The Loyalty Ladder: A Quantitative Exploration of Satisfaction and Commitment in Building Brand Loyalty

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Abstract: Understanding the factors influencing customer loyalty is crucial for businesses to thrive in today's competitive landscape. This study investigates the impact of brand personality and satisfaction on customer commitment and loyalty. Highlighting the crucial role of customers, the research emphasizes the importance of quality products, service, and brand policies in fostering positive brand perception. While existing research suggests a link between a strong brand and customer loyalty, this study examines the specific influence of brand personality and satisfaction on commitment, acting as a mediator between these factors and loyalty. Through a quantitative study, the research explores the relationships between brand satisfaction, personality, relationship commitment, and loyalty. The findings reveal a moderate positive association between brand satisfaction and loyalty, signifying that satisfied customers are more likely to be loyal. However, brand personality did not exhibit a significant relationship with either satisfaction or commitment. These findings suggest that

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building strong customer relationships through satisfaction is a key driver of loyalty, while brand personality may require further investigation to understand its specific role in this context.

1 Introduction

If people believe they share values with a company, they stay loyal to the brand. Brand loyalty (BL) is a marketing concept, everybody wants to look unique and more attractive, which is the reason why customers buy branded clothes. This is a vast concept but brand loyalty plays an important role in the market because of the numerous brands existing on the market. Brand loyalty and customers are believed to be the bread and butter that keeps a business valuable. It should be the top priority of every business to keep their customers happy and satisfied [1], [2], [3]. Customer satisfaction can be achieved through brand satisfaction.

Brand satisfaction (BS) is the most effective concept in the marketing world. Brand satisfaction means product name, sign, symbol, and other features that fully satisfy the customer, customer by a product and feel pleased with these productions. After brand satisfaction, the customer and product build relationship with strong commitment, this commitment helps brand loyalty. Brand commitment is an indication of brand loyalty. Brand commitment plays a mediating role between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty.

The present research strives to explore whether brand satisfaction (BS) and brand relationship commitment (BRC) could improve brand loyalty (BL), these two factors being variables that help customers develop brand loyalty. A third aspect, the brand personality (BP) construct is seen to be a brand image component consisting of the human characteristics people associate with brands [4]. Brand personality can serve as a basis for meaningful and sustainable emotional differentiation [5]. The concept enables customers to attribute an identity to a brand and therefore supports their identification with the brand [6]. This, in turn, increases the personal meaning of a brand.

Considering the interrelationship of the above four concepts brand satisfaction (BS) and brand personality (BP) can be considered as an independent variable while brand loyalty (BL) is a dependent variable and brand commitment (BRC) might play a mediating role in this model.

Mostly global and local content are available according to brand loyalty but in this research paper we fill the gap with the help of brand relationship commitment and brand satisfaction. This research paper helps to enhance customer brand loyalty.

The research is based on a model developed by the authors and is independent of any specific brand. The research focuses on brand satisfaction, loyalty, personality and relationship commitment in general.

Therefore, this paper is to give an evaluation of how brand satisfaction and customer relationship commitment can boost brand loyalty, to see what role brand personality can play in increasing brand relationship commitment and brand loyalty. A large number of brands are available to be evaluated and still the market is developing with high level of performance by giving high services in return of low prices.

Customer loyalty is the most important factor to keep business alive. The customer is the important asset of any business, that is why this paper is focusing on the brand loyalty. A customer plays an essential role in every business. In Pakistan there are couples of brands that are providing services to customers at a potential level [7]. The only way to maintain the customer brand is to provide possible services to customers. The main problems businesses seek answer are e.g. why customers change their brand, and who controls and grabs the attention of new customers. This research focuses on identifying the significant factors that might make customers loyal towards the brand. This loyalty can occur by giving them satisfying services. Brand and customer bonding help make strong customer commitment relationship.

