# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DIMENSIONS OF BRAND LOYALTY. AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION AMONG ROMANIAN URBAN CONSUMERS

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***Abstract.*** *Considering the increasing importance of brand loyalty in the context of fierce competition, the paper aimed at empirically investigating, among urban Romanian consumers, the relationship between some of the major dimensions of brand loyalty. Measurement was conducted through five indicators: brand satisfaction, brand repurchase intention in similar buying contexts, brand recommend intention, brand repurchase intention in case of price increase (price elasticity of loyalty) and, respectively, repurchase intention in case of distribution decrease (distribution elasticity of loyalty). The main objective of the research was not only to investigate the relationship between the dimensions of brand loyalty as reflected by the five previous loyalty indicators, but also to suggest a conceptual model of brand loyalty considering the nature and intensity of the identified correlations. The data was collected through an ad-hoc questionnaire based survey, sampling the population by means of a mixture of classical probabilistic and non-probabilistic methods. The results proved positive correlations among loyalty dimensions and allowed us to propose a general model for the relationship between these dimensions.*

**Keywords:** behavioral intend, brand loyalty, extended loyalty, loyalty essence.

## 1. Introduction

One of the key issues of marketing theory and practice during the last decades regards building, maintaining and developing brand loyalty in order to gain sustainable competitive advantages. Considering the dynamic marketing environment and fierce competition, brand loyalty as core dimension of brand equity, is essential for any company that plans to maintain long term competitive advantages and commercial performance.

The role and importance of brand loyalty as fundamental parameter for establishing marketing strategies has been widely adopted in developed countries but yet insufficiently understood by Romanian organizations. Therefore, we tried to investigate the relationship between the dimensions of brand loyalty and to conceptualize a general model of these relations, through an empirical investigation among Romanian consumers.

## 2. Theoretical review on brand loyalty

### 2.1. Positioning brand loyalty within brand equity

The concepts of both brand loyalty and equity have been viewed from a variety of perspectives during the last decades. Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm/or to that firm's customers. Although the assets and liabilities on which brand equity is based will differ from context to context, they can be usefully grouped into brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets. Among all, brand loyalty is the most important dimension and the core of a brand's equity, being, in some authors' views, the ultimate objective and meaning of brand equity (Travis, 2000).

Keller (2008) considers brand equity from a customer based perspective as being the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. Brand knowledge is defined in terms of awareness and image, brand awareness being the consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions (recognition and/or recall), while brand image being defined as a set of brand associations held in consumer's memory. Thus, brand loyalty is viewed as the reflection of brand strength, being the essential output of what brand awareness and brand image can generate.

Other important authors like Kapferer (1992) or Chernatony (1999) relate brand equity to the concept of brand identity, the latter being seen as a set of complex dimensions. On one hand, Kapferer enumerates the objective characteristics of the brand (its verbal and visual representation), the brand's personality (the human-specific characteristics of the brand), the brand relationship (especially with customers, but also with suppliers, employees, investors etc.), the brand culture (from which every product derives), the brand reflection (its external image that links the brand to its target market) and the self-image (the consumers' inner relationship with themselves, in the perspective of their brand attitudes). On the other hand Chernatony emphasizes brand vision, culture, positioning, personality, presentation and, last but not least, brand relationship. As it can be seen, in both conceptualizations, brand relationship, including mainly brand loyalty, is one of the core dimensions of brand identity and, implicitly, of brand equity.

### 2.2. Constituencies of brand loyalty

Oliver (1997) developed a popular conceptual framework of brand loyalty, taking into consideration a full spectrum of dimensions, using a hierarchy of effects model with cognitive, affective, conative (behavioral intent), and action (repeat purchase behavior) dimensions. Thus, brand loyalty becomes a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior (Oliver, 1999).

Traditional marketing literature generally emphasizes two different dimensions of the concept of brand loyalty – behavioral and attitudinal. On one hand, attitudinal brand loyalty includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral intent dimensions, while, on the other hand, behavioral loyalty reflects the repeat buying behavior (Dick and Basu, 1994). Behavioral intent, as the intention to act in the buying decision process, is considered by some authors (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001) as being intermediary between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, appearing either as a predisposition to buy a brand for the first time or a commitment to repurchase a current brand. The practical strategic objective would be to maintain and augment the repurchase commitment and convert behavioral intent to an actual purchase (Oliva and Oliver, 1992).

