

Connecting the dots between brand experience and brand loyalty: The mediating role of brand personality and brand relationships

Short Running Title: Connecting brand experience with loyalty

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Abstract

This paper critically examines consumer-brand relationships from the perspective of interpersonal relationship theory. Specifically, the authors investigate the relationship between brand experience and the two components of brand loyalty, namely purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty. The study also examines the link between brand experience and brand relationship variables, brand trust, brand attachment and brand commitment. In addition, the mediating role of brand personality and brand commitment in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty is investigated. Drawing on the results of an empirical cross-brand study from three product categories, the authors demonstrate that brand experience, brand personality and brand relationship variables (brand attachment and brand commitment) all affect the degree to which a consumer is loyal to a brand. Based on the findings, the authors offer guidelines to managers on how to build and sustain purchase and attitudinal brand loyalty by enhancing brand experience. The theoretical and managerial significance of the findings together with directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Brand experience; Brand personality; Brand relationships; Purchase brand loyalty; Attitudinal brand loyalty

Introduction

In today's competitive environment where consumers have enormous choices of brands, building and sustaining brand loyalty is crucial for the survival of firms. Savvy consumers are more informed than ever due to the upsurge in internet and smartphone technology, which have resulted in the ability of consumers to constantly switch brands. This situation is costly and ineffective for organisations that rely on the selling power of their brand. To differentiate from competitors, organisations need to create exciting brand experiences that entice customers to continually purchase from and remain loyal to the brand. Through these brand experiences, consumers relate to the personality that the brand conveys and develop strong bonds and relationships with the brand.

The importance of brand loyalty has been recognised in the literature for several years (i.e., Aaker, 1991; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Dick and Basu, 1994; Fournier and Yao, 1997). For instance, the role of brand loyalty in the brand equity process was discussed by Aaker (1991). The author pointed out that brand loyalty provides firms with numerous advantages, such as reduced marketing costs, increased customer acquisition, and cross-selling. Recognising the growing importance of brand loyalty in consumer-brand relationships, Fournier and Yao (1997) reconceptualised the brand loyalty construct based on the perspective of interpersonal relationship theory. In a more recent study, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) examined two aspects of brand loyalty - purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, and found that purchase loyalty provides companies with greater market share, while attitudinal loyalty leads to a higher relative price for the brand. Furthermore, Dick and Basu (1994) suggest other brand loyalty-related advantages to include positive word-of-mouth and reduced switching intentions of consumers.

In consideration of the numerous benefits accrued through brand loyalty, scholarly research has focused on how to increase and sustain brand loyalty (e.g., Dick and Basu, 1994; Ha et al., 2011; Brakus et al., 2009; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Dick and Basu (1994) suggest that brand loyalty is greater when consumer-brand relationships are strong. Consumer-brand relationships that have been considered in the marketing literature have essentially been drawn from psychology and sociology research. Within the relationship marketing literature, trust, attachment and commitment are considered to be key relational constructs (Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Park et al., 2010; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). However, a review of literature on experience-related studies in branding show a paucity of empirical research that examine the effects of brand experience against specific elements of brand relationship (e.g., Chang and Chieng, 2006; Schmitt, 2009; Brakus et al., 2009). For instance, Brakus et al. (2009) examined the role of brand experience, brand personality, and customer satisfaction in driving loyalty, yet the authors did not consider extensive consumer-brand relationships in their model. Further, while Iglesias et al. (2011) investigated the direct and indirect relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty through affective commitment, their study did not consider the role of brand personality and other key relationship variables (i.e., brand trust and brand attachment) in their model. More recently, Nysveen et al. (2013) explored the individual effects of brand experience dimensions on brand loyalty. While the authors moved towards a more holistic model, they did not consider the consumer-brand relationship.

Considering that consumer-brand relationships are significant drivers of brand loyalty, we extend the current work in this area by examining the role of brand relationship variables in the brand experience-brand loyalty relationship. In this study we consider three principal

components of brand relationships (i.e., brand trust, brand attachment and brand commitment) that have been highlighted to be important variables in consumer-brand relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Park et al., 2010).

In order to identify the influence of brand experience on brand loyalty, it is meaningful to consider the role of brand personality in consumer-brand relationships. Brand personality has been found to generate value through consumer-brand relationships and strengthen brand-relationships (Aaker 1996). Brand personality is an important cue that marketers can use to signal the brand's relevance to consumers (Ramaseshan and Tsao 2007). In this study we investigate the relationship between brand personality and the brand relationship variables. This provides a comprehensive insight into the relationships between brand experience, brand personality, brand relationships, and brand loyalty.

This study contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, due to the prevalence of the information-processing view, research on consumption and marketing has focused predominantly on the cognition and conation parts. The emotive response merely represents a consumer's evaluation of tangible product features since utility is measured as a function of the product's features and benefits (Schmitt, 2009). With the emergence of the experience paradigm (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), there is a need for further research to examine the role of experiential brand concepts such as brand experience and brand personality, especially as the progression of consumer value moves from features and benefits to experiences. In recognition of this, this paper focuses on the experiential brand concepts, including brand experience and brand personality.

Second, while researchers and practitioners recognise the importance of brand experience in cultivating consumer bonds (Shaw and Ivens, 2005), empirical evidence on the nature and

extent of the impact of brand experience in the brand relationship domain is scarce (Chang and Chieng, 2006). This research provides a theoretical contribution to the brand relationship literature by examining the role of brand experience in creating a connective bond between the consumer and the brand, to allow an organisation to achieve brand loyalty.