The paper is organized as follows: after literature review, the research methods are presented, then the research data are analyzed and the findings are evaluated. The paper closes with a conclusion section.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Brand Satisfaction

Many studies have been performed on brand satisfaction [8]. According to [9], among some of the known preceding of satisfaction extant literature gives functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits. It is disputed in several literature that brand attributes are influenced via mediating, brand satisfaction attested by past consumption experience [8]. Brand attributes at the same time have activated as a result of brand satisfaction by empirical studies [5]. According to He et al. [6], when the performance of a brand fulfils the belief of a purchaser, satisfaction occurs. If brands fail to fulfil the expectations of the purchaser, negative effects occur on brand reputation that is the cause of dissatisfaction of products or a brand [4]. Brand satisfaction describes as valuing summary of direct consumption experience based on superior expectations and actual expectation analysis after consumption, However, customer positive or negative comments are based on brand services and overall consumers' total purchasing and experience after using brand products or services. It is vital for every brand and business to serve their customers' loyalty to

make customers brand loyal. If brands or businesses do not serve their customers, then customers switch to other brands.

Brand satisfaction is the most essential variable of this article. Every company brand product finds a way through which the company can enhance brand satisfaction because brand satisfaction is a first step to increase brand loyalty for the customer. Without satisfaction, the customer cannot be loyal to a brand, therefore a hypothesis stating that brand satisfaction has a significant relationship with brand loyalty can be stated.

2.2　Brand Personality

The set of human features related to a brand has been described as brand personality [10]. In contrast to earlier psychologists who described personality in terms of traits, Chen [10] defined it in terms of attributes. The demographic characteristics fall under the concept of brand personality, which includes factors like socioeconomic class, gender, and age. These factors are influenced by how brand users, product spokespersons, and staff are perceived, as well as by product features indirectly [11]. Based on the compatibility between their own self-concept and the brand personality, consumers frequently give products higher ratings [12]. As an illustration, the cigarette brand Marlboro is often associated with men who are "macho cowboys" and is a representation of the brand image that a company creates.

Similar to how BMWs are perceived as being used by upper classes due to their image of exceptional quality and performance. Customers typically choose brands that reflect their personalities and those of the individuals they interact with. As a result, they develop associations with brands like those they have with people [13]. In this study, brand personality was defined as the collection of human personality traits that are relevant to describing the brand as a reciprocal partner in the consumer–brand interaction and those that relate to the interpersonal domain of human personality [14]. In summary the hypothesis stating that brand personality has a significant relationship with brand satisfaction can be formulated.

2.3　Brand loyalty

Dislike the wide number of studies on brand loyalty most of the research in recent past 3 decades analyzed consumers from two positions, attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty [11], [14]. If a consumer repeatedly purchases products from the same brand, it is known as behavioral loyalty. If consumers make psychological commitment in the purchases act, it is called attitudinal loyalty. Such as purpose to buy and aim to purchase without need is fully based on previous satisfaction and loyalty. [12]. In the field of GSM business, relationship marketing was analyzed to reveal brand royalty [15]. Factor analysis and regression analysis were applied to explore how relationship marketing practices can influence brand loyalty. In tourism, Gue at al. [16] powerfully point out the behavioral studies and present that

the attitudinal studies are much suitable to study travelers' loyalty because tourists can be loyal to a direction even if they do not travel to the spot.

Brand loyalty is an independent variable in the research model designed by the authors and the focus is on how to increase brand loyalty through different products of the company, so this problem is solved through brand satisfaction. Brand satisfaction is when a person feels pleased and happy with using the product. Satisfaction is the most important factor when it comes to loyalty. Based on the literature the hypothesis stating that brand relationship commitment has a significant relationship with brand loyalty can be formulated.

2.4   Brand relationship commitment

Consumers may engage with brands in ways that resemble human relationships as they give companies human qualities and treat them as human-like partners. Additionally, these brand interactions may be influenced by the standards that regulate human relationships [17]. It appears that there are some differences between consumers' relationships with brands and their relationships with other people. While consumers can establish and maintain relationships with numerous brands at the same time, certain interpersonal interactions—particularly romantic ones—represent exclusive dynamic partnerships. However, given that consumers view brands as potential partners in relationships, it is possible to assume that the bonds they establish and uphold with these entities are comparable to those in human relationships [18]. Reported by Morgan and Hunt [19] as well as Gundlach et al. [20] trust and commitment are rational variables in which the separate individual relationship is motivated to protect the relationship to avoid separation. Commitment has been investigated as a key concept in social exchange literature for a number of decades. According to Rusbult [21] and Rusbult & Buunk [22], commitment is a psychological state that encompasses the sensation of being dependent on a relationship and indicates a long-term orientation, including a desire to keep a relationship going and a sense of connection to a relational partner.

