On the relationship between store image, store satisfaction and store loyalty

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Introduction

During the past decades both marketing academics and practitioners have been intrigued by the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994; Fornell *et al.*, 1996; Hallowell, 1996; Kasper, 1988; LaBarbera and Mazursky, 1983; Newman and Werbel, 1973; Oliver, 1996). Most of these studies, however, have concentrated on products (brands) and to a somewhat lesser extent on services or channel intermediaries. Surprisingly, research on the relationship between store satisfaction and store loyalty has remained limited, both in actual number as well as in scope. Yet, in the present environment of increased competition with rapid market entry of new store concepts and formats (Maronick and Stiff, 1985), the managerial challenge of increasing store loyalty also presents the research challenge of a more in-depth understanding and an empirical estimation of this important type of consumer behaviour. There is some evidence that store loyalty may be (positively) related to store image (Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986; Osman, 1993). However, it has remained unclear what the exact relationship between satisfaction, image and loyalty in a retail setting is. For instance, one question that has been left unanswered concerns the issue whether there is a direct relationship between store image and store loyalty or whether there is an indirect relationship via store satisfaction. In this article we attempt to answer this question. We propose a model that describes the relationship between store satisfaction and store loyalty, taking into account the effect of store image. Rather than classifying consumers as patrons and non-patrons we explore the form and strength of their loyalty towards the store by distinguishing between different types of satisfaction and loyalty (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995).

Our article is structured as follows. First of all, we will differentiate conceptually between different types of store loyalty and store satisfaction. Moreover, based on a review of the literature, we will offer a brief outline of the construct of store image. Subsequently, we will focus on the relationship between store image, store satisfaction and store loyalty by formulating a set of formal hypotheses. Third, we will discuss the results of an empirical study that was undertaken to test our research hypotheses. In conclusion,

we will address the theoretical as well as the managerial implications of our findings on the relationship between store image, store satisfaction and store loyalty.

Store loyalty

In conceptualising store loyalty, we propose a distinction between repeat visiting behaviour and store loyalty. Repeat visiting behaviour is the actual revisiting of the store. The use of such behavioural measures in loyalty research is still popular despite the elaborate and fundamental criticism voiced by Jacoby and Chestnut (1978). For instance, East *et al.* (1995) operationalise store loyalty as the percentage of purchases of a specified product category at a chosen store. However, behavioural conceptualisations and operationalisations are often inadequate to explain how and why store patronage occurs. In fact, these merely reflect the outcome of a decision process in which internal dispositions play a role. Therefore, while repeat visiting behaviour is important, attention should be paid also to the antecedents that may account for the occurrence of certain behaviour (East *et al.*, 1995). We define store loyalty as:

> The biased (i.e. non random) behavioural response (i.e. revisit), expressed over time, by some decision-making unit with respect to one store out of a set of stores, which is a function of psychological (decision making and evaluative) processes resulting in brand commitment.

This definition is based on Jacoby and Chestnut (1978). The critical part of our definition of store loyalty is store commitment. We propose that store commitment is a necessary condition for store loyalty to occur. In case of absence of store commitment a patron to a store is merely spuriously loyal, i.e. repeat visiting behaviour is directed by inertia (Dick and Basu, 1994).

We define store commitment as: the pledging or binding of an individual to his/her store choice (cf. Kiesler, 1968; Lastovicka and Gardner, 1977). As a result of explicit and extensive decision making as well as evaluative processes, a consumer becomes committed to the store and, therefore, by definition becomes store loyal. When the decision making and evaluative processes are not explicit and are very limited, the consumer will not become committed to the store and cannot be store loyal. Consumers whose patronage is not based on store loyalty may exhibit an attachment to store attributes and can easily be lured away by competitors through, for instance, pricing strategies. In contrast, Osman (1993, p. 135) argues that "a customer who is loyal to a certain retail establishment will give this store his or her priority visit in any shopping event".

