The Connection Between Human Personality, Brand Personality, and Loyalty to a Sport Brand

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Self concept has been identified as a useful construct for explaining consumer choice (Malhotra, 1988). Wee (2004) recognized that personality is viewed as one of the most identifiable manifestations of one’s self concept. Personality affects the needs, values, and beliefs of consumers and has been of interest to marketers for quite some time due to its role in consumer behaviour (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001). As a result, personality has been utilized in previous research as a means of gaining valuable insights into the minds and decisions of consumers (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001).

The notion of a brand having a personality has been recognized by both practitioners (e.g., Biel, 1993; Plummer, 1985; Plummer, 2000) and academics (e.g., Aaker, 1997; Gardner & Levy, 1955). The idea is based on the acceptance that brands contain personal meaning for consumers’ self concept (Sirgy, 1982). Specifically, brand personality has been defined as a set of human characteristics that are associated with a brand and consists of five traits – sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). Research on brand personality identifies that consumers choose to associate with brands that are congruent with their personality. This is evident as Aaker (1999) identified that people select and attach themselves with brands that have personality dimensions that highlight aspects of their own personality.

Whether the preference for a brand is translated into loyalty towards the brand has yet to be examined in the literature. Aaker and Fournier (1995) noted that the predictive capability of brand personality on specific constructs has yet to be explored and they suggested that future research should examine the impact that brand personality has on loyalty. This study sought to address this gap in order to further our understanding of brand personality and its relationship to loyalty. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine whether brand personality mediates the relationship between human personality and loyalty. As Aaker (1997) identified that the personality traits that consumers associate with brands are most often enduring and distinct from other brands, the current investigation chose to examine the relationship between personality and loyalty for one sport brand.

The current youth market is most commonly referred to as Generation Y. This generation is most often identified as including individuals who were born between the late 1970s through the 1990s, thus those individuals who are approximately between the ages of ten and 30 (Gardyn & Fetto, 2000). This market segment is believed to have characteristics that set them apart from preceding generations and cause them to be of interest to marketers, one of which is their large size. Generation Y is three times the size of the generation that preceded them (Generation X) (Cheng, 1999). Another reason for their popularity is the potential to develop lifelong consumers (Bennett, Sagas, & Dees, 2006). Research has identified that the brands that these individuals associate with during these years are the same ones they will associate with throughout their lives. Thus, marketers are attracted to this segment as a result of the potential to develop brand loyalty from a young age (Moore, 2004). In light of the attractiveness of this market segment, it was chosen for the current investigation.

Data were collected at a large Canadian university. Undergraduate and graduate students were approached during class time to participate in this study. As this study focused on the market segment of Generation Y, a purposive sample of participants between the ages of 18 and 30 was sought. The sport brand that was utilized in the current investigation was lululemon. This company creates yoga-inspired athletic apparel for both females and males. This brand was chosen due to its popularity with the Generation Y market segment and its appeal to both genders. Participants were asked to complete a written survey that consisted of four sections: (a) individual personality scale developed for the Generation Y segment, based on the work of Ritchie (1998) and Wolburg and Pokrywczynski (2001), (b) the brand personality scale developed and validated by Aaker (1997), (c) brand loyalty measures based on the work of Gladden and Funk (2001), and (d) demographics. There were 342 surveys distributed and 325 were returned for a response rate of 95%. Alpha coefficients and factor analysis were used to test the internal consistency of the latent constructs for both of the personality measures (i.e., human and brand). Multiple regression analyses were used to determine the relationship between brand personality, human personality, and brand loyalty. The results revealed that the human personality characteristics of Generation Y are not strong predictors of the perceived brand personality of lululemon, or brand loyalty in the current investigation. This is evident as only two of the human personality traits, namely, introvert and negative (i.e., lazy, slacker, grungy), were found to predict brand personality and only negative was found to predict brand loyalty. The results revealed that the more introverted the participants, the more likely they were to view lululemon as being sincere. The more negative the participants, the less likely they were to view lululemon as stylish. Further, the more negative the participants, the less loyal they were to the brand. In terms of perceived brand personality, all of the characteristics
that were found to exist for lululemon, namely, sincere, competent, stylish, and rugged, were positive predictors of brand loyalty ($R^2 = .168$).

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, the results further develop our understanding of brand personality and its role in the development of loyalty for the Generation Y market segment. More specifically, it was found that individuals that perceived the brand lululemon as having a personality were more likely to be loyal to the brand. This finding is important as it identifies that brand personality is a predictor of brand loyalty, a relationship that had yet to be previously examined. It also identifies that there are multiple paths (i.e., through the different brand personalities) to the development of brand loyalty. For marketers, this information can be utilized when developing marketing campaigns for a sport brand. Striving to develop a complex brand personality would be beneficial for the brand as the results reveal that all brand personalities lead to the development of loyalty. As consumers may perceive the brand as having different personalities, developing a brand with multiple personalities will be beneficial in the development of a large loyal consumer base.