

THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE BRAND LOYALTY OF CONSUMERS FOR VIETNAM GARMENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 PENDING, A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN THE NORTH OF VIETNAM

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Abstract

In the period of complicated and serious Covid-19 epidemic on a global scale today, the purchasing demand of people everywhere is affected seriously. It is a requirement to have a proper measures to maintain and protect loyal customers for any business to survive and get over this difficult time for its development. This demand becomes more important for the textile industry in Vietnam as it holds an important position in the Vietnamese economy and ensures many jobs for millions of Vietnamese.

In this study, the author use qualitative research methodology using in-depth interview techniques to determine the factors: perceived quality, brand trust, brand identification, quality of relationship between customers and brand have a positive impact on brand loyalty of consumers in Vietnam.

Keywords: brand loyalty; apparel; apparel enterprises

1. Introduction

Today, Vietnamese people is paying more attention to buy high-quality garment products because of the economy growth and the development of knowledge. Many foreign garment companies have landed in Vietnam and run their business successfully in recent years. Therefore, for improving the competitiveness of Vietnamese garment enterprises, it is a demand on studying factors affecting the brand loyalty of Vietnamese consumers for helping Vietnamese businesses to have specific awareness and actions in the industry; to maintain the prestige and brand loyalty of the people to the Vietnamese brand, and expanding the Vietnamese domestic market in the context of increasingly fierce economic competition due to regional and international integration. So the author has researched the content of "Factors affecting the brand loyalty of consumers to Vietnamese garments" to help Vietnamese garment enterprises to learn fundamental reasons of their lost of market to foreign garment enterprises, from which those companies could build appropriate plans and measures to sustain and develop in the era of economic globalization and rapid scientific and technological development. In addition, the situation of the Covid-19 epidemic is very complicated and serious in Vietnam and in the world today cause a

significant impact on business activities of enterprises, thus the need in research of the impact of the epidemic on the brand loyalty of consumers towards Vietnamese garment products.

Although there have been many studies on the factors affecting brand loyalty [3],[27],[29] ... but there has not been any research on the factors affecting brand loyalty for Vietnamese garment products along with fierce competition of imported garments. This situation shows that in the field of research on Vietnamese consumers' loyalty to apparel brands, there is an urgency, especially in the following issues: Firstly, which factors have an impact to the loyalty of Vietnamese consumers? Second, how does the relationship of each factor affect the loyalty of Vietnamese consumers? Third, what should be done to increase the brand loyalty of Vietnamese consumers? Specifically, in this study, the author uses qualitative research method by semi-structured in-depth interview technique to clearly show which components affect the brand loyalty of Vietnamese consumers then gives the structure in the hypothetical model to serve the author's future quantitative research.

2. Theoretical basic and research model

Concept of the brand

Currently, there are many different views about brands (trademark or brand). From the perspective of application in commercial life, a brand is a specific expression of a trademark, which is a reflection or symbol of a business's reputation in front of consumers. From a marketing perspective, a brand is a name, symbol, sign, design, or a combination of all of them that identifies the goods or services of one seller and distinguishes them from others. From the perspective of intellectual property, brand is a general term that refers to and be protected in form of intellectual property objects such as trademarks, industrial design, geographical indications or appellations of origin of goods. Or in another view like that of Ambler, T&C. Styles (1996) defines a brand as a set of attributes that provide target consumers with the value and benefits they seek.

Thus, the brand can be understood relatively as follows: Brand is the sum total of all physical, aesthetic, logical and emotional elements of a product (or business), including itself. Products, names, logos, images and all visual representations are gradually established over time in the minds of consumers in order to establish a foothold there (Hoang Le Chi, Tran Thi Thap, 2013).

Brand loyalty

Consumer brand loyalty has attracted the attention of many researchers around the world for decades. In order to understand brand loyalty, many current studies have shed light on the definitions and measures of brand loyalty, as well as how to connect to lasting relationships between brands and consumers. In the study Jacoby and Chestnut (1978), they determined brand loyalty based on the will, attitudes and beliefs of consumers. Kotler, Armstrong, and Frank (1989) refer to brand loyalty as a consumer's feeling or emotional attachment to certain brands. Consumers are loyal to the brand and are more likely to buy the brand's products in the future (Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2006).