In our view, the level of consumer commitment can differ considerably. Therefore, we assume there is a continuum of store loyalty. At one end of the continuum, one finds true store loyalty; the repeat visiting behaviour based on a maximum amount of commitment. At the other end of the continuum, one finds spurious store loyalty; the repeat visiting of the store not based on any commitment at all. In this way, store commitment enables us to define a degree of store loyalty.

Store satisfaction

Satisfaction has often been regarded as an antecedent of store loyalty (Bitner, 1990). Store satisfaction can be defined (see also Engel *et al.*, 1990, p. 481) as:

> The outcome of the subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative (the store) meets or exceeds expectations.

This definition is within the tradition of conceptualisations of satisfaction that are used in the product literature. The basis for the definition forms the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980). According to this paradigm, satisfaction is believed to occur through a matching of expectations and perceived performance. In case a consumer makes this comparison, he or she elaborates on the evaluation of a store. In order to do so, a consumer must both have the motivation and the ability to evaluate the store relative to the reference point employed (cf. the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty *et al.*, 1983)). However, in some cases it may be very hard for consumers to generate expectations to evaluate store performance and to compare the expectations and performance as if they were independent elements. However, to the extent that an explicit comparison is made between expectations and performance, the consumer is likely to be aware of the outcome of this evaluation. We will label this type of satisfaction manifest satisfaction. Manifest satisfaction is the result of an evaluation which is well elaborated on.

To the extent that no explicit comparison is made, for instance, due to lack of motivation and/or ability of the consumer to evaluate the store, the consumer is not likely to be fully aware of his/her satisfaction. We will call this type of satisfaction latent satisfaction (see also Bloemer and Poiesz, 1989). Latent satisfaction is the result of an implicit evaluation which is not elaborated on. Also, the difference between manifest and latent satisfaction is not absolute; the degree of elaboration can differ, and therefore, we also assume a continuum between both types of satisfaction.

Store image

Many conceptualisations of store image have been advanced in the past (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974; James *et al.*, 1976; Kunkel and Berry, 1968; Marks, 1976). The dominant attitudinal perspective that is taken in the literature treats store image as the result of a multi-attribute model (Marks, 1976; James *et al.*, 1976). Image is expressed as a function of the salient attributes of a particular store that are evaluated and weighted against each other. Therefore, we prefer to define store image as:

> The complex of a consumer's perceptions of a store on different (salient) attributes.

This definition is in line with the definition of Houston and Nevin (1981). However, over the years different authors have distinguished different store attributes or characteristics that are part of the overall image towards the store (the so-called retail mix). For example, Lindquist (1974), in his study on the store image literature, has combined models from 19 studies and came up with nine

different elements: merchandise, service, clientele, physical facilities, comfort, promotion, store atmosphere, institutional and post-transaction satisfaction. Doyle and Fenwick (1974) distinguished only five elements: product, price, assortment, styling and location. Bearden (1977) suggested the following characteristics: price, quality of the merchandise, assortment, atmosphere, location, parking facilities and friendly personnel. More recently, store image is supposed to be composed of the different elements of the retail marketing mix as introduced by Ghosh (1990). These eight elements are: location, merchandise, store atmosphere, customer service, price, advertising, personal selling and sales incentive programs. For each retail store a distinct image may exist within consumers' minds. This is based on the salient elements of the retail mix. The merchandise of a retailer is its most important retail mix element, according to Ghosh (1990). A retailer has to make sure that he/she offers those products to his/her customers that they expect him/her to offer. Nevertheless, other non-functional elements also have to be in line with the expectations of the customer in order for a customer to become store loyal.

The relationship between image, satisfaction and loyalty
In our view, manifest satisfaction is directly and unequivocally related to store loyalty. Manifest store satisfaction means that an explicit evaluation of the store is made, which in case of a positive evaluation leads to store commitment. So, manifest satisfaction will be positively related to store loyalty. Latent satisfaction is the result of an implicit evaluation of the store choice, which is not elaborated on and of which the consumer is not fully aware. Latent satisfaction means mere acceptance of the store which will not necessarily lead to commitment. Nevertheless, latent satisfaction may also be positively related to store loyalty, but less strongly than manifest satisfaction. Therefore, hypothesis 1 can be formulated as follows:

> *H1*: The positive relationship between manifest satisfaction and store loyalty will be stronger than the positive relationship between latent satisfaction and store loyalty.

