

## **EXPLORING BEHAVIORAL AND ATTITUDINAL BRAND LOYALTY USING TRIPARTITE MODEL OF ATTITUDE**

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### **Abstract**

*Previously, scholars have studied behavioral and attitudinal brand loyalties separately by. Brand loyalty was first studied with behavior as one dimension in the brand loyalty structure, which predominantly measures brand loyalty by repeat purchase. However, the stochastic paradigm that views behavior as a single dimension cannot explain the motivation for consistent repeat purchase behavior. Subsequently, the stochastic paradigm was replaced with a deterministic paradigm that views attitude as a single dimension of brand loyalty. Since brand loyalty is a psychological abstraction in nature, scholars viewed that a combined approach of behavior and attitude is more appropriate to address the issue of brand loyalty. This paper proposes a Tripartite Model of Attitude to explain the dimensions and determinants of brand loyalty by combining behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty in one framework.*

*Keywords: Tripartite model of attitude structure; brand loyalty; behavioral loyalty; attitudinal loyalty.*

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### **Introduction**

The study of brands is increasing in complexity, and the definition of a brand by the American Marketing Association is no longer sufficient to accommodate the expanding concepts of brands, especially brand loyalty. According to the American Marketing Association, "A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of seller and to differentiate them from those of competitors". However, this definition does not address the psychological abstraction of brand loyalty. Aaker (1996) posited that loyalty is the core dimension of brand equity, which he considered an intangible asset of a brand that provides a sustainable competitive advantage. However, it is essential to know which dimension is important to which industry and what kind of loyalty is relevant to different industries. Reichheld and Sasser (1990) postulated that as customer relationship with the company lengthens, profits rise, and companies can boost profits by almost 100% by retaining just 5% more of their customers.

Building a strong brand and creating brand loyalty to maintain long-term relationships with customers are a complex process of understanding the consumers' psychological dimensions and determinants. Brand and brand loyalty are related but infer different meanings and concepts. Brand has physical attributes but brand loyalty is psychological abstraction in nature. Brand loyalty is the sum of all psychological experiences customers have about a company, its employees, product or services. It resides and lives in the mind of the customers, which is a total organizational function and not solely a marketing function. It generates long-term enduring results. Therefore, building a brand and maintaining brand loyalty will create a brand

with strong customer loyalty sustainable in the long term with a high degree of competitive advantage.

A brand with strong customer loyalty would be able to maintain premium pricing and greater bargaining power with the channels of distribution, reduce selling cost, provide a strong barrier to potential new entries into the product or service category, and give a synergistic advantage of brand extensions to other related products or service categories (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Brand loyalty is desirable because it is economical in the long term to initially put an intensive effort to generate a large enough customer base and subsequently achieving sustainable revenues from each loyal customer (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1983). In this context, it is economical in the long term because brand loyalty can bring about progressively higher sales volume, premium pricing ability, and retaining consumers rather than seeking them. Reducing customer loss can dramatically improve business growth for the years to come.

Given today's stiff competition, establishing and maintaining brand loyal customers are of utmost importance. There is a need to empirically explore behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty in the context of a two-dimensional approach or multi-dimensional approach, depending on the research need. This paper proposes and discusses the robustness of a multi-dimensional approach to customer loyalty. It is important to comprehend consumers' attitude in planning and evaluating marketing strategy with the assumption that individuals' attitudes predict their behavior (Bagozzi, 1977). Bagozzi investigated the convergence, discriminant, and predictive validity of a Tripartite Model of Attitude by using structural equation methodology where evidence was obtained for the convergent and discriminant validity of the tripartite model. Such evidence indicated that the inter-correlations among the three components were high. Since then, the integrity of the Tripartite Model of Attitude has been addressed by several researchers (Bagozzi, 1977; Breckler, 1984; Fishbein, 1966; Foxall, 1984; Greenwald, 1968; Han, Kim, & Kim, 2011; Hilgard, 1980; Malhotra, 2005; Ostrom, 1969; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960).

The Tripartite Model of Attitude is a three-component definition of attitude comprising affective, cognitive, and conative, as stipulated by Rosenberg and Hovland (1960). The three-component definition is adopted in this paper because it permits a broad array of research operationalization for attitude and measurement without apparent boundaries that can be regarded as the object of an attitude. In addition, this three-component definition of attitude provides sufficient depth and breadth that are in line with the traditional philosophical roots since the 1960s. The classical literature written 53 years ago stated that "We here indicate that attitudes are predispositions to respond to some class of stimuli with certain classes of responses and designate the three major types of responses as cognitive, affective and behavioral" (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960, p. 3).