Finally, brand experience is viewed as an instrument to facilitate relationships between consumers and brands. Previous research has proven that brand experience can accomplish a semblance of this role by positively influencing customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). However, research that specifically focuses on the role of brand relationship variables between brand experience and behavioural response is scarce. Thus, this paper aims to contribute to the literature by examining the key brand relationship variables (i.e., brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment) as a link between brand experience, brand personality, and brand loyalty.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the literature relating to the key variables included in the theoretical model is presented. This is followed by the theoretical framework with a series of hypotheses. Subsequently, the methodology, results and discussions are presented. The paper concludes with some noteworthy managerial implications and directions for future research.

Theoretical background

Interpersonal relationship theory

According to the interpersonal relationship theory (Fournier, 1998), the relationships consumers have with brands have similar qualities to human relationships. From this perspective, interdependence between partners whereby the partners collectively affect, define, and redefine the relationship is essential for relationships to truly exist. With regards to relationships between

consumers and brands, the brand is not merely a passive object of marketing transactions, but is an active, contributing member of the relationship dyad with great significance. In a consumer-brand relationship consumers assume the perspective of the brand in order to articulate their own relationship views (Blackston, 1992) and may assign personality qualities to inanimate brand objects by thinking about brands as if they were human characters (Aaker, 1997).

Past research on interpersonal relationships have explored the affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions along which relationships vary (e.g., Fournier and Yao, 1997). In addition, interpersonal relationship theories have been applied to study the consumer-object interactions such as attachment, commitment and trust (e.g., Dick and Basu, 1994). Drawing from the interpersonal relationship theory, this study uses the human relationship metaphor to examine consumer-brand relationships. Specifically, this study explores how consumers experience brands, perceive brand personality, how they form relationships with brands, and how they become loyal to brands.

The concept of brand experience

When customers search for, purchase, and consume brands, they are exposed to various brand-related stimuli. A consumer's choice of a brand can be influenced by brand-related stimuli such as the product design, identity, packaging, marketing communications, advertisements, and distribution locations. Past studies have identified different brand-related stimuli that include slogans and mascots (e.g., Keller, 1987), colours (e.g., Gorn et al., 1997), design elements (e.g., Mandel and Johnson, 2002), and shapes (e.g., Veryzer and Hutchinson, 1998).

Brand experience takes into account stimuli that a brand elicits within the consumer, which the consumer might or might not act upon. Brakus et al. (2009) conceptualised brand

experience as “subjective, internal responses and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are a part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (p. 53). Brand experience is conceived as a multidimensional concept in relation to modularity of mind theory (Tooby and Cosmides, 2000) and the experientialism category.

According to Brakus et al. (2009) brand experience may vary in valence, strength and duration. For instance, some brand experiences may be more positive or negative than others, and also could be perceived to be stronger or more intense than others. Furthermore, brand experiences may occur spontaneously or deliberately, and could be short-lived or be sustained over time. The brand experience stored in the consumer’s memory over a period of time may influence how he/she feels about the brand.

The concept of brand personality

Like humans, brands also have their own personality. Brand personality is defined as “the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands” (Geuens et al., 2009). Brand personality is deemed to be a key inferential-associative concept which explains symbolic consumption and affective bonds between consumers and brands (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 2001). Consumer behaviour research suggests that brand personality is a vehicle of consumer self-expression and may help consumers express their actual self, ideal self or specific aspects of the self (Belk, 1988). Brand personality traits are formed from consumer or brand experience and any direct/indirect contact between the consumer and the brand (Aaker, 1997; Berry, 2000). Thus, such brand or consumer experiences shape perceptions of the brand’s personality.

Brand relationship variables

As consumers experience brands and develop favourable impressions towards a particular brand, they tend to connect and establish relationship ties with the brand. Researchers have demonstrated relationship factors that predict future intentions to include trust (Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994), commitment (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and attachment (Park et al., 2010). Thus, this study focuses on the influence of brand experience on the three constructs – brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment, which in turn, drives brand loyalty through brand commitment. These key brand relationship constructs are believed to summarise a consumer’s knowledge and experience with a particular brand and guide his/her subsequent actions (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999).

Brand trust can be viewed as the willingness of the consumer to rely on the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). On the other hand, brand attachment reflects an emotion-laden bond between a person and a brand (Park et al., 2010), while brand commitment is the desire to maintain a relationship with a brand (Jahn et al., 2012). Brand attachment and brand commitment have been shown to be consequences of brand trust (e.g., Esch et al., 2006; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Prior research demonstrated that trust is a major determinant of attachment, which in turn influences a consumer’s commitment to a brand, product or company (e.g., Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). As such, a consumer will only seek brands to which he/she not only trusts, but is also attached and committed (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The following section outlines the conceptual framework and hypothesis development.

The direct effects of brand experience on purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty, and the indirect effects that are mediated by brand personality and brand commitment are presented. We advance that brand relationship variables have a chain effect - from brand trust, to brand attachment, to brand commitment. Brand commitment, in turn, influences purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty, thereby mediating the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. In addition, all brand relationship variables are proposed to be influenced by both brand experience and brand personality. The proposed theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 here

Brand experience and brand relationship variables

According to the phenomenology of consumer-brand bonds (Fournier, 1998), a consumer's accumulation of experiences with a brand results in an established consumer-brand relationship (Evard and Aurier, 1996). As experiences serve as a valuable source of personal input, brand experiences can cultivate notions of trust in a consumer. The concept of trust stems from the personal relationship theories, in the field of social psychology, as it is considered an inherent characteristic of any valuable social interaction (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The process by which an individual trusts the brand is based on his/her experience with that brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001). This is in line with personality and social psychology theories, which states that trust evolves from past experience and prior interaction (Rempel et al. 1985). Following an interaction with a brand, consumers become more familiar and knowledgeable about the brand, which leads to enhanced brand trust (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). When brands trigger experiential dimensions that are highly relevant to individuals, the individual

becomes confident about the brand's ability to deliver as promised, which thus leads to trust in the brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001). The effect of brand experience on brand trust has been supported in the literature, where customers who have positive brand experiences demonstrate strong brand trust (e.g., Ha and Perks 2005). Therefore:

H1a. Brand experience has a positive effect on brand trust.