Factors affecting brand loyalty

There are different views on the factors affecting brand loyalty. There is a view that the factors affecting brand loyalty are: perceived quality, brand trust, brand attitude and personal fit as according to İrem Erdog̃mus, and Isıl Bu̇deyri-Turan (2012), in which perceived quality, brand trust, and brand attitudes positively affect brand loyalty. However, according to the opinion of Andres Kuusik (2007), there are four factors affecting consumer loyalty, including: brand trust, quality of the relationship between consumers and businesses, and satisfaction and brand image, in which brand trust and the quality of the relationship between consumers and businesses are the two main determinants of customers' brand loyalty, etc.

Inheriting the research results [3], [26] along with the characteristics of customers and garments in Vietnam, the author proposes the following research model:

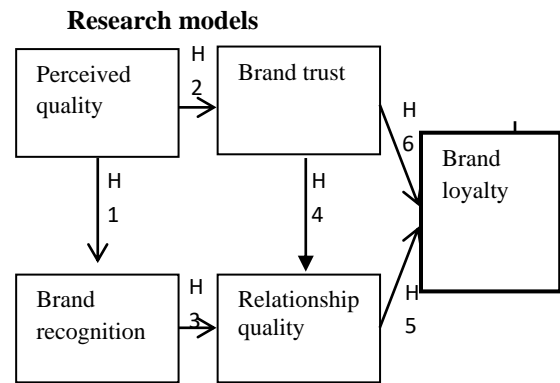


Figure 1. Proposed research model

In the author's opinion, the formation of brand loyalty begins when customers experience the garment and make sensory evaluations of the product, or in other words, the perceived quality factor.

Perceived quality is defined as "a consumer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service in relation to its intended purpose, in relation to alternatives" (Zeithaml), 1988), or in the view of Aaker, 1991, perceived quality reflects the consumer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service in relation to its intended purpose. its determination in relation to other options".

Research hypothesis, H1: Perceived quality has an impact on brand recognition; H2: Perceived quality has an impact on brand trust

In the relationship between perceived quality and brand identity, perceived quality brings value to the brand in a number of ways: high quality gives consumers a good reason to buy the brand and gives allow the brand to differentiate itself from the competition (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2005)., to charge a premium price and have a solid basis for brand extension. Some researchers have considered perceived quality as part of brand identity, referring to the salient features and reputation of the brand (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003, He, Li & Harris, 2012). Besides, when consumers perceive the quality of the product, that is, they consider the brand as a place to trust and continue to shop (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Therefore, perceived quality has an important impact on brand recognition and brand trust.

With hypothesis H3: Brand identity has an impact on the quality of brand relationships with consumers

Research by Lam et al. (2010) pointed out that brand identity determines the viability of relationships between consumers and brands, i.e. whether consumers have a relationship with the brand or not.

This means that the antecedent role of brand identity is the relationship of brand relationship quality with consumers (He, Li & Harris 2012). Brand identity also refers to consumer identification or brand attachment (Dimitriadis & Papista 2011; Lam et al. 2010). In other words, brand identity has a significant impact on the quality of a brand relationship with consumers.

H4: Brand trust has an impact on the quality of brand relationships with consumers

Brand relationship quality is defined as "a customer-based index of the strength and depth of person-to-person relationships" (Fournier, 1994, p. 124). Fournier (1994) argues that brand relationship quality reflects the strength and viability of long-term relationships between consumers and brands despite the presence of quality competing brands. Quality relationships are formed and fostered by brand trust from customers. Over time using the product, trusting the product quality, the interest, trust, and connection between customers and the brand has become stronger and stronger. Thus, it can be seen that brand trust has an impact on relationship quality.

H5: Relationship quality has a positive effect on brand loyalty

Like H4, relationship quality is fostered by the brand trust factor, and as a corollary, relationship quality will be the driving force, the main factor in building customer brand loyalty.

H6: Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty

Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty, it is an inevitable consequence of brand trust affecting relationship quality and relationship quality forms brand loyalty. .

Brand trust can also have a direct impact on brand loyalty when customers have good value for the product even though they have not built a relationship with the brand. When customers have a certain brand trust, they tend to be loyal to that brand (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

In general, through the synthesis of studies, the author gives the components that have a relationship to the brand loyalty of Vietnamese consumers, including: Perceived quality, brand trust, brand identity and the quality in brand relationship with consumers.