It has been demonstrated that a relationship's commitment may accurately predict whether it will be voluntarily maintained. In other words, relationship commitment is linked to a variety of so-called relationship maintenance acts, such as disparaging alternative partners by drawing them away or disparaging them [23]; being willing to make a sacrifice by giving up desired behavioural options for the sake of a relationship [24]; and having a propensity to accommodate bad behaviour from a partner rather than take offence [22]. In conformation with an extensive literature review conducted by Gundlach et al [20], 26 brand commitment is defined as an ordinary consumer's long–term, behavioral and attitudinal rapport towards relational brands. The impressive commitment can often be a trigger to further use the brand's switching motivation [4]. Many authors believe that commitment differentiate faithful brand loyalty from other repetitive purchase behavior that have confirmed habit, a real loyalty [14].

Brand relationship commitment is a mediating variable to produce a link between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. Brand relationship commitment means interaction between the brand and how customers think of ideas about brands, feel about brands, and also if they are committed to buy the branded products. Without brand relationship commitment customers cannot be loyal. Brand satisfaction helps in building a relationship commitment which improves brand loyalty of customers. Therefore, a hypothesis stating that BRC has a significant mediating role in the relationship between BS and BL, as well as between BP and BL can be formulated.

3   Methods

The research applies the positivist approach to research methodology. Positivism comes up with the research questions which are quantitative in nature and certain hypotheses are tested. It helps researchers to explain the phenomenon. This research philosophy leads to have the quantitative analysis for the authentic outcome. In this research paper, a research model is designed and several hypotheses are formulated and tested to reveal whether customers of any brand are loyal towards their brand based on their brand satisfaction, brand personality, and brand relationship commitment. The research uses a deductive approach where the researchers aim to find answers to the posed research questions, which is done through testing pre-existing hypothesis.

Quantitative method was applied. The data were collected through a questionnaire. The questions included statements that belong to the four components and were surveyed on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Anonymity was ensured and participants gave their consent by filling in the questionnaire. The survey applied convenient type sampling as the questionnaire was distributed online via internet and was targeted to people who have good or bad image about their brands, are currently customers of any brand.

The collected responses were analyses with the help of the Partial Least Squares Method – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in the Smart PLS software while further analyses were conducted in MS Excel and SPSS v25. The PLS-SEM modelling is a method of structural equation modelling and it allows the estimation of complex cause-effect relationship in path models with the selected latent variables. The procedure fits a composite model and maximized the amount of variance explained [25], [26].

Based on the research questions and the hypotheses the research model displayed in Figure 1 was developed to conduct a path analysis in order to reveal how Brand Satisfaction (BS) and Brand Personality (BP) influence Brand Loyalty (BL) through Brand relationship Commitment (BRC) as a mediator. Meanwhile, the influence of Brand Personality on Brand Satisfaction was also tested.
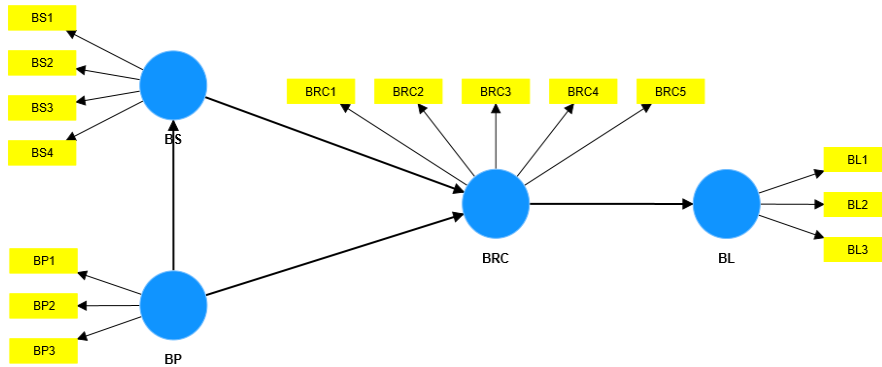
Figure 1.
The research Model (developed by authors)

The following hypotheses were formulated based on the research model:

$H1_1$. BP has an impact on BS.

$H2_1$. BP has an impact on BRC.

$B3_1$. BS has an impact on BRC.

$H4_1$. BRC mediates between BP and BL, and BS and BL.

$H5_1$. BRC has an impact on BL.

The following sections will present the evaluation of the model using path analysis and give the conclusion on the findings and results.