Drawing from interpersonal relationship theory, consumers can develop attachments to products and brands (Fournier 1998). Such attachment (both “emotionally involving” and “symbolic event” attachment) for consumers arise out of brand experience (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Depending on the depth of the stimulations and flow of senses, experiences play a role in cultivating attachment with brands (Celsi et al., 1993). Therefore, stimulated dimensions of brand experience could cultivate bonds and attachment between the consumer and the brand. Attachment theory (Bowlby 1980) also suggests that multiple interactions and experiences with brands lead to consumers forming emotional attachments to brands (Thomson et al. 2005). On these grounds, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1b. Brand experience has a positive effect on brand attachment.

Brand commitment is considered to be a core component of the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). According to the interpersonal relationship theory (Clark and Reis, 1988), the level of commitment individuals has with their partners commensurate with their prior experiences. Considering the similarities between consumer-brand and human relationships (Fournier, 1998), it could be argued that consumers become more committed to brands when they encounter positive experiences with a brand.

Additionally, when consumers find the brand-related stimuli to be pleasant, they want these experiences to be repeated (Brakus et al., 2009). This in turn results in stronger commitment to the brand. Therefore, we expect brand experience to have a positive influence on brand commitment. Thus, the following hypothesis:

H1c. Brand experience has a positive effect on brand commitment.

Brand experience and brand loyalty

It has been argued that brand loyalty consists of two separate dimensions – attitudinal brand loyalty and purchase (or behavioural) brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Oliver, 1999). Attitudinal brand loyalty is the degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand, whereas purchase brand loyalty consists of repeated purchases of the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Since positive brand experiences lead to pleasurable outcomes, consumers should want to repeat these positive experiences. That is, brand experience should not only affect brand relationship judgments, but also lead to brand loyalty. Consumers that have favourable brand experiences are more likely to buy a brand again (purchase brand loyalty), recommend it to others (attitudinal brand loyalty), and are less likely to buy an alternative brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Brand experience provides a better understanding of the value proposition a brand offers (Brakus et al., 2009). When consumers perceive greater value in the brand, they are more likely to purchase the brand and recommend it to others. For instance, Brakus et al. (2009) pointed out that positive brand experiences enhances a brand's value, and thus, is likely to make a consumer loyal to the brand. Additionally, Gentile et al. (2007) point out that a positive customer experience could promote the creation of an emotional tie between a firm's brand and its

customers, which in turn enhances customer loyalty. Hence, the more experiential dimensions the brand evokes, the greater the experience for the consumer, enticing him/her to repeat or re-immense the experience over again, resulting in brand loyalty. Thus:

H2a. Brand experience has a positive effect on attitudinal brand loyalty.

H2b. Brand experience has a positive effect on purchase brand loyalty.

Relationship between brand trust, brand attachment and brand commitment

According to the commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) trust is an essential element of relationships as it creates relationships that are highly valued. In the context of consumer-brand relationships, trust comes from a feeling of security that a brand will meet a consumer's expectations (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). When consumers trust a brand they develop a relationship with the brand, and thus feel emotionally attached to the brand (Park et al., 2010). Brand trust is therefore seen as a critical factor in fostering brand attachment because consumers rely upon the brand to consistently deliver its resources. This has been supported by Esch et al., (2006) who found a strong positive effect between brand trust and brand attachment. Thus, the following hypothesis:

H3a. Brand trust has a positive effect on brand attachment.

According to the interpersonal relationship theory (Clark and Reis, 1988) in a consumer-brand relationship context (Fournier, 1998), when consumers relate to a brand, are attached to a brand, and consume it on a regular basis, they become committed to the brand. Affective commitment has been found to be based on consumers' level of attachment (Gruen et al., 2000; Fullerton, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004). Therefore, we infer that consumers who are attached to a

brand not only benefit from the brand, but also reciprocate by showing greater commitment to the brand to maintain their brand relationship. From the above, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3b. Brand attachment has a positive effect on brand commitment.

The mediating role of brand personality

The effect of brand experience on brand loyalty may be enhanced when consumers have positive brand personality judgements. Prior research has shown that consumers purchase brands that act as a vehicle to express their identity (Aaker, 1996). When consumers experience favourable brand-related stimuli, they form positive brand personality judgements (Aaker 1997). Consumers attempt to evaluate a brand through symbolic attribute (brand-user image) with their self-concept. This process can be explained through the concept of self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982), and plays an important role in brand loyalty (Sirgy and Samli, 1985).

Selection of a brand with a certain personality enables consumers to express themselves, projecting ideal self-image upon brands. Aaker (1997) pointed out that a brand's personality may be inferred from people associated with the brand including, brand name, attributes, associations and communications. Consumer evaluations of these brand characteristics are likely to be influenced by brand experience. For instance, brand personality judgments can be facilitated when the consumer is exposed to specific brand experiences. Brand experiences are also used as information, which in turn helps consumers to make brand personality judgments (Pham, 2004).

Brand personality has been found to provide differentiation among brands, increase brand preference, and has been shown to enhance loyalty (Biel, 1993; Fournier, 1998). Similarly, brand

personality also increases consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982) and enhances the level of trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Brakus et al. (2009) indicated that brand experience can serve as a useful input for brand personality and demonstrated a mediating effect of brand personality in the relationship between brand experience and loyalty. From the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a. Brand personality mediates the relationship between brand experience and attitudinal brand loyalty.

H4b. Brand personality mediates the relationship between brand experience and purchase brand loyalty.