Since then, the three-component definition has achieved pervasive acceptance and also criticism on the nature of relationships among the three hypothesized components of cognitive, affective, and conative. Breckler (1984) conducted an empirical validation of affect, conation, and cognition as distinct components of attitude. Researchers can either measure the conative component of an attitude or measure behavior that presumably under the control of attitude component to test the attitude-behavior relationships. Conative behavior can be past behavior or behavioral intentions. Despite scholar differences in opinion about attitude, it is well established that attitudes are strongly related to behavior. The choice of Tripartite Model of Attitude to study brand loyalty is therefore supported by substantial literature (Bobâlcă, Gătej,

& Ciobanu, 2012; Dumitrescu, Țichindelean, & Vinerean, 2013; Han, Kim & Kim, 2011; Harris & Goode, 2004; Jamaluddin, Hanafiah, & Zulkifly, 2013).

### **History of Brand Loyalty**

The classical literature on brand loyalty was written 90 years ago by Copeland (1923). Since the work of Copeland (1923), no consensus has been reached on the definition of brand loyalty, which reflects the complex and evolutionary nature of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is also a broadly defined construct with different definitions and interpretations. Oliver (1999, p.34) offered one of the definitions of brand loyalty as “A deeply held psychological commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/ service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.”

The concept of brand loyalty has evolved dramatically from a one-dimensional structure to a multi-dimensional structure involving several determinants. In today’s competitive business environment, brand loyalty is inevitable because developing and maintaining long-term relationships with customers ensures long-term business sustainability and profitability (Reichheld, 1990). Since loyalty is the subject of social psychology, the study of brand loyalty draws the social psychology theory involving behavior and attitude. There are several theories involving the attitude concept, such as the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), the Theory of Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants (Fazio, 1990), the Theory of Trying (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990), and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The widely adapted multi-dimensional model of attitude in the field of social psychology has been the classic Tripartite Model of Attitude (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960), consisting of cognitive, affective, and conative components. The cognitive component of attitude deals with beliefs and thoughts about a brand. The affective component of attitudes makes reference to feelings or emotions about a brand. This component is absent in Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior. The conative component refers to past behaviors or experiences with a brand. The trilogy components of attitude encompass different views about attitude as separable components of attitude but are moderately correlated which each other.

Bandyopadhyay and Martell (2007) postulated that the major theorization in behavioral brand loyalty is that persistent repurchase of a brand in observed behavior alone is capable of throwing light on the issue of brand loyalty. From the stochastic point of view, a one-dimensional brand loyalty model observes brand loyalty in terms of purchasing patterns, sequence, proportion, probability or occurrences, and attempts to define brand loyalty using a one-dimensional paradigm. However, one-dimensional brand loyalty adopting behavior as a single dimension cannot explain the motivation for consistent repeat purchase behavior. The stochastic paradigm alone is insufficient to explain brand loyalty and, therefore, a deterministic paradigm has to be employed.

A valid measure is essential for a better understanding of the concept of brand loyalty. Knowing the limitations of a measurement method is crucial for a correct interpretation of the results of a study. It is helpful to have an understanding of the structured review of the major categories of brand loyalty measures. The structured review starts with a discussion of the brand loyalty conceptual definitions followed by brand loyalty measures. Conceptual definitions are abstract descriptions of the phenomenon being studied, and the operational definitions are the measurement methods. Conceptual definitions are necessary to assess the construct validity using the adopted measurement methods. Without conceptual definitions, the correctness of

brand loyalty measures cannot be evaluated with meaningful results and interpretations. Oliver (1999) posited that behavioral loyalty alone is not able to explain the motivational and the psychological aspects of brand loyalty, which warrants research on the attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty.

Attitudinal loyalty involves identifying the psychological functions that drive consumers to repurchase a brand like commitment and intention. Attitudinal measures are able to distinguish brand loyalty from repeat buying based on stated preferences, commitment, or purchase intentions of the consumers emphasizing the cognitive element of brand loyalty. Attitudinal measures can facilitate the choice of the right decision unit based on surveys where it is possible to get data from the decision-maker rather than the purchaser. Attitudinal measures give insight into the motivations of the customers' choice behavior, and these motivations are less likely to be influenced by random short-run fluctuations. However, attitudinal measures may not be an accurate representation of reality because they are not based on actual purchases. A consumer may rationalize his or her choice when questioned by the researcher and make up an evaluation of brands even when no explicit evaluation is made in real shopping situations.

Moreover, other variables than attitudes are known to influence actual purchases, such as budget constraints. Therefore, the validity of attitudinal measures depends on the strength of the attitude-behavior relationship. In addition, attitudinal measures are often based on data observed at a single point in time. The incidental nature might be reduced by collecting data on a longitudinal basis but the costs in doing so may be prohibitive. However, one-dimension attitudinal loyalty is inadequate in explaining or predicting the actual repeat purchase behavior. Based on the literature review, measuring and operationalizing one-dimensional brand loyalty can be misleading and insufficient to explain brand loyalty. Subsequently, behavior and attitude are simultaneously incorporated as brand loyalty dimensions to form a two-dimensional brand loyalty model.