4   Results

The results section is divided into subsection, first a demographic profile of the respondents is presented, then the reliability of the building blocks of the research model is tested, then the research model is evaluated and finally the hypotheses are tested and either supported or not supported.

4.1   Demographic Profile

A total of 118 responses were collected, all of which could be included in the analysis. Table 1 displays that the gender distribution of the responses is well balanced, 44.9% of the participants are males and 55.1% of them are females.

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Gender	Percent
Male	44.9
Female	55.1
Total	100

Table 1.

Gender distribution (developed by authors)

As age is concerned, 33.9% of the respondents are between 16 and 25, 49.2% of them are between 26 and 3, 11% of them are between 36 and 50, while 5.9% of them are over 50 (Figure 2). It shows that the focus is on the age group between 26 and 35, the economically active younger generation, who are expected to have built commitments and loyalty to brand or job etc.
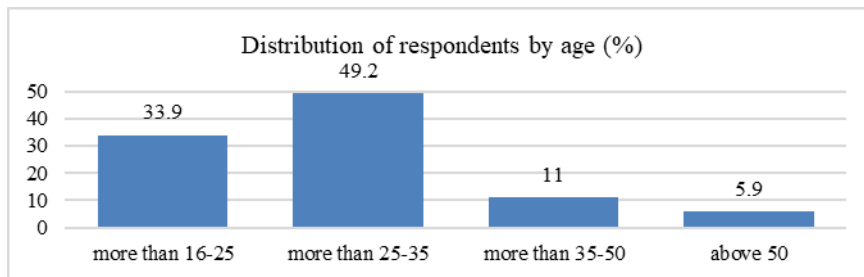

Figure 2.

Age distribution (developed by authors)

If education level is taken, over 40% of the respondents have a bachelor degree (which corresponds with the age group), while 30% have a master degree and 28.21% of the participants finished secondary education.
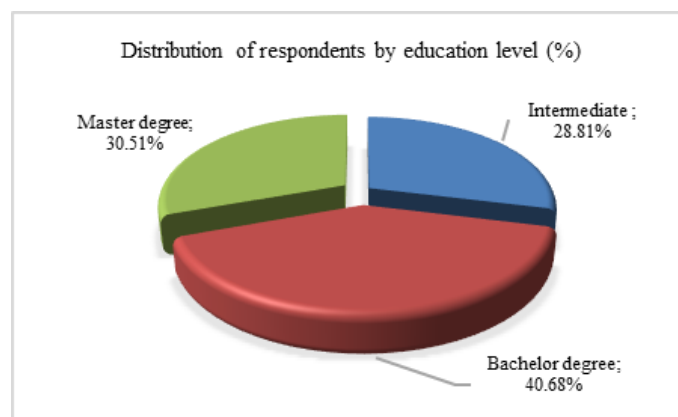

Figure 3.

Distribution of participants by education level (developed by authors)

4.2   Analysis of Brand Commitment components

Before the research model is built and evaluated, the individual statements are analyzed. Figure 4 presents the distribution of responses given by the respondents.
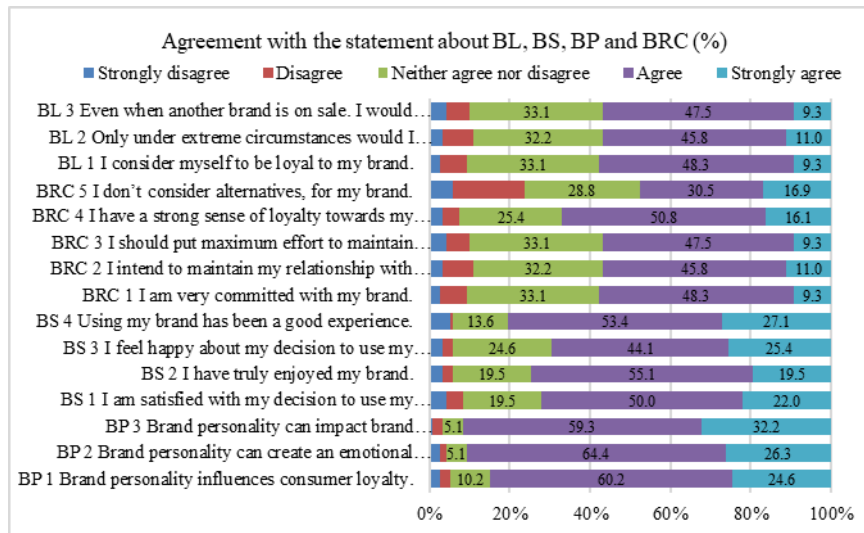

Figure 4.
Distribution of responses given by the participants (%) (developed by authors)

It is sticking out that respondents agreed with the statement in the highest percentage (between 30.5% and 64.4%) and they either strongly agreed with a statement or they were indecisive in the second highest percentage. Disagreement was not frequently chosen as response option.

