard deviations according to the administration area in which the respondent lives. The average expenditures on sports shoes are from SKK 2,068 to SKK 2,806 depending on the administration area. The variability of expenditures, which is shown in the Table 5 absolutely by means of standard variation, can be relatively better compared by means of a variation coefficient, i.e. the portion of average expenditures and standard variation in a specific

administration area. The highest average expenditures on sports shoes are in the Trnava county, which reaches approximately 54.3% variability of expenditures. The lowest average expenditures on sports shoes are in the Banská Bystrica county where there is also a medium variability of 53.2%. The lowest variability can be seen in the Prešov county (Table 5).

Hypothesis 2: dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the kinds of sports for which they have been designed

Similarly to the verifying of the first hypothesis, the analysis of variance, in which the dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the kind of sports for which they have been designed, has been searched. Table 6 contains a total variability dispersion of the sports shoes, which is caused by means of the factor of the kind of sports. F-test has shown the influence of the kind of sports factor on the expenditures on sports shoes at any significant level higher than 0.0001 (Table 6).

The total influence of the factor of kind of sports, for which the sports shoes have been designed, is statistically significant but it represents only 8.4%. The conditions of the use of analysis of variance have been verified in a similar way as in the case before. The interesting results are shown in the following Table 7, which contains average expenditures and standard deviations on sports shoes with regard to the sports for which they have been designed (Table 7).

Further, from the respondents' answers we can judge that when creating the brand loyalty the purpose of use of sports shoes is import. As much as 75.05% of consumers remember the place of purchase and know the purpose of the purchase of sports shoes. Most Slovak consumers use sports shoes designed for traditional sports such as e.g. running and jogging 72.02%, basketball 3.67%, football 7.22%, volleyball 7.22%, tourism and mountaineering 2.68% and similarly. Even when the respondents mention untraditional sports only occasionally, they reach a total share of 5.62%. They include e.g. skateboarding, squash, fitness, floorball.

The average expenditures on sports shoes are from SKK 349 to SKK 7,250 depending on the purpose for which the respondent will use them. The variability of expenditures which is shown in the table absolutely by means of standard deviations is better compared by means of variation coefficient, i. e. the ratio of average expenditures and standard variation (13.1%). The lowest average expenditures are those on swimming (SKK 349) with medium variability (40.5%). The highest variability of expenditures can be seen in the ski shoes (61.2%). The highest statistically significant differences between the average expenditures on sports shoes are those between the golf shoes and the shoes designed for football, running and jogging, tennis, basketball, tourism and mountaineering, volleyball and swimming. The next statistically significant differences are those between the average expenditures on football and volleyball shoes.

Table 5

Average expenditures on sports shoes

Administrative area where the respondent lives	Expenditures on purchase of sports shoes in (SKK)	
	Average	Standard deviation
Bratislava county	2419.67302	1293.93594
Trnava county	2805.76190	1523.77791
Nitra county	2437.04977	1288.29644
Trenčín county	2773.81294	1372.84019
Žilina county	2277.27333	1245.57750
Banská Bystrica county	2068.77056	1101.16713
Prešov county	2523.43030	1099.37174
Košice county	2765.07246	1363.48446

Table 6

Total division of variability of expenditures on sports shoes

Source of variability	Degress of freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-value	P-value
Between groups	11	117845956	10713269	6.84	<0.0001
Within groups	860	1347417722	1566765		
Total variability	871	1465263678			

Table 7

Purchase expenditures on the sports shoes designed for different kinds of sports

Kind of sports for which the sports shoes have been designed	Purchase expenditures (in SKK)	
	Average	Standard deviation
Running and jogging	2464.05398	1233.56538
Basketball	2338.87500	911.68209
Tourism and mountaineering	4950.00000	.
Golf	7250.00000	947.52309
Hockey	1895.00000	1704.12734
Football	3163.20635	1734.72847
Wall climbing	2680.00000	.
Skiing	4532.66667	2334.69491
Swimming	349.00000	141.42136
Tennis	2344.69231	1434.12758
Volleyball	2291.74603	1158.93531
Other sports	2008.57143	810.92640

Hypothesis 3: dependence between the endeavour of consumer to reach satisfaction on the basis of the characteristics of the brand

One of the questions of marketing research was aimed at the consumers' opinions, which refer to their brand loyalty to sports shoes. As a whole the questionnaire contains 15 questions concerning consumers' opinions which were answered by the respondents by means of four-point range (1-I fully agree up to 4-I totally disagree). These opinions will represent our original measurable variables.

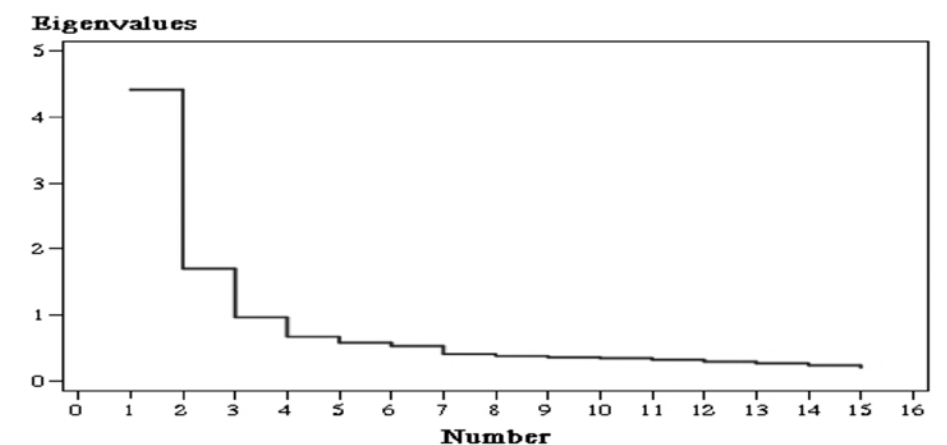
Searching the hidden dimension, resp. dependence between the endeavour of consumer to reach satisfaction on the basis of brand characteristics is possible to solve by the method of principal factor analysis. The method of principal factor analysis lies in the application of the method of principal component in the reduced covariation matrix of input variables, with the square of multiple correlation coefficient according to individual variables being used as prior estimate of communalities.