This hypothesis is based on the assumption that the greater the amount of elaboration, the more manifest the satisfaction will be. In fact, elaboration is a moderator variable in the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. As stated before, elaboration is determined by the motivation and the ability of a consumer to elaborate on the store choice. In our view, motivation can be operationalised by store choice involvement (see also Petty *et al.*, 1983) and ability can be operationalised by store choice deliberation (Petty *et al.*, 1983; Verplanken, 1991).

The fact that the amount of consumer satisfaction and store loyalty in general are positively related, as we expect, is hardly supported by the literature. Although a number of studies address the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty as related to products and services (Bloemer and Lemmink, 1992; Bloemer and Kasper, 1995; Burmann, 1991; Garfein, 1987;

Kasper, 1988; Kraft *et al.*, 1973; LaBarbera and Mazursky, 1983; Newman and Werbel, 1973), there is little empirical evidence to support the explicit relationship between store satisfaction and store loyalty (Hummel and Savitt, 1988).

Customers' patronage behaviour towards a particular store is dependent on their image of that particular store (Osman, 1993). The more favourable the store image, the higher the valence of the store to the customer. However, the exact relationship between store image and store loyalty has remained inconclusive. There is both evidence for a direct relationship and an indirect relationship whereby store satisfaction acts as a mediator (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974; Houston and Nevin, 1981; Lindquist, 1974; Stanley and Sewall, 1976). Therefore, we formulate the following hypotheses.

H2: Store image has a direct positive effect on store loyalty.

H3: Store image has an indirect positive effect on store loyalty through store satisfaction (i.e. a mediator-effect).

The relationships between the variables are summarised in Figure 1 which depicts our conceptual model.
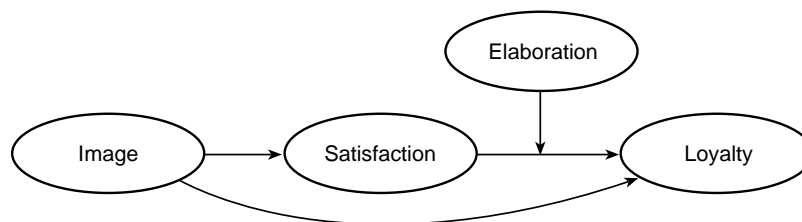

Figure 1.
Conceptual model

An empirical study
Data collection
An empirical study was conducted among customers of a department store in a major Swiss city in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. There were several reasons for taking a department store as our object of study. In the first place, situational variables (e.g. geographical distance) play a less important role in determining customer attitude and patronage behaviour as opposed to, for instance, supermarkets. Second, customers from a wide variety of segments commonly visit department stores, in contrast to, for instance, certain high-priced specialty stores. Third, the choice of a department store guarantees variation in terms of products and brands. We surveyed the customers of one department store because our main variables pertain specifically to one store only. Finally, we chose this particular department store because it puts effort in image building, customer satisfaction and loyalty programs.

Three-hundred questionnaires were distributed among shopping customers on week days as well as Saturdays at various times of the day. Every tenth

customer coming through the revolving doors of the department store was selected by the interviewers. These customers were asked to fill in the questionnaire at home. A pre-stamped, university-addressed envelope was added to the questionnaire, so no additional costs were incurred by the respondents. One-hundred-and-fifty-three questionnaires were returned from which 124 could be used for further analyses. The sample was found to be representative for the department store population by checking the customer database. Moreover, the descriptive results were compared with demographic variables that were available from previous market research studies within this retail organisation.