Attitudinal brand loyalty is a prerequisite for behavioral loyalty, some researchers (Baldinger and Rubinson, 1996) showing that, if their attitude towards a brand is positive, highly loyal buyers tend to stay loyal, while switching buyers might be turn into loyal buyers more easily.

### 2.3. Brand loyalty effects

Traditionally, among the advantages of a high degree of brand loyalty, the branding literature includes the ability to apply premium pricing policies, the greater negotiation power in relation to distribution channels, the reduced selling costs, the higher barriers to potential new entries into the product category, and the increased success potential of brand extensions to related product categories (Reichheld and Teal, 1996). Customers can manifest their loyalty to a brand in several ways: they may choose to stay with a provider, and they may increase the number of purchases or the frequency of their purchases or even both, thus generating higher revenues for the brand. They may also become advocates of the brand, concerned by playing a powerful role in the decision making of others, thus reducing the brand's marketing communication costs.

It is well known that it is much more expensive to gain new customers than to retain existing ones, especially when the existing customer base is satisfied and loyal. Even if there are very low switching costs and low customer brand commitment, there is a substantial inertia among customers. Still, brand loyalty must not be confounded to brand inertia. According to Bloemer and Kasper (1995), brand loyalty implies a deep-seated commitment to brands and there is a sharp distinction between repeat purchases and actual brand loyalty. In their published research, they assert that a repeat purchase behavior is the actual re-buying of a brand whereas loyalty includes antecedents or a reason or fact occurring before the behavior. The authors further delineate brand loyalty into "spurious" and "true" loyalty. Spurious loyalty represents biased behavioral response expressed over time by some decision-making unit, with respect to one or more alternate brands, as a function of inertia. True brand loyalty includes the above, but replaces inertia with a psychological process resulting in brand commitment.

Research has shown that loyal customers are less price sensitive (Reichheld and Teal, 1996) and the expense of pursuing new customers is reduced (Dowling and Uncles, 1997), while organizational profitability is positively affected by the level of brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty can enhance marginal cash flow and profitability, as loyal customers often accept to pay a price premium for their favorite brands, are easily stimulated to new usage situations and tend to increase intensively and extensively their spending on the brand (Davis, 2002). The marketing communication spending is also reduced as loyal customers are already confident in the purchase decision and process information rapidly, instruments like sales promotions or advertising being less intensive needed in this case in comparison to brands with low loyalty degree.

Loyalty also enhances the process of attracting new customers. Satisfied and loyal clients tend to provide brand exposure and reassurance to new customers, through "mouth to mouth" communication. On the other hand, a potential customer has a better evaluation of a brand if that brand is perceived as having a loyal customer base.

### 2.4. Building brand loyalty

Building attitudinal loyalty mainly implies brand image building through mass media communications, but also short-term marketing activities such as promotional tools in order to shape a brand's image (Knox, 1996). Still, the short-term tools must be accompanied by long-term activities (such as product development).

Brand trust plays a very important role in building and maintaining both attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty, its role having been researched extensively in both B2C and B2B sectors (Cowles, 1997; Doney and Cannon, 1997). Results indicated that brand trust augment brand loyalty and influences market share and price elasticity.

Building and maintaining brand loyalty also implies frequency programs in order to retain customers. Traditionally, loyalty cards can be used on order to prevent brand switching (Dowling and Uncles, 1997), but the technique is easily copied and it is hard to derive a sustainable competitive advantage from it, being mainly a defensive tactic to prevent brand switching.

Customer satisfaction is essential in order to build brand loyalty, although satisfaction does not necessarily generate or increase loyalty. Some authors emphasize an asymmetric relationship between loyalty and satisfaction (Waddell, 1995). Schultz (2000) outlines the importance of satisfying a customer in order to create behavioral loyalty. Thus, a satisfied customer tends to be more loyal to a brand over time than a customer whose purchase is caused by other reasons such as time restrictions and information deficits.

Davis (2002) asserts that brand loyalty can only be achieved through a strong brand positioning which means creating and managing a unique, credible, sustainable, and valued place in the customer's minds, revolving around a benefit that helps the brand stand apart from its competition.