4.3   Dimension reduction and Reliability analysis

The designed model has four components, each component comprised a couple of statements. Before the PLS-SEM and factor analysis the reliability of the components was tested using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha value shows good reliability between 0.5-0.6 satisfactory reliability between 0.6 and 0.8 and if Cronbach's alpha is higher than 0.8 then the reliability of the component is high [10]. The first row of Table 2 shows the Cronbach's alpha value.

Outer loadings	BL	BP	BRC	BS	VIF
Cronbach's α	0.823	0.617	0.834	0.878	
BL1	0.83				1.672
BL2	0.88				2.078
BL3	0.867				1.948
BP1		0.800			1.3
BP2		0.793			1.252
BP3		0.655			1.162
BRC1			0.804		1.769
BRC2			0.838		2.107
BRC3			0.847		2.146
BRC4			0.690		1.539
BRC5			0.680		1.501
BS1				0.862	2.372
BS2				0.867	2.308
BS3				0.797	1.893
BS4				0.893	2.605

Table 2

Research model components factor loadings and VIF values (developed by authors)

Table 2 also shows the factor loadings and the variance inflation factor (VIF) values of the components received in the course of PLS-SEM analysis. The factor loadings received are all greater than 0.593, which means high factor loadings, implying that the statements well determine the corresponding factor. The VIF measures collinearity in the multiple regression and checks the existence of model overfitting. In this model the VIF measures for the predictors are all smaller than 3, which indicates low correlation among the variables so all statements can be used for model evaluation [25], [27].

The composite reliability (CR) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the model have also been checked for the variable. Table 3 includes the value of CR and AVE. Dash and Paul [25] state CR should be over 0.6 and AVE over 0.5 for each construct in order to keep reliability and validity. These requirements are fulfilled, implying high reliability of the items.

	CR (ρ_a)	CR (ρ_c)	AVE
BL	0.824	0.895	0.739
BP	0.635	0.795	0.566
BRC	0.860	0.882	0.601
BS	0.892	0.916	0.732

Table 3

CR and AVE testing of the mediator and the output variable (developed by authors)

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion, which measures the square root of the AVE values with the latent variable correlations are presented in Table 4. The criterion is fulfilled as in each case the correlation measures are smaller than the square root of AVE. (diagonal).

	BL	BP	BRC	BS
BL	**0.860**			
BP	-0.172	**0.752**		
BRC	0.966	-0.184	**0.775**	
BS	0.557	-0.101	0.558	**0.855**

Table 4

The Fornell-Larcker criterion results (developed by authors)

As the conditions defined in Hair [28] does not hold for the BRC-BL path (<1), the discriminant validity of the model is not established, further items need to be included in the model in the future.
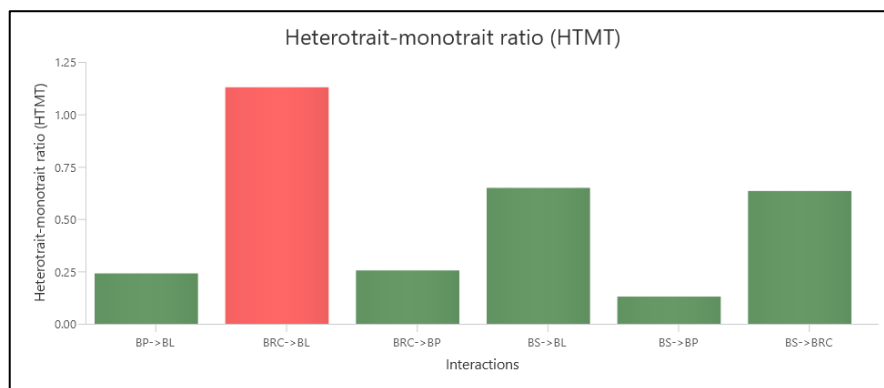

Figure 5.

Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) results (developed by authors in Smart–PLS)

4.4 Evaluation of Brand Loyalty through Brand Relationship Commitment

First the correlation of the elements was analyzed to detect some positive and negative influences. Table 5 shows that BL and BRC are in very strong positive correlation, BS has a moderate positive correlation with BL and with BRC while BP and BL are in weak negative correlation. Furthermore, the input variables in the model, BP and BRC are in weak negative correlation. The results imply that BP has a negative effect on BL while the other constructs, BP and BRC will have a positive and presumably significant influence on BL.

Correlations	BL	BP	BRC	BS
BL	1			
BP	-0.172	1		
BRC	0.966	-0.184	1	
BS	0.557	-0.101	0.558	1

Table 5

Correlation of model constructs (developed by authors)

Figure 6 presents the PLS-SEM path analysis and evaluation. The R-square values show that BRC determines BL by 93.2% (Adjusted R^2=93.2%), BRC is determined by 32.8% by BS and BP (Adjusted R^2=31.6%) while BS is explained by a mere 1% by BS (Adjusted R^2=0.002%).

The path coefficients show weak negative impact from BP to BS (–0.129) and BRC (–0.101) while BS$\rightarrow$BRC path coefficient equals 0.545, showing moderately strong influence and the BRC$\rightarrow$BL path coefficient equaling 0.966 shows a highly strong positive determination.
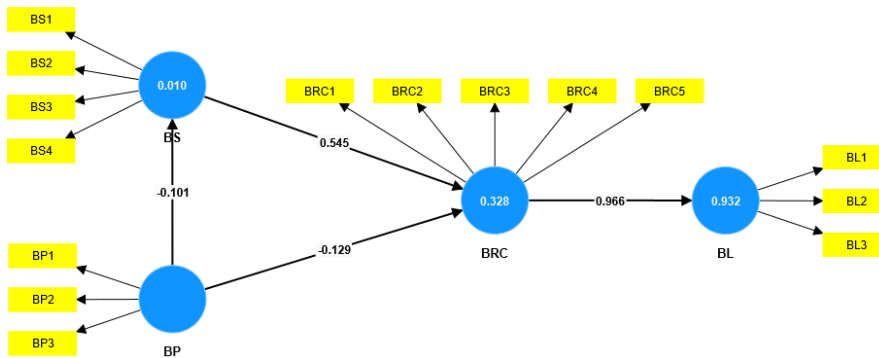

Figure 6

PLS–SEM model path analysis with factor loadings (developed by authors)

Bootstrapping was applied to test the robustness of the model and the coefficients were tested in order to justify the formulated hypotheses. Figure 7 presents the path coefficients and the significance levels, which allow us to draw conclusions and find the significant relationships and influences in the model. The figure displays the R^2 values, the path coefficients and the p values (in brackets).
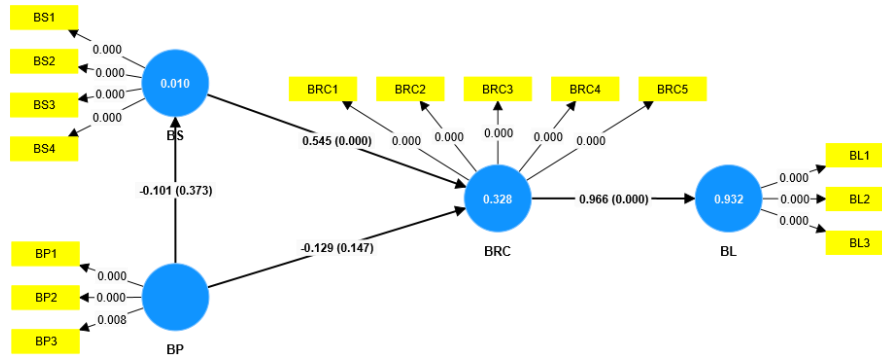
Figure 7

PLS–SEM model significant testing of the constructs and paths (developed by authors)

During the evaluation of the model Brand Personality (BP) has proved to be insignificant (p=0.147 and p=0 373), while BS is significant with p=0.000 and BRC has proved to be a significant mediator in the model (p=0.000). Considering the constructs similar results could be detected. Each item is significant in each construct of the model (p<0.05). Despite the fact that BP does not have a significant impact on BS and BRC. BS influences BRC significantly.