The two-dimensional brand loyalty model then evolved into a multi-dimensional model incorporating attitude structure (affective, cognitive, and conative) as components of attitude to explain attitude from the psychological point of view. Behavior is still regarded as a single dimension, but attitude is regarded as a hierarchical dimension with three sub-dimensions of affective, cognitive, and conative. The multi-dimensional model of brand loyalty also incorporates the antecedents or determinants of brand loyalty. Among the determinants of brand loyalty are brand image (brand personality and brand value), trust (trustworthiness and dependability), commitment (devotion, lack of competition, and switching cost), importance of relationship (riskiness, cost, and importance of product), word of mouth (willingness to recommend and profitability for referrals), and satisfaction (satisfaction with service and satisfaction with brand).

Oliver (1999) scrutinized the issues of multi-dimensionality of brand loyalty, and his conceptualization of brand loyalty implied that loyalty is neither a dichotomy (loyalty and no loyalty), nor multi-category but a sequence of continuum where loyalty formulation commences with cognitive loyalty, followed by affective loyalty to conative loyalty or intentional loyalty and finally the actual purchase. Harris and Goode (2004) considered this multi-dimension of brand loyalty as the most comprehensive evaluation of brand loyalty constructs. Identifying the determinants of brand loyalty is a common purpose of research in the field of brand loyalty.

The results of brand loyalty studies tend to be overlapping, as little research has been done to compare the relative influence of this construct, due to the difficulties in defining and measuring it. This gap has generated a new call for research to examine simultaneously the relative influence of this construct in various industries.

### **Tripartite Model Attitude**

#### *Theoretical and Conceptual Framework*

The Tripartite Model of Attitude Structure can be used as a theory or theoretical framework to guide the exploration on behavioral and attitudinal brand loyalty.

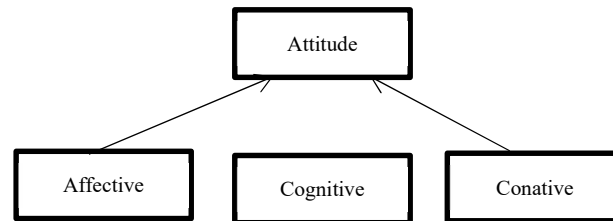


Figure 1. Tripartite Theory of Attitude Structure

The Tripartite Model of Attitude Structure of loyalty received considerable debate on whether attitude predicts behavior. Several scholars postulated that attitudes do not always predict behavior, and they identified other factors that moderate the attitude-behavior relationship (McGuire, 1985; Zanna & Rempel, 1988). Attitude is a hypothetical construct inaccessible to direct observation because attitude is not part of a person's physical characteristics. It has to be inferred from behavior and can be inferred from measurable responses, which reflect positive or negative evaluations of the attitude.

However, there is virtually no limitation to the nature of responses that can be scrutinized. The classical categories of responses are cognition, affect, and conation, which comprise verbal and non-verbal responses (Hilgard, 1980; McGuire, 1966). Cognitive responses reflect perceptions of and thoughts about the attitude. There is no direct access to the person's thoughts and perceptions because it is latent that can only be inferred from external observable clues. Non-verbal cognitive responses are quite difficult to assess, and the clue about attitudes is indirect. Affective responses from which attitudes can be inferred are related to evaluations of and feelings towards the attitude. Facial expressions, bodily reactions, and other physiological changes constitute non-verbal responses.

Conative responses are behavioral inclinations, intentions, commitments, and actions with respect to the attitude. The measuring scale for conative responses can include verbal expression, what people say they do, plan to do, or would do under certain circumstances. Attitudes can be inferred from cognition, affect, and conation responses, and each response category can reflect a different theoretical component of attitude (McGuire, 1985). In this context, attitude is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of cognition, affect, and conation, where the evaluation of each of these components can vary and differ (Breckler, 1984; Ostrom, 1969). The Tripartite Model of Attitude Structure presented by Rosenberg and Hovland (1960) is a hierarchical model that includes cognition, affect, and conation as first-order factors and attitude as a single second-order factor (Ajzen, 2005). According to Ajzen (2005), the three components are defined independently, comprising verbal and non-verbal response classes that can be classified further into broader categories with different labels to evaluate attitude. However, since the three components reflect attitude, they should correlate with each other

with evidence for discriminant validity measures assessing cognition, affect, and conation, as reported by Breckler (1984).