Aaker (1991) suggests some basic rules when it comes to managing and enhancing brand loyalty. He states that customers must be treated with respect in the sense that the interaction between the company and its personnel, on one hand, and between the company and its customers, on the other hand, should be positive, while any rude, uncaring, or unresponsive behavior should be avoided. Moreover, the company must stay close to the customers. For that, focus groups should be used to see real customers' problems, account managers should meet with customers to find out their concerns, and customer contact must be encouraged so that signals be sent to both the organization and the customers that the latter is valued. Regular, timely, sensitive, comprehensive, and integrated into day-to-day management surveys of customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction must be conducted in order to understand customers' feelings, identify the reasons of overall satisfaction change, and adjust products and services. Switching costs must be created by providing unique and valuable solutions for customers' problems or rewarding loyalty directly through specific incentives and advantages. Moreover, customers must be provided with extra unexpected services so as their behavior be changed from brand tolerance and acceptance to brand enthusiasm. Finally, irritations and problems causing people to switch brands must be deeply analyzed. The interaction with a lost customer must be kept in order to clearly identify his negative motivations and all possible actions that could help regain him as a customer and avoid others to follow his action.

Lindstrom (2005) asserts that the ultimate bond between the customer and the brand derives from our five human senses. Lindstrom's "brand sense" concept lies in three components which combined build both loyalty and what he terms "smash ability". The constructs of his theory reside in that the sensory branding stimulates the relationship with the brand and allows emotional response to dominate the rationale thinking. The goal is a strong and positive bond between the brand and the consumer so that the consumer will turn to the brand repeatedly. An emotional engagement, through matching subjective perception and reality, is established. The essence of Lindstrom's theory lies in what he terms the "six sensory steps". These include sensory audit, brand staging, brand drama, brand signature, implementation, and evaluation. Through this discovery method, an organization can unveil aspects of their current offering or new avenues to exploit. This process, according to the author, will enhance brand loyalty and deepen existing relationships. This approach to brand loyalty derives from the use of our five senses. In order to understand any brand, a sensory audit must be conducted to assess the brand's leveraging of sensory touch points. This is comprised of examining a brand's stimuli, enhancement, and bonding capabilities. Lindstrom points out that the more sensory components, the stronger the foundation of your brand, and suggests that consumers use many senses when evaluating brands: visual (like an unique logo on building, cups, and bags etc.), visual/auditory (like an uniform and the way sales people approach customers), visual/auditory/touch (like the interior aesthetics: sofa, colors, wall paper, music etc.), smell/taste (like the distinct aroma released by the product).

Innis and La Londe (1994) proved that distribution and especially customer service are essential elements that influence brand loyalty and thus must be separately analyzed when managing brand loyalty. Innis and La Londe's research showed that customer service performance contributes to the satisfaction of a firm's customers, the attitudes toward the firm as held by the firm's customers (and one's attitude toward a firm or a product affects how a person will respond toward that product or firm in the future - there are both antecedents and consequences to an attitude), and the purchase/repurchase intentions of a firm's customers. Based on their research, they suggest that several specific issues/actions must be considered when managing brand loyalty. Firstly, brand managers must understand the customer service attributes that the customers view as important and should focus on improving service levels on these attributes and work to maintain acceptable service levels on less important attributes while reducing the cost of providing these services. Secondly, they must recognize and emphasize the importance of logistics to the overall goals of the company: the retention of current customers, the recruitment of new customers, and the building of market share. Thirdly, the results of this research must be used to support the elevation of logistics in the company, during the strategic planning process, or, operationally and tactically. Fourthly, brand managers should encourage inter-functional coordination in order to allow marketing and logistics to work together during planning and implementation in an effort to provide the optimal combination of customer service and marketing service to the customer. Finally, customer service should be used as an element of strategy to help the company gain a differential advantage in the marketplace.

### 2.5. Brand loyalty based market segmenting

A first approach of classifying consumers considering their degree of loyalty is that of Brown (1953), according to whom buyers can be divided into four groups. The first group contains the so-called “hard-core loyals” who always buy the same brand. The second category of consumers – the “split loyals” – are loyal to two or three brands, while the third group includes consumers who are loyal to one brand for a period of time, but easily shift from one brand to another, due to certain advantages offered by the new brand, these consumers being categorized as “shifting loyals”. Finally, the last group is represented by “switchers” – consumers who show no loyalty to any brand, switching the brand with almost any buying situation.