Brand personality and brand relationship variables

According to interpersonal relationship theory (Fournier, 1998) consumers assume the perspective of the brand in order to articulate their own relationship views by assigning personality qualities to inanimate brand objects in a consumer-brand relationship (Aaker, 1997). Selecting a brand with a certain personality enables consumers to express themselves (Aaker, 1997), which thus creates a strong bond between the consumer and the brand. Therefore, when consumers are connected to a brand through a brand's personality, they form strong relational bonds with the brand.

Brand personality has been found to provide brand differentiation, increase brand preference and usage, and enhance the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Biel, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Sirgy, 1982). For instance, Caprara et al. (2001) points out that personality is a valid metaphor for brands based on the idea that consumers grow attractions towards brands based on their personality. Through the theory of self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982), consumers

identify themselves in relationship with a brand based on the adequacy between their own personality and that ascribed to the brand. Therefore, consumers who are connected to a brand through the brand's personality form strong trust, attachment and commitment to the brand. Hence, the following hypotheses are put forward:

H5a. Brand personality has a positive effect on brand trust.

H5b. Brand personality has a positive effect on brand attachment.

H5c. Brand personality has a positive effect on brand commitment.

The mediating role of brand commitment

Drawing from the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974), when a customer has favourable attitudes towards the brand, positive experiences with the brand, and is committed to the brand, they are more likely to engage in an action or behaviour (i.e., in this context - purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty). Dick and Basu (1994) proposed that brand loyalty is greater when relationships are strong. Thus, the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty is seen to enhance when customers are committed to the brand.

The close relationship of a brand with its consumers, expressed in terms of brand commitment, reflects the level of positive experiences generated by that brand. Customer commitment has been found to be an important antecedent to customer loyalty (e.g., Thomson et al., 2005; Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006). Commitment is associated with positive affect and strong ties towards a product, firm, or brand (Gundlach et al., 1995). Thus, brand loyalty is likely to accrue from such ties with a brand in the long run.

Hence the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6a. Brand commitment mediates the relationship between brand experience and attitudinal brand loyalty.

H6b. Brand commitment mediates the relationship between brand experience and purchase brand loyalty.

Method

Each consumer is unique and reacts to brand-related stimuli in different ways. In line with previous brand experience studies (e.g., Chang and Chieng, 2006; Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010) we considered the individual consumer as the unit of analysis for this study. A field worker collected data using questionnaires from 372 consumers of the brands considered for this study in Australia. Given that the brands selected for this research are popular among a youth demographic, the field worker was placed at various locations that this demographic frequently visited (e.g., around malls and cafes) to collect the data, which is in line with mall intercept methodologies (i.e., Bush and Hair 1985). Each respondent was asked to rate the extent to which the items described his or her experiences with a brand, personality of a brand, and feelings of trust, attachment, commitment and loyalty towards a brand, from among the 3 brands considered for this study. We compared the characteristics of respondents who voluntarily completed the questionnaire, with those who initially chose not to complete the questionnaire. The differences in the mean scores for the characteristics were found to be insignificant for the two groups (i.e., respondents and non-respondents), confirming absence of non-response bias.

To ensure that the respondents considered for the analysis had adequate experience with the brand, we asked respondents to specify the number of years that they have been using or purchasing the brand. Respondents that indicated that they have been using or purchasing the

brand for less than one year were omitted from the study as they did not have sufficient experience with the brand. This resulted in 300 completely usable responses. Of the final sample, 44% (132) were males and 56% (168) were females, and were aged from 17 to 48 years old, with the average age being 24 years. These respondents included employees of governmental institutions and of individual companies including retailers, service organizations, and not-for-profit organizations.

Brand stimuli

A number of brands spanning several product categories were included in the questionnaire (Brakus et al., 2009; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Each respondent was provided with a choice of one brand per category and was allowed freedom to choose the brand she/he would like to evaluate. Selection of brands for this study followed the recommendation of Leuthesser et al. (1995) of analysing brands that are sufficiently well-known to the consumer. The selected brands were identified by Brakus et al. (2009) as experiential brands based on the brand experience scale. An initial selection of three brands per product category was determined across consumer products, consumer electronics, and fast-food service. The final selection of brands were evaluated on a brand familiarity scale from Kent and Allen (1994) to select the most appropriate brand representative of the product or service category. A pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted among 20 participants to identify and select the brand for the purpose of the study. Based on the results of the pre-test, three brands with the highest mean score in their respective categories were selected: Coca Cola (consumer products), Apple (consumer electronics), and McDonalds (fast-food services). The remaining brands were omitted from the study. Of the final sample, 23.7% (71) respondents selected Coca Cola, 30.3% (91)

selected McDonalds, and 46% (138) selected Apple.

Measures

The scales employed in the study were based on empirically validated scales from past studies. Some items were reworded and adapted, and some items were added to fit the brand context. In the final questionnaire the sequence of statements were randomised to eliminate possible common-method bias. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale anchored by “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (7).

To measure brand experience, we employed the 12 item scale developed by Brakus et al. (2009) to address the four dimensions of brand experience (sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual). In line with Raffelt et al. (2013) we relied on the operationalization of brand personality by Aaker (1997) who stated that brand personality comprises of several dimensions, including sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. This scale included 15 brand personality items that represented the five brand personality dimensions: “down-to-earth,” “honest,” “wholesome,” and “cheerful” (for sincerity); “daring,” “spirited,” “imaginative,” and “up-to-date” (for excitement); “reliable,” “intelligent,” and “successful” (for competence); “upper-class” and “charming” (for sophistication); and “outdoorsy” and “tough” (for ruggedness).