When stating the number of significant factors resp. dimensions the procedure base on the table of eigenvalues and plot of eigenvalues has been used.

On the basis of the table of eigenvalues we can say that with the number of factors of 4 the portion of the explained cumulative communality exceeds one, i.e. the presented number of factors will explain a sufficient part of variability. This decision was verified by means of the plot of eigenvalue as well (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Scree plot of eigenvalues



The results of method rotation of the factor analysis are transparently shown in the Table 8 whilst the weights of individual factors are arranged according to the size. The group of variables with very significant factor loadings represents the best indicators of the factor in the created model. It means that their variability is mostly influenced by the changes of the specific factor.

Table 8

Model of factor analysis after rotation Equamax

Rotated Factor Pattern				
Question	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
People with a lifestyle similar to mine wear the specific brand.	0.82060	-0.15295	0.11059	0.06778
The type of a person, who wears the specific brand is most similar to me.	0.81891	0.05787	0.15109	0.14417
Wearing the brand of sports shoes is important for my image.	0.79642	0.02619	0.28042	0.07133
This brand expresses my personality.	0.68927	-0.30030	0.05962	0.23412
When having a repeated purchase I change the brand of sports shoes.	-0.01981	0.79123	-0.13246	-0.22745
I am disappointed by the specific brands of sports shoes	-0.01750	0.66449	-0.13762	-0.02914
The decision to buy a specific brand of sports shoes in the specific shop was a good decision.	0.11169	-0.48037	0.20505	0.01183
In relation to other brands of sports shoes I am satisfied with the chosen brand.	0.13854	-0.52696	0.30866	0.23216
The specific brand is exactly what I need.	0.26159	-0.57038	0.26877	0.22114
I consider a repeat purchase of a specific brand of sports shoes a good experience.	0.07169	-0.59932	0.26825	0.22583
I am prepared to pay more for a specific brand of shoes.	0.13993	-0.11517	0.86923	0.23531
In the case the specific brand of shoes is not in stock of a specific shoeshop I would certainly buy a different brand of sports shoes.	0.23406	-0.25162	0.77874	0.26115
In comparison to other brands of sports shoes I consider the specific brand for better.	0.14275	-0.43267	0.43852	0.28438
In the case a specific brand were not in the assortment of the shop, when buying the next time I would not buy a different brand and I would wait.	0.26354	-0.00930	0.28868	0.79795
In the case a specific brand which is not in the assortment of the shop, I would certainly buy a different brand of sports shoes.	-0.01760	0.12307	-0.14138	-0.84364

According to the factor loadings the individual principal factors can be interpreted as the following hidden dimensions:

- 1 factor – personality and style of the buyer,
- 2 factor – I will change the brand to be satisfied,
- 3 factor – price is not important,
- 4 factor – I hesitate with the switch of the brand because I prefer loyalty to the brand.

The blackened factor loadings show the dependence of the specific factor and the specific variable. The factor weights, the value of which is higher than [0.5%] are considered to be significant ones. Majority of the highlighted factor loadings are positive, only with the second and fourth factors we can encounter a positive as well as negative value of weight. These factors then

show two different orientations, e.g. with the factor four the positive orientation represents the brand loyalty and the negative orientation represents absence of loyalty to sports shoes. The respondents perceive both orientations in a similar way (a bit higher weight is put on negative orientation), but they prefer either one or the other.

Conclusion

In the assortment structure of the Slovak retail trade the role of brand products is increasing. The research results show that the relation consumer – brand is connected with some behaviour dimensions and unique character or brand loyalty. The better knowledge of a specific category of products is, the stronger the connection is.

Research of consumer's brand loyalty in such a limited conceptual frame leads to the conclusion that the searched dependence in all three hypotheses is significant.

At present the purchasing behaviour of the Slovak consumer in the market of sports shoes is influenced especially by the environment. The dependence shown in the second hypothesis supports the third hypothesis as far as the expenditures on the sports shoes are concerned. Such a behaviour signalizes that when buying the Slovak consumer does not mind the price. It results in the fact that the conformity of the consumer's imagination of the brand is connected with his loyalty. The stronger the conformity between his self-image and the brand image is the more loyal he is in the of the price increase.

The above mentioned characteristics of the Slovak consumer in the sports shoes market results in the knowledge that the enterprise should pay higher attention to the perception of the brand unique character with the aim of strengthening the relation consumer – brand. It would create a suitable indicator for evaluating the ability for an enterprise to reach the stated qualitative goals as far as the relation of a consumer to the brand is concerned. It would also be possible to create or modify the present market brand position on the basis of expected goals of enterprise in the relation with customer. Thus the relation consumer – brand based on a brand unique character contributes to its strengthening and long-term relation.

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Article sent in: June 2008

Accepted: March 2009