A second approach comes from Aaker (1991) who sees five levels of brand loyalty and splits customers accordingly into a “loyalty pyramid”, comprising five types of buyers, each type being positioned on a corresponding level of the pyramid: non loyal buyers who are completely indifferent to brands, satisfied or at least not dissatisfied buyers with no dimension of dissatisfaction sufficient enough to stimulate a change, satisfied customers with switching costs, customers who truly like the brand and have an emotional attachment to it, and committed customers, proud to have discovered and used the brand.

Considering the level of consumer involvement versus the perceived differences between brands, Assael (1974) identifies four brand loyalty driven types of consumers: “complex loyals”, who firstly do research, then develop beliefs and attitudes about the brand, and finally make a thoughtful choice, “dissonance loyals”, who shop around and buy fairly quickly, as they may consider most brands in a given price range to be the same, even though expensive and self-expressive (in spite of experiencing dissonance noticing certain features or hearing favorable things about other brands, they seek information to support their choice), “habitual loyals”, who make decisions based on brand familiarity and keep buying the same brand out of habit as passive recipients of information conveyed by advertising, and, finally, “variety-seekers”, who switch brands for the sake of variety rather than dissatisfaction, choosing brands with little evaluation, and evaluating them mostly during consumption.

Dick and Basu (1994) argue that loyalty is determined by the strength of the relationship between the relative brand attitude and the repeat patronage related to it. A low relative attitude can occur in several situations or causes like when a brand has low awareness (for example, after a recent introduction), when a brand is unable to communicate distinct advantages, when competing brands are seen as similar etc. On the basis of this attitude-behavior relationship, the authors propose four types of brand loyalty. Thus, a low relative attitude combined with a high rate of repeat patronage designates “spurious loyalty”, while the actual absence of loyalty (“no loyalty”) implies both a low rate of repeat patronage and a low relative attitude. When the relative brand attitude is high, the authors identify either "latent loyalty" (low repeat patronage) or actual "loyalty", when both relative attitude and repeat patronage have high levels.

### 2.6. Brand loyalty assessment

In order to manage brand loyalty efficiently, it is necessary to consider approaches to its measurement, as a practical tool in using the construct and linking it to profitability. The majority of brand loyalty assessment procedures can be classified as either behavioral – based on the actual purchases observed over a time period – or attitudinal – based on stated preferences, commitment or purchase intentions (Mellens et al., 1996). Generally, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty assessment procedures are related through positive correlation. Still, the correlation is not perfect so there is a need for a dual approach regarding brand loyalty assessment.

Reviewing the specialized literature, some of the most referenced attitudinal loyalty measures are based on attitude toward the loyal/dis-loyal act (Sharp et al., 1997), brand preference (Guest, 1944), commitment (Hawkes, 1994), or probability of purchase (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978), while some of the most referenced behavioral measures are based on market share loyalty (Cunningham, 1956), exclusive purchase (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978), elasticity (Sharp et al., 1997), or price until switching (Pessemier, 1960).

One of the most practical loyalty assessment approaches, which therefore deserves special attention, is that of Aaker (1991) who suggests a behavior based and, respectively, a loyalty constructs based assessment. On one hand, behavior based loyalty assessments consider the actual purchase patterns of the customer base using measures like repurchase rates of the brand, percents of purchases which went to each brand purchased considering the last acquisitions, or the number of brands purchased by a customer during a recent given period. Although objective, behavior data has limitations as it may be inconvenient or expensive to obtain, provides limited diagnostics about the future, and it is difficult to discriminate between customers who switched brands and the purchase of multiple brands by different members of a family or an organization. On the other hand, loyalty constructs based assessments consist of evaluating loyalty on the basis of four sub-dimensions or sub-measurements: the customers' objective switching costs and their subjective perceived risks involved by a potential brand switch, the customers' level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction: problems they have, sources of irritation, and reasons for brand switching (for a brand to have a loyalty potential, its customers' dissatisfaction must be absent or low enough to avoid a switching), the liking degree customers have regarding the firm and the brand, and, respectively, the customers' level of commitment to the brand. Regarding the apparent ambiguous term of "liking", Aaker explains that the general overall liking can be scaled in a variety of ways: liking, respect, friendship, trust. Liking the brand is not reflected by customers' perceptions and beliefs about the brand's attributes, but rather by general statements of liking, such as those listed above. The measure of liking can also be reflected by the additional price customers would pay to obtain their brand (price premium) and the price advantage that competitors would have to generate before they could attract a loyal buyer. Aaker also outlines the measurement issues when it comes to customers' commitment. Thus, commitment can be assessed through the amount of interaction and communication involved with the brand and the extent to which the brand is important in terms of customers' activities and personality. It is important to evaluate not only if the customers recommend the brand but also if they sustain this recommendation with strongly sustained arguments.