We measured brand trust using four items modeled after Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001): “I trust this brand”; “I rely on this brand”; “This is an honest brand”; and “This brand is safe.” To measure brand commitment we adopted two items from the scale of De Wulf et al. (2001). These items include: “Even if this brand was more difficult to reach, I would still keep buying this brand,” and “I am willing ‘to go the extra mile’ to remain a customer of this brand.” Finally, to

measure brand attachment, we adapted four items from the work of Park et al. (2010): “The brand part of you and who you are”; “You feel personally connected to the brand”; “Your thoughts and feelings toward the brand come to your mind naturally and instantly”; and “Your thoughts and feelings toward the brand often automatic.”

The dependent variable, brand loyalty, was measured in terms of attitudinal brand loyalty and purchase brand loyalty. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, pp. 87) state that, “brand loyalty includes a degree of pre-dispositional commitment towards a brand; hence our notion of brand loyalty in this study includes both purchase and attitudinal loyalty”. Purchase brand loyalty was measured with four items consisting of: “I will buy this brand the next time I buy a product that this brand offers”; “I intend to keep purchasing this brand”; “I do not buy from other brands if this brand is available”; and “I usually purchase this brand instead of other brands that offer similar products,” adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Ha et al. (2011), and Wirtz et al. (2007). To measure attitudinal brand loyalty we adapted the items: “I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands”; “I am dedicated to this brand”; “I say positive things about this brand to other people”; and “I would recommend this brand to friends and family,” drawn from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Ha et al. (2011), and Zeithaml et al. (1996).

Measurement validation

Before testing the proposed model, we performed a CFA using AMOS software. The results (reported in Table A1-A4) present the standardised solution of the CFA, where all the indicators loaded significantly ($p < .05$) and substantially on their respective constructs. The results show a reasonable degree of internal consistency among the corresponding indicators,

with all coefficient alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold value of .7 (Nunnally, 1978). To assess the convergent validity of measurement items, the average variance extracted (AVE) was evaluated. From Table A1-A4, it is evident all of the AVE values are greater than the acceptable threshold of .5, thus confirming convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Following Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, we find the square root of the AVE for each of the latent variables to be larger than the latent correlations (as presented in Table A5), thus confirming discriminant validity. In addition, we examined the correlations among the variables (Table A6) and found absence of multicollinearity.

Results

Using structural equation modeling (AMOS version 19.0) as a means of analyzing the relationships in a simultaneous manner, all hypotheses were tested through a maximum-likelihood estimation procedure (Vernuccio et al., 2012). The measures of overall fit for our structural equation model are: $\chi^2 (53) = 107.782$, RMSEA = .059, GFI = .951, AGFI = .904, NFI = .964, NNFI = .968, and CFI = .981, which indicate that our model fits the data well (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Browne and Cudeck 1993). Table 1 shows the standardised coefficients for all the direct and indirect structural relationships.

The results provide empirical support for the hypothesised influence of brand experience on two brand relationship variables: brand attachment ($=.863$; $p < .01$) and brand commitment ($=.452$; $p < .05$), thereby supporting H1b-c. However, the effect of brand experience on brand trust was found to be insignificant ($=.160$; $p > .05$), rejecting H1a. Our results demonstrated that brand experience has a positive effect on purchase brand loyalty ($=.377$; $p < .05$) and attitudinal brand loyalty ($=.362$; $p < .01$). Thus, H2a-b are found to be supported. In regards to the

relationship variables, the effect of brand attachment on brand commitment was found to be significant ($=.461$; $p < .01$). However, the effect of brand trust on brand attachment was not supported ($=-.090$; $p > .05$). Thus, H3b was supported while H3a was rejected. Further, brand personality was found to have a significant positive effect on all brand relationship variables including, brand trust ($=1.353$; $p < .01$), brand attachment ($=1.049$; $p < .01$), and brand commitment ($=.669$; $p < .01$), thereby supporting H5a-c.

Insert Table 1 Here

Indirect effects

To test the significance of the indirect effects (H4a-b and H6a-b), we first tested the overall model fit (Table 1), through which the direct and indirect paths were fit simultaneously to estimate each effect while partialling out, or statistically controlling for, the other as suggested by Iacobucci et al (2007). Next, the Sobel test was used to determine the relative size of the indirect paths (Sobel, 1982). The Sobel first-order test (or z -test) is the most common test to assess the presence of mediation by dividing the indirect effect ($\alpha\beta$) by the standard error for the indirect effect derived using the first-order delta method (e.g., Iacobucci et al., 2007; Vernuccio et al., 2012). The results of the Sobel test, presented in Table 2, support the significant role played by brand personality in partially mediating the relationship between brand experience and purchase brand loyalty (*Sobel test* = 2.445, $p < .05$) and attitudinal brand loyalty (*Sobel test* = 4.193, $p < .01$), providing support for H4a-b. Similarly, results of the Sobel test show that brand commitment partially mediates the relationship between brand experience and purchase brand loyalty (*Sobel test* = 3.230, $p < .01$) and attitudinal brand loyalty (*Sobel test* = 3.291, $p < .01$), thus supporting H6a-b.

Insert Table 2 Here

Test of an alternative model

Considering that this study has employed survey data to test our hypotheses of a causal model, we feel it is appropriate to examine whether an alternative model may fit the data equally well. This approach is in line with Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012). Given that the relationships with brand trust were found to be insignificant (see Table 1), we excluded brand trust from the structural model in the alternative model. The remaining variables and the hypothesised relationships were unchanged. The results of the alternative model were found to have a slightly weaker fit ($\chi^2(51) = 168.986$, RMSEA = .088, GFI = .916, AGFI = .850, NFI = .932, and CFI = .951) than the originally proposed model. Thus, the test of an alternative model confirms the strength of the hypothesised model.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the relationship between brand experience and two components of brand loyalty, namely purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty. We also tested the link between brand experience and brand relationship variables, including brand trust, brand attachment and brand commitment. In addition, the mediating role of brand personality and brand commitment in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty was investigated.

