An Analysis of the Involvement–Commitment Relationship across Product Categories

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Abstract

An involvement-commitment-loyalty model is proposed and tested with AMOS. The results for fast-moving-consumer-goods (fmcg) are consistent with the theory. Ego involvement influences purchase involvement, which influences brand commitment, which influences customer loyalty. The results for the more ego-involved service of hair stylists, however, showed a different result. Purchase loyalty did not mediate the relationship between ego involvement and brand commitment, but instead ego involvement had a direct relationship with brand commitment.

Keywords: Commitment, Involvement, Customer Loyalty

The Relationship between Involvement and Loyalty

Beatty, Kahle, and Homer (1988) posited a relationship between involvement and commitment. The involvement-commitment model is conceptualised as:

Ego Involvement ➔ Purchase Involvement ➔ Brand Commitment

Ego involvement is defined as the importance of the product to the individual and to the individual’s self-concept, values, and ego, while purchase involvement relates to the outcome of an individual’s interaction with the product and purchase situation.

A consumer who is ego involved in a purchase, has a focus on making the correct purchase, which leads to an extensive search for product-related information and consideration of alternatives. Once a purchase has been made, assuming the consumer is satisfied with the purchase, the consumer is likely to be brand committed. If marketers can generate greater levels of involvement in consumers, greater commitment will follow for those consumers. This should lead to brand loyalty, purchase intention, and conative loyalty.

Involvement is most likely to precede or lead to commitment (Beatty, Kahle, and Homer, 1988) when individuals are involved with purchases within a product class. They will be more inclined to establish strong preferences and develop brand loyalties more readily. This statement is based on empirical evidence from the positive relationship between perceived risk, which is closely related to, or a component of, purchase involvement, and brand loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978).

Within the Beatty, Kahle, and Homer (1988) model of involvement–commitment, “brand commitment” is defined as the emotional or psychological attachment to a brand within a product class. Beatty, Kahle, and Homer (1988) acknowledge that the concept of ‘brand commitment’ is similar to the construct of brand loyalty. When comparing this definition with the Jacoby and Kyne (1973) definition of brand loyalty, it is clear that the term brand commitment is, by definition, similar to what is known as “attitudinal loyalty”. The important difference between brand loyalty and brand commitment is that brand loyalty comprises both brand commitment and repeat purchasing behaviour. This implies that brand commitment is
an essential antecedent of true brand loyalty. In order to capture customer loyalty, which is a combination of commitment and overt loyal behaviour, a measurement inventory by Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds (2000) was employed.

Some researchers have focused on involvement as an essential variable influencing consumer purchasing decisions (Antil, 1984; Zaichowsky, 1985; Beatty, Kahle, and Homer, 1988; Homburg and Giering, 2001). Marketing researchers generally agree that the level of involvement is associated with the level of perceived personal relevance or importance of a specific product category to the consumer (Bloch and Bruce, 1984; Celsi and Olson, 1988; Homburg and Giering, 2001).

**Research question 1:** Consumers undertaking a purchase decision for a hairdresser would have a) high ego involvement and purchase involvement, b) high brand commitment, and c) high loyalty.

**Research question 2:** Consumers undertaking the purchase of an fmcg, such as a soft drink, would be expected to undertake this purchase regularly, and with little effort, therefore, it would have a) higher purchase involvement than ego involvement, b) brand commitment, and c) high customer loyalty.

**Method**

A pre-tested, self-administered questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample of Deakin University Commerce, and MBA students. University students are experienced, repeat purchasers of both the fmcg and service categories. The response level was 200 with a usable sample of 173 questionnaires. The questionnaire was developed based on previous work by Beatty, Kahle, and Homer (1988) who measured ego involvement, purchase involvement and brand commitment; and Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds (2000) who measured the customer loyalty construct.

**Measurement of Involvement and Customer Loyalty**

A measurement tool developed by Beatty, Kahle, and Homer (1988) was adapted to measure involvement, and a six-item measurement tool developed by Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds (2000) was adapted to measure customer loyalty in this paper. Each of the items consists of a nine-point scale, anchored at “Strongly Disagree” and “Strongly Agree”. The involvement items measure ego involvement, purchase involvement and brand commitment. The items that were selected by Beatty, Kahle, and Homer (1988) were taken from several published studies, notably Cunningham (1967), Lastovicka (1979), and Lastovicka and Gardner (1978). The operationalisation of customer loyalty by Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds (2000) is in accordance with the multi-dimensional definition of the loyalty construct. Recent studies have defined and measured loyalty using multiple items including, repeat patronage, self-stated retention, price insensitivity, resistance to counter persuasion, and the likelihood of spreading positive word-of-mouth (Dick and Basu, 1994; Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Fornell, 1992).