Questionnaire development
The majority of the items in our questionnaire were translated into German via a procedure of double-back translation by a qualified translator (Brislin, 1980). Furthermore, the items were adapted to the specific characteristics of our research setting. The questionnaire was pre-tested in two stages. First, marketing research students were asked to fill in the questionnaire in order to detect biases and possible ambiguities. Second, a number of store employees were asked to do the same. After each stage the questionnaire was modified and refined. The design of our questionnaire was based on multiple-item measurement scales which have been validated in previous research (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995).

Customers were asked to state their satisfaction or dissatisfaction (SAT) with the department store ("are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the department store" and "how much are you (dis)satisfied in terms of a percentage varying from 0 per cent to 100 per cent"). Next, they had to rate their intention of visiting the same department store next time they needed to visit a department store (repeat visiting behaviour (RPB) also ranged from 0 per cent to 100 per cent). Then, questions on store commitment (COM, four items), store choice involvement (INV; five items) and store deliberation (DEL; three items) were posed. Commitment, involvement and deliberation were measured with scales containing five-point Likert-scale items, ranging from 1 (= completely disagree) to 5 (= completely agree).

The reliability analysis of these scales yielded favourable results. The constructs exhibited a high degree of reliability in terms of coefficient alpha. All values exceeded the recommended value of 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1995). Cronbach's alphas for the commitment, the involvement and the deliberation scale were 0.76, 0.77 and 0.76 respectively.

The commitment scale together with the chance of visiting the same department store again was used to determine the degree of loyalty for the customers. This operationalisation concerns the behavioural as well as the commitment aspect of loyalty. Therefore, it is in line with our definition of store loyalty which stresses the two aspects. The involvement and deliberation scales were used to determine the degree of elaboration in order to classify the type of satisfaction (latent or manifest).

The image (IM) towards the store was measured with a scale containing eight five-point Likert-scale items. The scale included those items that dealt with the different elements from the retail mix (Ghosh, 1990). Also this scale was pre-tested and found to be valid and reliable. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was 0.75.

In addition, we asked questions about the gender of the respondent, his or her age, the number of persons within the household, and the net monthly income of the household.

Results

Sample characteristics

Of the respondents, 38 per cent were male and 62 per cent were female; 26 per cent were younger than 26; 42 per cent were between 25 and 41; 25 per cent were between 40 and 56 and 7 per cent were above the age of 55. The average number of persons within the household was 2.7 and the average net monthly income was 5,320 SFR. The most striking descriptive result was that no respondent seemed to be dissatisfied with the department store. Of the respondents 52 per cent were 100 per cent satisfied with the department store. Whereas even 97 per cent were satisfied for at least 70 per cent. Of the respondents 58 per cent stated a 100 per cent chance that they would visit the department store again. Only 10 per cent of the respondents rated the chance of a revisit below 50 per cent.

Test of hypotheses

In Table I, we present an overview of the correlations between the main variables; store satisfaction, involvement (as an indicator of the motivation of the consumer to evaluate a store), deliberation (as an indicator of the capacity of the consumer to evaluate a store), store image and store loyalty.

Table I shows a positive relationship between store satisfaction and store image ($r = 0.35$), store satisfaction and store loyalty ($r = 0.49$) and store image and store loyalty ($r = 0.47$). In addition, a negative relationship was found for the relationship between store satisfaction and deliberation ($r = -0.25$). Moreover involvement and deliberation seem to be positively related to one another ($r = 0.23$). On the whole, however, the correlations between the various

	SAT	INV	DEL	IM	LOY
SAT		0.13	-0.25[a]	0.35[b]	0.49[b]
INV			0.23[a]	0.15	0.17
DELI				-0.01	-0.10
IM					0.47[b]

Notes:
SAT: store satisfaction; INV: involvement; DEL: deliberation; IM: store image; LOY: store loyalty
[a] One-tailed significance < 0.05
[b] One-tailed significance < 0.001

Table I.
Pearson correlations
between the central
variables

concepts are rather weak. Next, we used (hierarchical) regression analysis to gain additional insight into the data and to test our first hypothesis.