The results from the empirical analysis show that brand experience has a significant and positive direct effect on brand relationship variables brand attachment and brand commitment,

but not on brand trust. We presume this to be because brand trust arises out of high involvement and familiarity with a brand. For instance, Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001) find that the antecedents and consequences of brand trust are predominantly based on the level of involvement a consumer has with a brand. The authors find that when a consumer is highly involved with a brand, the effects of the brand trust relationships are stronger, which highlights the relevance of framing the study of brand trust in a context of high involvement. This could further be explained by the fact that experience is momentary (Verhoef et al., 2009), and as such it does not reflect the degree of involvement a consumer has with a brand.

We find that brand experience has a strong positive influence on both attitudinal brand loyalty and purchase brand loyalty. This is a significant contribution as past research has only considered the link between brand experience and customer loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009), failing to explore dynamic consumer-brand relationships - brand loyalty and the different types of brand loyalty (i.e., attitudinal brand loyalty and purchase brand loyalty). These findings provide a significant contribution to the interpersonal relationship theory and the consumer-brand relationship literature.

Our study clearly demonstrates that a consumers' strong and favorable connection with a brand's personality should enhances their relationship (i.e., brand trust, brand attachment and brand commitment) with that brand. Furthermore, we contribute to the current literature by incorporating brand personality in our model and demonstrate its partial mediating role in the relationship between brand experience and both types of brand loyalty (i.e., purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty).

Finally, while prior research has examined the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009), our study

contributes to the consumer-brand relationship literature and interpersonal relationship theory by demonstrating the partial mediating role of brand commitment in this relationship. This finding indicates that a close consumer-brand relationship (expressed in terms of brand commitment), reflects the level of positive experiences generated by that brand, and leads to increased purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty.

Managerial Implications

Brand loyalty is a crucial factor in sustaining purchases and demand for products and services over time. In addition, brand loyalty helps improve the efficiency and effectiveness of a company's marketing and branding operations. As a result, companies spend considerable amounts of resources in gaining and enhancing brand loyalty through several initiatives, such as brand experience. However, in order to generate and sustain brand loyalty, merely creating positive brand experiences may not be adequate. It is important that companies also focus their efforts in orchestrating favorable brand personalities and brand relationships with their customers.

Our findings highlight that the stimulation of senses through brand experience promotes the creation of a relational tie between the consumer and a firm's brand, which in turn enhances brand loyalty. Thus, it is important for managers to predict the differing impact of experience dimensions upon brand loyalty by understanding the magnitude of the relationship between brand experience and behavioural responses. In this regard, managers should focus their efforts on enhancing brand-related stimuli such as logos and colours, packaging, communications, and environment. This requires managers to continuously innovate and improve their brand experience offerings by proactively seeking suggestions of both consumers and employees to

identify realistic stimuli. These brand-related stimuli contain experiential cues that trigger the brand experience dimensions, leading to improved brand relationships and commitment, which ultimately results in brand loyalty.

Managers should also evaluate their brand offering from a holistic perspective to focus upon stimuli that have a vital role in activating brand personality dimensions. We find that the effect of brand experience on brand loyalty is significantly higher when consumers are able to relate to the brand personality characteristics. Managers should develop communication strategies in a way that there is no gap between what consumers perceive and what the managers intend the personality of the brand to be. This requires a careful design of brand communication and promotion strategies by managers.

Finally, we found that brand commitment plays a crucial role in enhancing the effects of brand experience on brand loyalty. Thus, managers should make efforts to gain and enhance customer commitment to the brand. This could be done by improving the consumers' perception of value that the brand offers, such as price promotions, incentives, augmented products, etc. Through these efforts, managers will be able to gain and sustain both purchase brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty.

Limitations and future research

Our research is certainly not without its limitations. First, brands from only three product categories were selected for this study (i.e., consumer goods, services, and consumer electronics). A wider range of categories could have been analysed to improve the generalizability of the findings. It would be insightful for future research to replicate this study

by making comparisons across multiple brands and product categories instead of a few experiential brands.

Second, our study only examined the hypothesised relationships using cross-sectional data obtained in one time period. Further empirical examinations of these relationships could employ longitudinal data to explore patterns, if any, which occur over time for certain variables.

Third, future research could examine the individual effects of each of the four dimensions of brand experience (i.e. sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual) in this model. For instance, it would be noteworthy to understand the relative importance and strength of each of the brand experience dimensions on other variables included in the model.

Fourth, while we find support for the variables brand experience and brand personality to have an effect on the relationships in the model (with exception of the relationship between brand experience and brand trust), the dimensions of these variables (i.e., second-order constructs) may have a direct influence on the relationships in the model. For instance, with regard to the brand personality dimensions, Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer (2013) find that sincerity and competence have the strongest influence on brand attitudes and brand commitment, while excitement and ruggedness have the weakest influence on these brand variables. Therefore, it would be insightful for future research to examine the individual effects of each of the dimensions of brand experience and brand personality on the relationships in the model.

Fifth, the three brands selected for the study, following Leuthesser et al. (1995), turned out to be sufficiently well-known to the consumers and somewhat larger than life brands. This is a limitation of the study as the brands could be considered to not be representative of typical brands. We therefore call for future research to investigate the hypothesised relationships by

including brands that have varying levels of standing in the marketplace, and thereby examine the differences, if any, between the different types of brands in the model.

Finally, we did not consider the process aspects of brand experience and brand personality implementation. For example, it would be interesting to understand how brand experience and brand personalities are developed, the types of brand-related stimuli used, and how consumers actually perceive the brand and its intended personality through brand communication and promotion strategies created by companies. Inclusion of these process aspects of brand development in future research could shed some interesting insights and guidance to managers.