**Data Analysis and Research Findings**

Exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were performed on the data sets for the two product categories (See Table 1). Figure 1 shows the base model used for the confirmatory factor
analysis. The results of the CFAs are presented in Table 2. No single statistic is accepted universally as the index of model adequacy, so several measures of model fit are presented. The suggested limits for the model are CMIN/DF < 3.0; \( \chi^2 p > 0.05 \); AGFI > 0.8; RMSEA < 0.08 indicate an acceptable model fit to data (Arbuckle, 1997; Kline, 1998). The statistics that are within acceptable limits are in bold. The CFA models for both soft drink and shampoo are within acceptable limits, however, the full models for both categories are rejected as strong models of the factor structures underlying the observed data.

**Table 1: Factor Structures for Measurement Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>BKH</th>
<th>GAR</th>
<th>Soft-drink</th>
<th>Hair salon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I can make many associations between my choice of hair salon/stylist and experiences in my life</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The type of hairdresser I go to says a lot about me</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My friends give me a hard time if I choose the wrong hair salon/stylist</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am very concerned about what type of hair salon/stylist I go to</td>
<td>P I</td>
<td>P I</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Generally, choosing the right hairdresser is important to me</td>
<td>P I</td>
<td>P I</td>
<td>E I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If my preferred hair stylist were not available, it would make little difference to me if I had to choose another hair salon/stylist</td>
<td>B C</td>
<td></td>
<td>P I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I consider myself to be highly loyal to one brand of hair salon/stylist</td>
<td>B C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When another hairdresser has more competitive prices, I will generally go to that hair salon/stylist rather than my usual hair salon/stylist</td>
<td>B C</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td>P I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would highly recommend my favourite hair salon/stylist to my family and friends</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td></td>
<td>C L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am likely to make negative comments about my favourite hair salon/stylist to my family and friends</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In the near future, I intend to use more of the services offered by my favourite hair salon/stylist</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td>B C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. If the price of my preferred hair salon/stylist were to increase, I would still continue to go to that hair salon/stylist.</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td>B C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. If a competing hair salon/stylist were to offer a much better price or promotion I would switch from my favourite.</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td>P I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. As long as I get my hair cut, I do not see myself as switching to a different hair salon/stylist</td>
<td>C L</td>
<td></td>
<td>C L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis for the soft drink model (Figure 2) indicated that the four-factor model is within acceptable limits, and shows a relationship that follows the theoretical model. Ego involvement is related to purchase involvement that leads to brand commitment and finally customer loyalty (as measured by Ganesh et al., 2000). The AMOS model for hair salon/stylist revealed that the four-factor structure does not fit the data. Instead, a three-factor structure provides a better fit, with customer loyalty dropping out of the model. Another finding of interest is that purchase involvement does not mediate the relationship between ego involvement and brand commitment for hair salons, but instead there is a relationship between ego involvement and brand commitment. This holds with the theory that hairdressers are seen to be high ego involvement decisions.

**Conclusions and Future Research**

The testing of the involvement to commitment relationship has been extended by the addition of customer loyalty measures. This was further extended across product categories to assess whether the suggested factor structure held across high and low involvement categories, and for goods and services. It was found that a modified model held for fmcgs, but for services, the role of ego involvement negated the influence of purchase involvement.

The implications of these findings are that for hairdressers, the individual’s self concept is a strong driver in the overall purchase decision, whereas for low involvement products such as soft drinks, purchase situation is as important as ego involvement and is a strong driver of commitment and loyalty. The higher ego involvement for hairdresser purchases indicates that the consumer is concerned with making the right purchase, which leads to higher brand commitment. The link for behavioural loyalty is non-existent, which is in line with the weakness of attitudinal predictors of behaviour for high involvement products.

**Table 2: Results of AMOS Analysis of Alternative Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>CMIN/DF (P&gt;0.05)</th>
<th>GFI (&gt;0.9)</th>
<th>AGFI (&gt;0.9)</th>
<th>RMSEA (&lt;0.08)</th>
<th>TLI (&gt;0.9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soft drink</td>
<td>221.13</td>
<td>2.99 (0.000)</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.794</td>
<td>0.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>287.86 (0.000)</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.794</td>
<td>0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser (full)</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>32.76 (0.012)</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>0.073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3: AMOS Model for Hairdressing

References


Lastovicka, J. L. 1979. Questioning the Concept of Involvement Defined Product Classes, In (Ed, Wilkie, W.), Advances in Consumer Research, Association for Consumer Research, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 6, 174-179.