## 3. Research methodology, objectives and hypotheses

The research methodology was based on a simplified model of brand loyalty drawn up from various approaches reflected in the literature, model according to which the concept of brand loyalty was basically reflected by brand satisfaction, by the probability that those consumers who had bought a specific brand within a given product category would chose the same brand in the next buying decision process in a similar context (simple repurchase) or a different context (price increase, and respectively, distribution decrease), and, respectively, by the active involvement of loyal consumers in brand promotion (recommendations).

Therefore, the necessary data to be collected consisted in brand satisfaction ("*Were you satisfied with the last purchased brand?*"), intention to repurchase the brand within a similar buying context *(„Do you intend you repurchase the same brand the next time?"),* intention to recommend the brand *(„Would you recommend the brand you bought last time to others?")*, intention to repurchase the brand within a changed buying context in the case of price increase *(„If the brand's price increased in comparison to its competitor brands, would you still buy the same brand?"),* and, respectively, in the case of distribution decrease *(„If the brand were not to be found in the stores you usually buy, would you look for it in other stores in order to buy it again?")*. The data collection instrument (the questionnaire) was designed using symmetric marketing scales with six answering options from 1 = "*Definitely not*" to 6 = "*Definitely yes*", so that to avoid neutral responses and to force a positive/negative attitude.

The five brand loyalty indicators above mentioned were measured in relation to the last purchased brand within two product categories: durables and, respectively, non-durables (perishables).

In order for the research objectives and instrument to be accurate, two important factors had to be taken into consideration. Firstly, the investigated population comprised heterogeneous individual consumers not only considering their demographical characteristics (age, income, education, sex etc.), but also their vocabulary, intelligence level, technical knowledge and degree of usage regarding existing products and brands. Secondly, the data had to be collected in such a manner so that investigated consumers could describe their behavior and attitude, what they do and what they think about the analyzed product categories and corresponding brands.

Therefore, the particular product categories selected to be investigated within the research were chosen so as: to be different considering their usage duration (durable/non-durable), not to be too technical (in order for most of the consumers to be able to evaluate their own behavior and express their attitudes towards those product categories) and to have a large rate of penetration into households usage or consumption. Given the established criteria above mentioned, the particular product categories chosen for the research consisted in tooth-paste, as being representative for the nondurable product category, and television sets (for durables).

The data was collected through an ad-hoc survey, due to the fact that statistically representative data had to be obtained, the information needed was basically unavailable. Resources and time allocated to the research did not permit conducting a panel survey in order to investigate medium or long term evolutions of the analyzed relations.

Considering the financial and time restrictions previously mentioned, the investigated population was limited to the urban consumers of Cluj-Napoca, one of the largest cities of Romania, although the intention of the research was to analyze the urban Romanian consumers as a whole. Nevertheless, the research could still be considered, with certain limitations, as being representative for the entire urban Romanian population as Cluj-Napoca is the second largest city of Romania, representing almost 3% of the Romanian urban population.

The questionnaire based interviews were conducted face-to-face, by a group of more than one hundred students, each student completing a set of five interviews.

The sampling method used for the survey consisted in a mixture of classical probabilistic and non-probabilistic methods. Firstly, the population was geographically clustered considering the almost five hundred postal areas of Cluj-Napoca. Afterwards, a number of clusters equal to the number of interview operators were extracted through systematic random sampling. The clusters (postal areas) were assigned to the interview operators (one cluster to each operator), and each operator had to complete five questionnaire based interviews on the basis of an itinerary sampling method (five consumers from different households, located into five consecutive buildings from the assigned cluster – postal area). The data collected was afterwards verified and validated by contacting (via phone and/or email) a random sample of respondents in order to confirm his/her answers. The interview operators identified as trying to mislead the research through providing non-valid questionnaires were fully verified. At the end of the data collection process, from the total of 595 (assumed) completed interviews, only 551 were validated, therefore the research having a statistical error of ±4.2%, with a statistical confidence level of 95%.