3. Research methodologies

To better understand the factors affecting the brand loyalty of consumers in Vietnam as well as the relationship between consumers and brands in the current competitive context. The author uses qualitative research method by semi-structured in-depth interview technique (n = 7 units). This method, also called appraisal sampling, is a

technique in which the selection of interviewees is based on judgments about the relevant characteristics they will present (Hair, Lukas & Miller, 2012). , Zikmund et al., 2014). The author has decided to select interviewees who are brand consumers, in shopping malls where many brands are located. Participants were approached at shopping centers in the central areas of Hanoi and Hai Phong. All of these shopping malls are aimed at middle-income consumers and above. Participants were approached after they had made a relevant purchase, demonstrated with their shopping bag, aged eighteen years or older. They have been invited to participate in the study, and if they are satisfied, a date, time, and convenient location will be invited to meet..

Participants were selected across three age groups (25 - 35, 35 - 40, 40 - 50 and over 50 years old) living in Hanoi and Hai Phong. The sample for the in-depth interviews consisted of 4 female participants and 3 male participants. 3 participants were married and 4 were single. Interviewees have the following names in the following order: Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant E, Participant F, Participant G.

The use of this method is also an assessment of how consumers perceive the brand, whether the responses of Vietnamese consumers have changed or commented on the structure of the study? In addition, this method serves as a premise for future quantitative methods that the author will study

4. Research results

This study demonstrates the extent to which factors (perceived quality, brand identity, brand trust and brand relationship quality) with consumers' brand loyalty from there. The structures in the hypothetical model of this study are clarified when combined with the responses of the interviewees.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used by Brin (2002), Willis (2002) (Appendix 1) to ask their opinions about the brand and how they think and feel about the brand when they choose their own brand to discuss:

Brand loyalty

The different participants who expressed many shades of brand loyalty will also differ. They have expressed themselves through many brands, where different brands are adopted to meet different times and contexts, or different finances: *Usually I wear Canifa clothes, but when I do When I go to a party, I wear An Phuoc. (Participant G); *I like it [Chicland - the brand that participants talk about] a lot but I can't buy many clothes, because each shirt costs more than 1 million VND, even up to 1.5 million VND. (Participant C)

Interviewees are often very interested in brand-to-consumer relationships and tend to be pragmatic

when making purchasing decisions based on images rather than any emotional or relational connections: *I only consider brands if they have a unique design that suits my needs and not anything else... Now I don't have any bias towards any of the brands. (Participant B)

*Some cases of loyalty are expressed in love or understanding of the brand (aspect of brand relationship quality, discussed in the research model section). For example, some participants showed very different levels of brand loyalty, revealed brand passion, and their opinions were very consistent: *Because I am a loyal consumer of Nem, I think I'm Nem's ambassador... Because I'm so loyal to that brand, I think the brand fascinates me making me want my friends who I love to love the brand and try going to this brand to use the product. So sometimes I try to influence people to get people to support the brand I love. (Participant A); *I think my brand loyalty is very high [Ninomax - the brand that the participant talked about]. There have been many people who buy luxury brands but they don't understand them and just buy according to their preferences. For me, I love and understand the brand, I am definitely loyal to the brand. (Participant D)*

*Sometimes interviewees profess loyalty to another brand but not a sense of fetishism: *If the Seven.am outfit isn't available, I'll go to Eva de eva, sometimes I can buy one in Ivy moda... but I'm still loyal to Seven.am. (Participant A)*

*In some cases, brand loyalty emerges as a result of a brand that "provides the ongoing satisfaction sought by participants (satisfaction is discussed in relation to brand trust). As shown below, this group explains that continued consumption is directly driven by social need, with little brand affection in a sense, this is consistent with the fact that Brand Identity has a positive effect on brand loyalty: *I'm not saying I can't live without it [Ivy moda - the brand that the participant talked about] , but I'm satisfied with it... Even if this brand makes me sad or whatever the brand changes, I will continue to buy and care (Participant C); *I can't say specifically about sentiments but when I use my products, I'm satisfied with the products means I have feelings for the brand...but if u a brand can not maintain what i need, i will not continue to buy. If they can maintain what they are offering at the moment, I will continue to buy. (Participant F)*

In conclusion: Through the above investigation, it is shown that relationship quality affects brand loyalty, it is the result of perceived brand quality and brand identity. However, for some participants, brand loyalty can reach a higher level of abstraction because they perceive them to be disloyal even though they continue to buy some brands.