We expect the positive relationship between manifest satisfaction and store loyalty to be stronger than the positive relationship between latent satisfaction and store loyalty. This means that we have to investigate the moderator effect of the type of store satisfaction: manifest versus latent. For this purpose we used hierarchical regression analysis to fit the two following models:

$$LOY = b_0 + b_1 (SAT) + b_2 (INV) + b_3 (DEL) \qquad (1)$$

$$LOY = b_0 + b_1 (SAT) + b_2 (INV) + b_3 (DEL) + b_4 (SAT \times INV \times DEL), \qquad (2)$$

where SAT = store satisfaction; INV = involvement; DEL = deliberation and LOY = store loyalty. A significant difference between the percentage of explained variance for both models indicates a significant moderator effect of the type of satisfaction (SAT $\times$ INV $\times$ DEL). The exact effect of the moderator variable and the other dependent variables can best be investigated by computing the partial correlation coefficients between these variables (SAT, INV, DEL and SAT $\times$ INV $\times$ DEL) and the dependent variable (LOY). The results of these analyses are shown in Table II.

From Table II, it can be seen that the type of satisfaction has a moderator effect on the relationship between store satisfaction and brand loyalty (a significant improvement of R^2 from Model 1 to Model 2, and a positive partial r (0.65) for the interaction term). Therefore, it can be concluded that an increase in manifest store satisfaction has a larger positive impact on store loyalty than the same increase in latent store satisfaction. As a result, we take Model 2 as a point of departure for further analysis. We tested this complete model

	Adjusted R^2 (%)	r	Part r
Model 1	20		
Model 2	60		
Improvement	0.000		
Parameters			
Model 1			
SAT		0.42	0.39[a]
INV		0.19	0.14ns
DEL		−0.08	−0.00ns
Model 2			
SAT $\times$ INV $\times$ DEL		0.48	0.65[a]

Table II.
Parameters of the hierarchical regression analysis; Model 1 versus Model 2

Notes:
SAT: store satisfaction; INV: involvement; DEL: deliberation
[a] One-tailed significance < 0.01
ns: non significant

	Adjusted R^2 (%)	r	Part r
Model 2	66		
Parameters			
SAT		0.49	0.12[a]
INV		0.18	−0.18[b]
DEL		−0.10	−0.49[b]
SAT × INV × DEL		0.48	0.63[b]

Notes:
SAT: store satisfaction; INV: involvement; DEL: deliberation
[a] One-tailed significance < 0.05
[b] One-tailed significance < 0.01

Table III.
Parameters of the
regression analysis on
Model 2

with simple regression analysis. The results of this analysis are shown in Table III.

From Table III it can be seen that including the amount of store satisfaction, the type of store satisfaction as well as involvement and deliberation provides considerable explaining power of the model. We conclude that store loyalty might best be explained by amount and type of satisfaction, involvement and deliberation. The effect of the amount of satisfaction is positive. An increase in store satisfaction means also an increase in store loyalty. The effect of the type of satisfaction is also positive and even far more pronounced. An increase in manifest satisfaction has a clearly stronger effect on loyalty than the same increase in latent satisfaction. Furthermore, both involvement and deliberation seem to have a negative effect on store loyalty. An increase in involvement goes along with a decrease in loyalty as well as an increase in deliberation being accompanied by decrease in loyalty. However, the latter effect is more pronounced. Altogether this means that the ability to evaluate the store has a relatively large negative impact on store loyalty. To conclude we may accept *H1*: the positive relationship between manifest satisfaction and store loyalty is stronger than the positive relationship between latent satisfaction and store loyalty.

Second, we are interested in a more in-depth insight into the relationship between store image and store loyalty in relation to *H2* and *H3*. Therefore, we tested the following model:

$$LOY = b_0 + b_1 (SAT) + b_2 (INV) + b_3 (DEL) + b_4 (SAT \times INV \times DEL) + b_5 (IM), \tag{3}$$

Based on the complete model (Model 2), we add store image as an additional explaining variable in order to find out whether the addition of this variable would increase the explaining power of Model 2. The results of this analysis are shown in Table IV.