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Figure 1
Conceptual Model

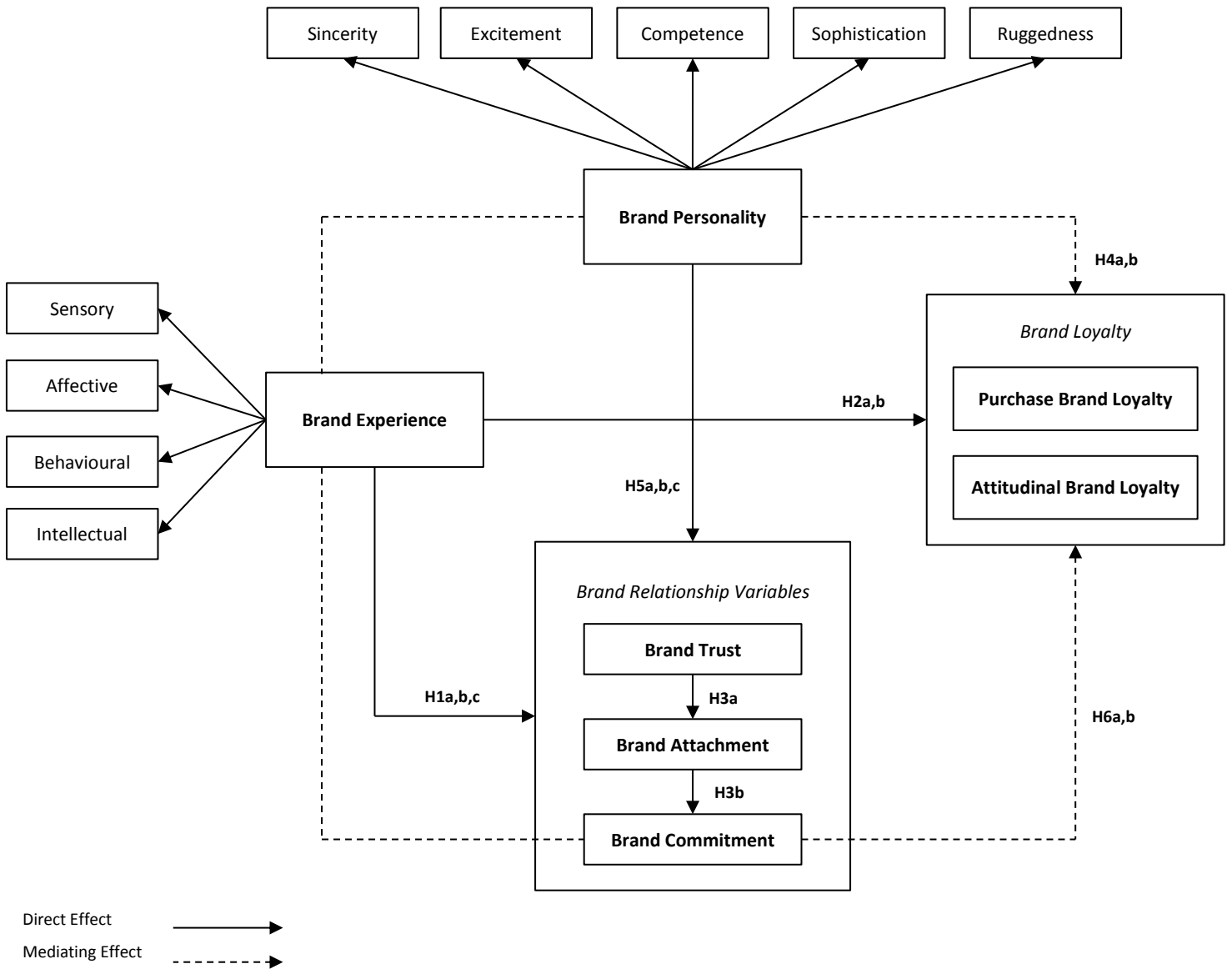


Table 1
Structural equation model: standardised path estimates

<i>Hypothesised model parameters</i>			<i>Standardised β</i>
Direct effects			
	Intellectual	→ Brand Experience	-
	Behavioural	→ Brand Experience	.184**
	Affective	→ Brand Experience	.291**
	Sensory	→ Brand Experience	.221**
	Sincerity	→ Brand Personality	-
	Excitement	→ Brand Personality	.090**
	Competence	→ Brand Personality	.084**
	Sophistication	→ Brand Personality	.126**
	Ruggedness	→ Brand Personality	.109**
H1a	Brand Experience	→ Brand Trust	.131
H1b	Brand Experience	→ Brand Attachment	.202**
H1c	Brand Experience	→ Brand Commitment	.200*
H2a	Brand Experience	→ Purchase Brand Loyalty	.147*
H2b	Brand Experience	→ Attitudinal Brand Loyalty	.129**
H3a	Brand Trust	→ Brand Attachment	.131
H3b	Brand Attachment	→ Brand Commitment	.072**
	Brand Experience	→ Brand Personality	.118**
	Brand Personality	→ Purchase Brand Loyalty	.098**
	Brand Personality	→ Attitudinal Brand Loyalty	.092**
H5a	Brand Personality	→ Brand Trust	.116**
H5b	Brand Personality	→ Brand Attachment	.219**
H5c	Brand Personality	→ Brand Commitment	.140**
	Brand Commitment	→ Purchase Brand Loyalty	.039**
	Brand Commitment	→ Attitudinal Brand Loyalty	.035**
Indirect effects			
H4a	Brand Experience → Brand Personality → Purchase Brand Loyalty		.357**
H4b	Brand Experience → Brand Personality → Attitudinal Brand Loyalty		.456**
H6a	Brand Experience → Brand Commitment → Purchase Brand Loyalty		.208**
H6b	Brand Experience → Brand Commitment → Attitudinal Brand Loyalty		.219**