Quality of brand relationship with consumers

Most of the interviewees have a degree of closeness to their brand. More specifically, some show an interdependence or affection for their brands in the hypothetical situation that these brands no longer exist: *I feel like something is missing.... So without it [Ivy moda-brand that participants discussed], it still has to change sometimes, so I will look for a new brand for me, but I will be a bit sad because when I get to the center shopping, my favorite brands no longer exist there. (Participant C; *I don't feel close to it [An Phuoc-branded participant discussed] but still feel something is missing. (Participant G)

In the case of: The intensity of emotions that may appear to a participant in financial difficulty: *So I think when Ninomax closes I will feel sad. Maybe I'll cry. If Chamlies ceased to exist, I probably wouldn't cry for Chamlies but I would cry for Ninomax because it's cheap and fashionable. That's the brand I want to buy. No local brand can make me feel as dependent as Ninomax. (Participant D)

There are cases where interviewees expressed closeness or understanding of their brand. One participant talked about her relationship with brands as a close relationship with two-way communication: *For example, I usually buy Nem products online, within a month, Nem will send me an email with product information, or marketing program, asking me if I want to search for products, participate in new offers or not, like a friend. Sometimes Nem calls me to ask what I need, to introduce new collections. I think we have two-way communication and both sides can communicate with each other. (Participant A); *I think I know the characteristics of the brand [Chamlies - the brand mentioned by the participant]. I read the newspaper and people said their clothes very aristocratic and luxurious (Participant D)

In these in-depth interviews, participants used "rice" and "pho" as metaphors to refer to their brand. People describe relationships with partners using food-related metaphors (Linh & Harris, 2009). For example, the Vietnamese consider their wives to be 'rice': that is, their daily staple food; lovers of adultery are 'pho' (Linh & Harris, 2009). The use of interpersonal relationship metaphors in the brand suggests the existence of a common type of brand relationship, and implies a relation to the quality of the relationship between the brand and the consumer. (Bruhn et al., 2012):mI think it's like a private relationship, for example Nem understands me about everything and somehow I understand Nem... Nem is like rice. Sometimes I can eat pho, but every day I have to eat rice. (Participant A)

In conclusion: In these comments, different participants expressed different nuances of brand intimacy, such as brand awareness; two-way communication; Loss of emotion or feeling that something is missing when the brand is gone.

Brand trust

Brand trust refers to a feeling of trust in credibility based on perceived brand trust (Delgado Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). When expressing their thoughts about their brand, most of the participants implied a feeling of confidence, and some explicitly mentioned their credibility: *In my perception, Nem promised me the site. Professional dress, professional look, when I shop at Nem, I recognize that professional look, so I think it will keep its promise. (Participant A); *An Phuoc gives me confidence to wear... It creates a sense of elegance when I go to work. That's all I expected. (Participant G)

The interviewees said that their beliefs about the brand stem from the perception of quality. This is consistent with the discussion in the research model about the influence of perceived quality on brand trust: *Because I can understand the product clearly in the long run. I understand quality, and I believe in using the products. (Participant G)

Some studies have shown that perceived quality is a part of Brand Identity, brand trust (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003, He, Li & Harris, 2012): *I rate [perceived quality] through through the company's heritage, for example, if it's a well-branded company, then I believe in the brand. (Participant A)

Another participant said that his sense of confidence stems from judging him by the clothes he wears, which reflects his social position: *It also gives me a feeling that I am to a certain degree in society, like when you wear a nice outfit to go out, you feel more confident. (Participant E)

In conclusion: It can be seen from such comments that most of the participants find that the brand helps them feel confident. Their brand is trustworthy, and promising, never failing to keep promises. Some consumers find brand satisfaction and affection.

Brand recognition

All interviewees found that their relationship with the products/brands achieved their goals: *A participant wanted to express and enhance themselves: Often the clothing mine is not feminine. But when I wear Nem's clothes, I feel that I am more feminine and gentle. (Participant A)

Another participant pointed out that wearing brand clothes for a youthful image: *I feel young when I wear them, e.g. a brand that suits me is also Ivy moda (Participant C)

One female participant between the ages of 40 and 45 exhibited some nostalgic connection to the brand. This is understandable because women aged 30-44 are conscious of the coming 'midlife' years and are often looking for products that can rejuvenate their appearance: *When I was younger, I like the youthful brand, but now I still like the youthful brand, maybe because I wanted to show the

youthfulness when I was young and now I also want to maintain the youthfulness through the youthful brand. (Participant B)

This brand identity was discussed not only by the female participants but also by the male participants, such as Participant E who expressed a special sense of self when he revealed that he is passionate about the brand. I like my image and opinion more than the brand itself: *So I can't feel special when I use Blue Exchange clothing. However, for An Phuoc 3 million/shirt, when you wear it, people will see you differently. (Participant E)