The main objective of the research was to investigate the relationship between the dimensions of brand loyalty, as reflected by the five loyalty indicators previously described, and to suggest a conceptual model of brand loyalty, considering the nature and intensity of the identified correlations.

Therefore, we investigated a set of analogical hypotheses such as “Loyalty dimension *i* is positively correlated with loyalty dimension *j*”, where “*i*” and “*j*” were represented by the five brand loyalty dimensions – brand satisfaction, intention to repurchase the brand within a similar buying context, intention to repurchase the brand in the case of price increase, intention to repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease, and, respectively, intention to recommend the brand.

## 4. Results

Given the fact that the statistical variables reflecting the five brand loyalty dimensions were ordinal, we computed the Spearman's ranks correlation coefficients in order to investigate the analogical hypotheses regarding the relationship between them (Table 1).

*Table 1*

**Correlations between brand loyalty dimensions (Spearman)**

| | | Brand satisfaction | Repurchase the brand within similar buying context | Repurchase the brand in the case of price increase | Repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease | Recommend the brand |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perishable product category | Brand satisfaction | | *Rho = .402 (p=0.000)* | *Rho =.227 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.234 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.407 (p=.000)* |
| | Repurchase the brand within similar buying context | *Rho = .402 (p=0.000)* | | *Rho =.217 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.265 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.513 (p=.000)* |
| | Repurchase the brand in the case of price increase | *Rho = .227 (p=0.000)* | *Rho =.217 (p=0.000)* | | *Rho =.389 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.260 (p=.000)* |
| | Repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease | *Rho =.234 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.265 (p=0.000)* | *Rho =.389 (p=.000)* | | *Rho =.239 (p=.000)* |
| | Recommend the brand | *Rho =.407 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.513 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.260 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.239 (p=.000)* | |
| Durable product category | Brand satisfaction | | *Rho =.459 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.212 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.229 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.572 (p=.000)* |
| | Repurchase the brand within similar buying context | *Rho =.459 (p=.000)* | | *Rho =.201 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.160 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.596 (p=.000)* |
| | Repurchase | *Rho =.212* | *Rho =.201* | | *Rho =.486* | *Rho =.243* |

| | | Brand satisfaction | Repurchase the brand within similar buying context | Repurchase the brand in the case of price increase | Repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease | Recommend the brand |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | the brand in the case of price increase | *(p=.000)* | *(p=.000)* | | *(p=.000)* | *(p=.000)* |
| | Repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease | *Rho =.229 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.160 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.486 (p=.000)* | | *Rho =.199 (p=.000)* |
| | Recommend the brand | *Rho =.572 .000)* | *Rho =.596 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.243 (p=.000)* | *Rho =.199 (p=.000)* | |

The hypotheses were confirmed and validated in all cases, both within the durables and non-durables, positive correlations being observed within each pair of brand loyalty components. Nevertheless, these correlations were not similar in intensity. Thus, the strongest correlations were identified between intention to repurchase the brand within a similar buying context and intention to recommend the brand (*Rho = 0.513 within perishables and Rho = 0.596 within durables)*, between brand satisfaction and intention to recommend the brand (*Rho = 0.407 within perishables and Rho = 0.572 within durables)*, between brand satisfaction and intention to repurchase the brand within a similar buying context (*Rho = 0.402 within perishables and Rho = 0.459 within durables)*, and, respectively, between intention to repurchase the brand in the case of price increase and intention to repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease (*Rho = 0.389 within perishables and Rho = 0.486 within durables).* Moreover, the correlations were more intense, in all cases, within the durable product category, than within the perishable product category.

Furthermore, given the heterogeneity of the correlations' intensity, we ran the *Varimax* principal component analysis procedure (Table 2).

The results showed that the five dimensions of brand loyalty can be grouped into two distinct aggregate loyalty components: one comprising brand satisfaction, intention to repurchase the brand within a similar buying context and intention to recommend the brand, and the other one including the intention to repurchase the brand in the case of price increase and the intention to repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease. The suggested model explained 63.15% and, respectively, 71.43% of the overall loyalty variation, depending on the product category (durable/perishable). The results also showed that, both in the case of durables and non-durables, the contribution of the first aggregate component of loyalty to its overall variation is much higher than that of the second aggregate component.