From Table IV it can be concluded that the image towards the store does not have a direct influence on store loyalty in addition to the amount and type of

	Adjusted R^2 (%)	r	Part r
Model 2	66		
Model 3	67		
Improvement	ns		
Parameters			
SAT		0.49	0.12[a]
INV		0.18	–0.18[b]
DEL		–0.10	–0.49[b]
SAT × INV × DEL		0.48	0.63[b]
Model 3			
IM		0.46	0.10ns

Notes:
SAT: store satisfaction; INV: involvement; DEL: deliberation
[a] One-tailed significance < 0.05
[b] One-tailed significance < 0.01
ns: non significant

Table IV.
Parameters on the
hierarchical
regression analysis:
Model 2 versus
Model 3

satisfaction, involvement and deliberation. This means that we have to reject *H2*. Furthermore, this might imply that the effect of store image on loyalty goes via satisfaction with the store. This can be investigated by estimating the following models.

$$\text{LOY} = b_0 + b_1 \text{ (IM)} \tag{4}$$

$$\text{SAT} = b_0 + b_1 \text{ (IM)} \tag{5}$$

$$\text{LOY} = b_0 + b_1 \text{ (SAT)} \tag{6}$$

$$\text{LOY} = b_0 + b_1 \text{ (SAT)} + b_2 \text{ (IM)} \tag{7}$$

Four requirements have to be met in order to be able to conclude that store satisfaction is indeed a mediator variable in the relationship between store image and store loyalty (Baron and Kenny, 1986; Holbrook, 1981).

- Store loyalty has to be a function of the image towards the store (Model 4).

- Store satisfaction has to be a function of the image towards the store (Model 5).

- Store loyalty has to be a function of store satisfaction (Model 6).

- In the case of Model 7, the effect of store image has to be non significant or the effect of store image has to be smaller than the effect of store image in Model 4.

The results of this analysis are shown in Table V.

On the basis of the aforementioned requirements, the conclusion can be drawn from Table V that satisfaction with the store is a mediator in the relationship between store image and store loyalty, since the beta-coefficient of

	b	beta	p
Model 4			
Intercept	−550.3		0.17
IM	41.6	0.49	0.00
R^2	0.23		
Model 5			
Intercept	65.86		0.00
IM	0.5	0.35	0.00
R^2	0.12		
Model 6			
Intercept	−639.1		0.23
SAT	24.38	0.40	0.00
R^2	0.15		
Model 7			
Intercept	−1,840.2		0.00
SAT	21.8	0.36	0.00
IM	27.5	0.33	0.00
R^2	0.30		

Table V.
Results of regression
analysis based on
Model 4 to Model 7

image of the store is remarkably lower in Model 7 (0.33) than in Model 4
(0.49). This means that we may accept *H3*. Store image has an indirect effect on
store loyalty through store satisfaction. Figure 2 summarises our empirical
findings.

Discussion
Store loyalty is a phenomenon that is currently receiving a great deal of interest
from retail management. In this article we propose a model for understanding
store loyalty. The major emphasis in this model is on store satisfaction. We
identified two types of store satisfaction: manifest satisfaction and latent
satisfaction as antecedents to store loyalty. It was shown that the relationship
between store satisfaction and store loyalty does indeed depend on the type of
satisfaction. The positive impact of manifest satisfaction on store loyalty is
stronger than the positive impact of latent satisfaction on store loyalty. This
confirms the results of Bloemer and Kasper (1995) who report a similar finding
in relation to brand satisfaction. Manifest satisfaction is based on a positive
evaluation of a store which is well elaborated on. In addition we found that the
amount of satisfaction has a positive effect on store loyalty, whereas both