Most participants use brands to demonstrate their identity to society, their profession or their work: *I want to show other colleagues that I am a professional; also because I often communicate with consumers ... Nem's clothes are very suitable for my communication activities, when I need to buy clothes, I immediately think of Nem. (Participant A)

*In a sense, social surroundings influence choice: *I have seen my friends and colleagues use the brand and I want to be like them (this participant recalls the brand's influence). influenced her choices when she was a child). (Participant B; *It [An Phuoc-the shoe brand that the participant talked about] also gives me a feeling that I am at a certain level in society... Level is success and wealth. have and use expensive things (Participant E)*

Although one study suggested that Brand Identity does not require formal association or close association (He, Li & Harris, 2012, Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010), there are respondents who indicated that their relationship with the brand affects others and society: *What makes An Phuoc (the brand that participants talk about) special when I wear An Phuoc's clothes, people praise it ... This brand just shows me the luxury, class. (Participant E); *I needed trendy clothes when I met business partners and this brand [Valentino Rudy - the brand that participant talked about] met my need. (Participant E)

One interviewee indicated that he would protect his brand against negative information if necessary: *For example with An Phuoc, if someone said something wrong about it, I would feel upset and argue with him(s). (Participant E)

Conclusion: For most participants, an important reason for brand identity was the purpose of keeping in touch with people in society.

Perceived quality

When asked about their assessment of the quality-related attributes of fashion products/brands, the interviewees suggested design or product attributes contribute to quality improvement. Other attributes or benefits include materials, colors, durability, and comfort: *First of all, design differences. Then it should be right for me in terms of form/style and

color. Finally, I am interested in materials, something that can give me the best comfort when operating. (Participant B); *I will review the design first, then the material to evaluate the product. (Participant E); *Among brands with the same price, I will touch the product of the brands to assess whether it can be used for a long time... It doesn't matter if I have How long can you use them? I would like to see it as durable over time. (Participant D)

Most of the participants rated quality in relation to price. Some argue that high prices indicate high quality. Others divide between perceived quality in terms of price and value: * I can also judge quality by price. Relatively high price, but not quite, means high quality. (Participant F); *I don't want to buy a shirt this year and next year it will be old. I don't like that because I think my money doesn't seem worth in that case. (Participant D); *I only consider brands if they have a unique design that suits my needs, not anything else. I don't even care about their price, as long as I like it. (Participant B)

Members rate quality in relation to the brand, with some clearly named quality as an overall decision of benefit: *I believe there is a connection between brand and quality. (Participant E); *When I rate a product or service, I think the word "quality" is too general, so I usually don't judge based on functional benefits... I think the brand is the guarantee of my choice. (Participant A)

Furthermore, the design is clearly related to the intended use of the interviewees: *Because I work in an office, I need the design to be suitable for the office, meeting, or some important event. (Participant F); *I only consider brands if they have a unique design that suits my needs, not anything else. (Participant B); *Some of the designs are clones of other brands but very good. I thought it [Ninomax- the brand that participants talked about] was appropriate, especially for my age, when I was

still a student. It is very suitable for school, active, youthful and fashionable. (Participant D)

Therefore, participants suggested a number of attributes for evaluating clothing, including design, form, color, material, durability, and comfort/fit. However, durability is added as an item related to perceived quality.

5. Conclusion

The results of the in-depth interviews led to two main conclusions about the proposed model: First, all structures derived from the study can be applied in the current context of Vietnam because they are expressed in the thoughts of the participants, the feelings and similarities with the brand. Second, the results of the interviews are consistent with the discussion of the hypotheses in the research methods section. Brand loyalty is governed by four factors: (1) Perceived quality; (2) Brand identity; (3) Brand trust and (4) Quality of brand relationship with consumers. Brand perceived quality will be the first step for consumers to recognize and identify the brand that they need to associate with. Over time and product experience, meeting the needs of consumers, will form brand trust and build a quality relationship between consumers and brands from which brand loyalty are preserved over time.

The multi-brand loyalty model revealed in the interviews is consistent with the argument of Fournier and Yao (1997) that it is impossible to point out one brand as providing higher value than another. Thus, the hypothetical model has proven its correctness in practice through the author's experimental examination. This is also the result that serves as a premise for the author's future quantitative research method, in order to confirm more clearly the relationships of perceived quality, brand identity, brand trust, and quality in brand relationship with consumers on the brand loyalty of Vietnamese consumers.

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