*Table 2*

**Brand loyalty principal component analysis (Varimax)**

| | Rotated Component Matrix | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perishable product category | | Durable product category | |
| | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Recommend the brand (1) | 0.783 | 0.093 | 0.868 | 0.116 |
| Repurchase the brand within similar buying context (1) | 0.751 | 0.153 | 0.813 | 0.091 |
| Brand satisfaction (1) | 0.748 | 0.100 | 0.797 | 0.113 |
| Repurchase the brand in the case of price increase (2) | 0.115 | 0.824 | 0.080 | 0.863 |
| Repurchase the brand in the case of distribution decrease (2) | 0.132 | 0.818 | 0.142 | 0.846 |

| | Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Perishable product category | | | Durable product category | | |
| | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1 | 1.767 | 35.34 | 35.34 | 2.075 | 41.50 | 41.50 |
| 2 | 1.391 | 27.81 | 63.15 | 1.497 | 29.93 | 71.43 |

## 5. Conclusions, research limitations and future research directions

Generally speaking, a high level of brand satisfaction is not necessarily pre-conditioned by high levels of brand associations' favorability (perceived quality, brand prestige, brand popularity etc.). Instead, satisfaction is given by the conformity between user experience and expectations, expectations which can derive from a variety of personal, environmental and contextual factors.

Still, brand satisfaction is strongly correlated with the intention to repurchase and recommend, and, therefore, we might say that brand satisfaction is an intrinsic dimension and a pre-requisite of both attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty. Even though necessary, a high level of satisfaction is not sufficient for an overall high level of brand loyalty mainly reflected by the behavioral intent to repurchase and promote the brand among others. Nevertheless, considering the stronger relationship among these three dimensions, we may conclude that brand satisfaction, same-context repurchase intention and the availability to recommend the brand to other, represent the essence of brand loyalty.

The other two dimensions of brand loyalty – namely the intention to repurchase the same brand but with a higher price or, respectively, in the case of a reduced presence in sales points – are less correlated with the other loyalty dimensions but more correlated among them. Therefore, we might conclude that these two components constitute an extended part of brand loyalty.

Considering the results of the research and the conclusions derived, we propose a model for the relationship between the dimensions of brand loyalty, as depicted in Figure 1.

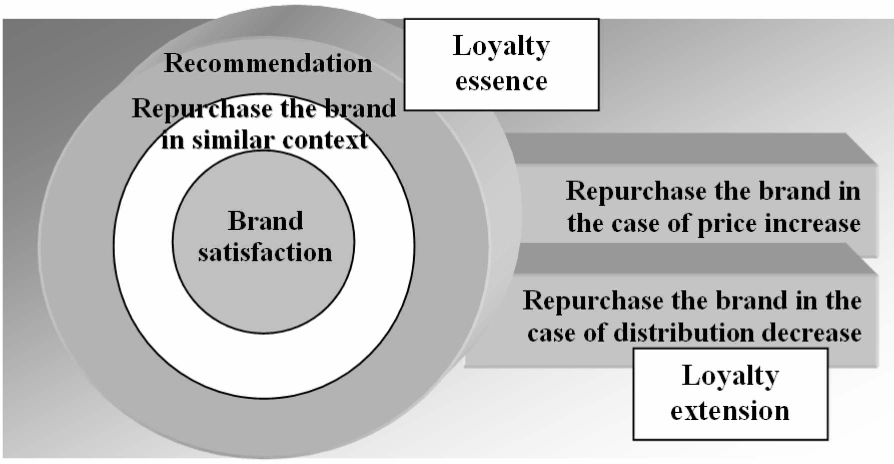


**Figure 1. Brand loyalty proposed model**

Still, certain research limitations and future research directions can be depicted. Firstly, the results' significance is limited to a certain local area of the urban Romanian market. Even though we could, with certain limitation, extend the results to the overall Romanian urban market level, a more geographical extensive research should be conducted in order to reveal certain local consumer behavior specifics. Secondly, the research method (ad-hoc survey) would have been more relevant if a panel were created and analyzed over time, so as consumer evolutions could be emphasized, as the Romanian market is a developing one. Thirdly, the research could be extended considering not only durables and consumables like those investigated, but also other specific types of tangible products and, of course, services, as significant differences would be expected to appear in that case.

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