The effect sizes (f-square) in the model is presented in Table 6. While BP f-square is small (f-square <0.02), it has no effect on the model, however, the f-square values for BRC→BL and BS→BRC are largen than 0.35, they have a large effect on the dependent variables in the model [28].

	f-square
BP → BRC	0.025
BP → BS	0.010
BRC → BL	13.784
BS → BRC	0.437

Table 6

f-square values in the model (developed by authors)

Next to the path coefficients and the total effects, indirect effects were also analyzed (bootstrapping results). Table 6 includes the significant and non-significant total indirect and specific indirect effects. Two total indirect effect was found significant (BS→BL), i.e. Brand Satisfaction has a significant effect on Brand Loyalty, and interestingly BP would have a negative impact on BL (the link was not explored in the original model). One specific indirect effect was significant (BS → BRC → BL) i.e. Brand Satisfaction – Brand Relationship Commitment – Brand Loyalty, and extra significant effects were found between Brand Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty, in each case p=0.000.

Total indirect effects	Original sample (O)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
BP → BL	-0.178	2.029	**0.043**
BP → BRC	-0.055	0.875	0.382
BS → BL	0.526	5.613	**0.000**
Specific indirect effects			
BS → BRC → BL	0.526	5.613	**0.000**
BP → BRC → BL	-0.125	1.450	0.147
BP → BS → BRC	-0.053	0.873	0.382
BP → BS → BRC → BL	-0.055	0.875	0.382
Total effects			
BP → BL	-0.178	2.029	**0.043**
BP → BRC	-0.184	2.032	**0.042**
BP → BS	-0.101	0.891	0.373
BRC → BL	0.966	203.322	**0.000**
BS → BL	0.526	5.613	**0.000**
BS → BRC	0.545	5.653	**0.000**

Table 7

Direct and Indirect effects on the research model (developed by authors)

Conclusions

Brand personality is the collection of human qualities and features that a company displays to appeal to customers and create emotional bonds with them. It covers the values, tone, and overall look of the company. Companies can set themselves apart from rivals and establish a solid brand identity by creating a distinctive brand personality. A clearly defined brand personality elicits feelings and impressions, enabling customers to grow their trust, loyalty, and affinity for the product [11], [29].

Several studies proved that brand satisfaction is based on services and products which brands offer to their customers in different potential ways, and which products and services make customers satisfied [6]. Branded products and services that make customers satisfied is hypothized to make them committed to specific brand. The research justified the above statement, i.e. $H3_1$ is supported, as well as an extra relation was found significant between BS and BL, stating that Brand satisfaction has a strong positive impact on Brand Loyalty. If customers are satisfied with branded product and services then customers wish to buy the used brand, otherwise they tend to turn away from the used brand.

However, $H1_1$ and $H2_1$ could not be justified, brand personality had no impact on brand satisfaction, brand relationship commitment and on brand loyalty, despite that for example Alikhani & Mokhtarian found significant relationship between these characteristics [30].

Customer relationship commitment, on the other hand, is based on customers satisfaction. Customer satisfaction makes strong bounding between customers and brand, which might lead to brand loyalty. Brand relationship commitment means customers shows great favor towards their brand and make purchases of used goods and services from their favorite brand. The research proved and justified the strong bound between brand relation commitment and brand loyalty, therefore, $H5_1$ is supported. At the same time, since BRC had no relation with BP but there was a significant effect on BL with the moderating effect of BRC (BS $\rightarrow$ BRC $\rightarrow$ BL) it can be said that brand personality does not influence customers in decision making as much brand satisfaction or brand relation commitment. Therefore, $H4_1$ is partly supported as BRC does not mediates between BP and BL, but mediates between BS and BL. When customers show great commitment towards their favorable brand, they become brand loyal.

The research has its limitations as a larger sample size would have better supported the research model and as some items in the constructs proved to be non-significant, more statements should be included in the future. However, the present adds value to the field of brand marketing and it might give advice to brand and marketing policy makers that brand satisfaction and brand relation commitment play a more significant role in decision making than brand personality.

This paper developed a research model to explore the path analysis with the help of PLS–SEM on customer loyalty towards their brand. The impact of brand satisfaction and brand personality was analyzed with brand relation commitment as mediator on brand loyalty. The authors believe that the findings might help managers to enhance their performance by making customers more satisfied through or by offering high quality products and services.

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