Model fit statistics

$\chi^2_{53} = 107.782$, RMSEA = .059, GFI = .951, AGFI = .904, NFI = .964, NNFI = .968, CFI = .981

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 2
Sobel test results

<i>Indirect paths</i>		<i>Sobel test statistic</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Significant mediation</i>
H4a	Brand Experience → Brand Personality → Purchase Brand Loyalty	2.445	.015	YES
H4b	Brand Experience → Brand Personality → Attitudinal Brand Loyalty	4.193	.000	YES
H6a	Brand Experience → Brand Commitment → Purchase Brand Loyalty	3.230	.001	YES
H6b	Brand Experience → Brand Commitment → Attitudinal Brand Loyalty	3.291	.000	YES

Appendix

Table A1
Measurement model: Brand personality

<i>Items</i>	<i>CFA</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<i>Sincerity</i>		.879	.734
Down to earth	.706		
Honest	.819		
Wholesome	.888		
Cheerful	.792		
<i>Excitement</i>		.903	.775
Daring	.825		
Spirited	.811		
Imaginative	.882		
Up to date	.825		
<i>Competence</i>		.871	.794
Reliable	.784		
Intelligent	.886		
Successful	.814		
<i>Sophistication</i>		.761	.807
Upper Class	.759		
Charming	.798		
<i>Ruggedness</i>		.701	.755
Outdoorsy	.717		
Tough	.725		

CFA Model fit statistics
 $\chi^2_{79} = 228.580$
RMSEA = .080, GFI = .904, AGFI = .874, NFI = .920, CFI = .946

Table A2

Measurement model: Brand experience

<i>Items</i>	<i>CFA</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<i>Sensory</i>		.847	.766
This brand makes a strong impression on my visual senses or other senses.	.813		
I find this brand interesting in a sensory way.	.870		
This brand does not appeal to my senses (R).	.738		
<i>Affective</i>		.828	.749
This brand stimulates feelings and sentiments.	.866		
I do not have strong feelings for this brand (R).	.723		
This brand is an emotional brand.	.774		
<i>Behavioural</i>		.839	.757
I engage in physical actions and behaviours when I use this brand.	.853		
This brand results in bodily experiences.	.820		
This brand is not action-oriented (R).	.721		
<i>Intellectual</i>		.899	.833
I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand.	.884		
This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.	.927		
This brand does not make me think (R).	.785		
CFA Model fit statistics			
$\chi^2_{46} = 102.793$			
RMSEA = .064, GFI = .946, AGFI = .908, NFI = .952, CFI = .973			

Table A3

Measurement model: Brand relationship variables

<i>Items</i>	<i>CFA</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<i>Brand Trust</i>		.869	.718
I trust this brand.	.806		
I rely on this brand.	.734		
This is an honest brand.	.823		
This brand is safe.	.807		
<i>Brand Attachment</i>		.880	.737
The brand is part of you and who you are.	.901		
You feel personally connected to the brand.	.931		
Your thoughts and feelings toward the brand come to your mind naturally and instantly.	.749		
Your thoughts and feelings toward the brand often automatic.	.701		
<i>Brand Commitment</i>		.854	.872
Even if this brand was more difficult to reach, I would still keep buying this brand.	.857		
I am willing “to go the extra mile” to remain a customer of this brand.	.869		
CFA Model fit statistics			
$\chi^2_{30} = 81.728$			
RMSEA = .076, GFI = .947, AGFI = .902, NFI = .960, CFI = .974			

Table A4

Measurement model: Brand loyalty

<i>Items</i>	<i>CFA</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>AVE</i>
<i>Purchase Brand Loyalty</i>		.859	.712
I will buy this brand the next time I buy a product that this brand offers.	.842		
I intend to keep purchasing this brand.	.817		
I do not buy from other brands if this brand is available	.704		
I usually purchase this brand instead of other brands that offer similar products	.743		
<i>Attitudinal Brand Loyalty</i>		.897	.765
I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands	.843		
I am dedicated to this brand	.864		
I say positive things about this brand to other people	.797		
I would recommend this brand to friends and family	.804		
CFA Model fit statistics			
$\chi^2_{16} = 45.352$			
RMSEA = .078, GFI = .962, AGFI = .916, NFI = .973, CFI = .982			

Table A5

Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

<i>Brand Experience</i>	Sensory	Affective	Behavioural	Intellectual	
Sensory	.875				
Affective	.684	.865			
Behavioural	.300	.459	.870		
Intellectual	.341	.320	.341	.912	
<i>Brand Personality</i>	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Sincerity	.857				
Excitement	.447	.880			
Competence	.346	.656	.891		
Sophistication	.542	.649	.524	.898	
Ruggedness	.421	.244	.113	.467	.868
<i>Brand Relationships</i>	Brand Trust	Brand Attachment	Brand Commitment		
Brand Trust	.847				
Brand Attachment	.608	.859			
Brand Commitment	.606	.704	.934		
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>	Purchase Brand Loyalty	Attitudinal Brand Loyalty			
Purchase Brand Loyalty	.843				
Attitudinal Brand Loyalty	.840	.875			

Table A6
Correlations among latent variables

	Mean	SD	Correlations							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. Brand Experience	4.585	.852	1							
2. Brand Personality	4.830	.933	.653	1						
3. Brand Trust	5.032	1.285	.576	.698	1					
4. Brand Attachment	4.100	1.379	.627	.668	.617	1				
5. Brand Commitment	4.228	1.676	.581	.604	.614	.700	1			
6. Purchase Brand Loyalty	4.946	1.234	.515	.582	.601	.624	.688	1		
7. Attitudinal Brand Loyalty	4.688	1.449	.633	.701	.693	.692	.697	.702	1	

Note: All correlations are significant at $p < .01$