Figure 2.
Empirical model

involvement and deliberation have a negative effect on store loyalty. It should be noticed that the direct negative effect of deliberation is even more pronounced than the direct negative effect of involvement. An explanation for this might be that customers who elaborate more on department store shopping might take more stores into consideration. This might lead to less loyalty in the case of a stronger motivation and ability to evaluate a store. Nevertheless, when combined with the amount of satisfaction and as a moderator variable, elaboration (i.e. motivation and ability) strengthens the positive effect of store satisfaction on store loyalty. Finally, the fact that the effect of the image of the store is mediated by store satisfaction underlines the importance of store satisfaction. This implies that store satisfaction transforms the implications of the image of the store and that store image can only influence store loyalty through store satisfaction. Hence, our findings nuance the intuitively appealing direct relationship between store image and store loyalty (Hirschman, 1981). In the next section we will discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of these results.

Theoretical implications
A number of theoretical implications follow from our research, suggesting a number of issues that merit further research. First of all, it seems important to validate the distinction between manifest and latent store satisfaction in other retail settings (e.g. supermarkets, speciality shops) and to verify whether the moderator effect of elaboration in the relationship between store satisfaction and store loyalty also occurs in other settings. It might well be that for retail stores with different merchandise, other relationships between types of satisfaction and loyalty may be found.

Second, this study was limited to loyalty as an expression of consumer preference. Future research should focus on other attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of satisfaction such as word-of-mouth communication, the compositions of the evoked set and information search behaviour and investigate whether type of satisfaction also has a moderator effect on these consequences. Moreover, we focused exclusively on satisfaction. Additional research is needed to investigate whether a distinction can also be made between manifest and latent dissatisfaction. It could, for instance, be hypothesised that manifest dissatisfaction might be more strongly or even differently related to complaining behaviour or brand switching than latent dissatisfaction.

Third, the literature on customer-firm relationships has suggested various types of commitment, such as affective, calculative and moral commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Kumar *et al.*, 1994). The obvious implication would be to investigate whether the type of commitment to a store can further nuance the satisfaction-loyalty relationship.

Fourth, as our study replicates and extends findings from the consumer product literature to store image, store satisfaction and loyalty, additional research is required to test our model in business-to-business relationships involving industrial vendors too. Obviously, the external validity of our

findings needs additional attention in terms of the replication of our study in a similar research setting.

Finally, all constructs were measured at one point in time, thus essentially from a static perspective. It may be worthwhile to study store loyalty over time in order to be able to take into account the dynamics in consumer patronage behaviour. Should such an approach be taken, then measures of actual behaviour and store objective performance (e.g. switching behaviour, vulnerability to price competition, turnover, relative market share) in addition to perceptual gauges could be taken into account.

Managerial implications

Our findings have a number of managerial implications also. First of all, store management should not only be concerned about the amount (i.e. low vs. high) of store satisfaction. It seems equally important to take the type of satisfaction into account too. This is based on the amount of elaboration of the customer on the store evaluation. Management should stimulate customers to make an explicit evaluation of their store. If this explicit evaluation results in manifest satisfaction, the effect on store loyalty is stronger than the effect resulting from latent satisfaction. Thus, manifestly satisfied customers are the true store loyals, while latently satisfied consumers are potential store switchers.

Management can stimulate customers to elaborate on their store choice by activating the motivation and the ability of the consumers to evaluate the choice. This can be achieved, for instance, by reminding customers of past patronage or emphasising store policies that guarantee customer satisfaction. Moreover, the store can be linked to important values (e.g. environmentally-friendly products), preferred brands or personal situations, by accentuating personalised services and customer-oriented lay-out and design, by providing clear and understandable information (e.g. with respect to warranties) and by building a permanent relationship with the customer (e.g. by establishing preferred customer memberships).

Basically, store loyalty management means store satisfaction management. Since the effect of the image of the store comes via store satisfaction, it seems of second order importance. However, this does not mean to say that the image of the store is unimportant because it is modified by the satisfaction judgement of the customer. Rather, this signifies that store loyalty is built through store satisfaction. And that satisfaction is built among other things (like emotions, values, attributions, etc.) by store image. Truly loyal customers are manifestly satisfied with the store and have a positive image towards the store.

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