In exploring the behavioral and attitudinal brand loyalty using the Tripartite Model of Attitude Structure, it is appropriate to include behavior in the theoretical framework as follows:

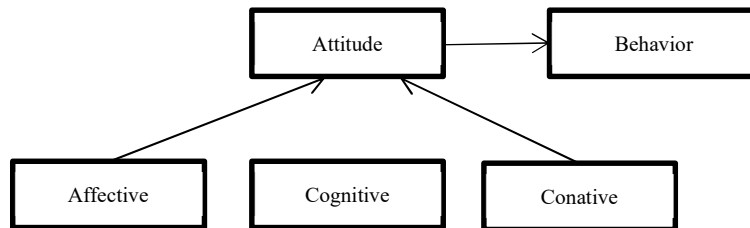


Figure 2. Behavior is included in the Tripartite Model of Attitude Structure

This theoretical framework allows researchers to measure the attitudinal components and behavior that is presumably under the control of the attitude component. The behavior-attitude relationship that has been conceptualized can be operationalized by using the relevant measuring scales. The Tripartite Model of Attitude Structure has been subjected to a multiplicity of interpretations where the three-component definition of attitude permits broad interpretation for a given set of data. Other independent variables (IV) or determinants or moderators or mediators that influence attitude can be included in the theoretical framework to extend its nomological networks in future research.

Several other theories are available for this purpose, namely Theory of Planned Behavior, Theory of Reasoned Action, and Social Cognitive Theory, but for the purpose of this theoretical analysis and synthesis, the Tripartite Model of Attitude Structure is used as the underpinning theory for the brand loyalty framework. Suitable measuring scales to measure the dimensions and determinants of behavioral and attitudinal loyalty (affective, cognitive, and conative) is used based on the operationalization of each construct.

### **Hypothesis Development**

The hypothesis development of this theoretical construct is in congruence with the theoretical framework of Tripartite Model of Attitude structure. The objective of this theoretical research is to determine the effects of attitudinal loyalty on behavioral loyalty in any specific industry. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Attitudinal loyalty dimensions (affective loyalty, cognitive loyalty, and conative loyalty) have a positive effect on behavioral loyalty.

This hypothesis can be either accepted or rejected through confirmatory factor analysis and regression analysis.

### **Operationalization Of The Construct**

The study variables can be operationalized by selecting the appropriate instrument that will be used to test the concept, and the instrument chosen must be congruent with the theoretical framework. Operationalization is a process of defining the measurement of a phenomenon that is not directly measurable involving types of data and identifying sources of error in measurement. Selecting an appropriate measuring scale must take into consideration the

research objectives, the number of scale points, and the number of dimensions and determinants. Characteristics of a good measurement are validity, reliability, and practicality. Primary data on the variables of interest on brand loyalty can be obtained by using a structured questionnaire involving measurement scales (Likert scale) for each variable. Data collected from the sample will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). A sampling frame is not available since the respondents comprise general consumers, whose exact identities are anonymous. Thus, non-probability sampling techniques such as quota sampling will be used to understand the nature of their attitudes and the relationship with behavior.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

As for data analysis and discussion, this conceptual paper follows the empirical evidence set forth by Abaidullah (2017) and Suhartanto (2011). Abaidullah (2017) and Suhartanto (2011) validated the tripartite model of attitude in two separate industries, namely, the agriculture produce retail industry and hotel service industry. Abaidullah (2017) posited that conation is an important sub-dimension of attitude in the agriculture produce retail industry. Suhartanto (2011) posited that affection is an important sub-dimension of attitude in the hotel service industry. Both studies agreed that different industry calls for different roles of attitude sub-dimensions comprising cognition, affection, and conation as tripartite attitude components.

### **Research Implications**

The outcome of this proposed study is expected to yield benefits to both the academia and the industry. In terms of theoretical contributions, the framework offers an extension to the Tripartite Model of Attitude within the marketing context, specifically one that involves Malaysian consumers. Such endeavors will undoubtedly narrow the literature gap concerning the Tripartite Model of Attitude, of which its present use is limited to fields outside marketing and consumer behavior. The multi-dimensional interpretations of attitude are widely used in studies concerning social and health psychology, yet the model is still considered highly relevant for both marketers and consumer behavior scholars. Consumers' ability to respond in purchasing decisions is still largely shaped by their mental models, which are extensively driven by their emotions (affect), thoughts (cognitive), and willingness (conation). By pursuing the proposed research into practice, marketers and promoters shall benefit from a better understanding of consumers' state of readiness to respond to the initiated marketing activities, such as advertising, promotions and loyalty programs. Despite the never-ending debate on which particular structure of attitude should be appropriately used in psychological research, the classic Tripartite Model of Attitude remains relevant. To conclude, the stable nature of the multi-dimensional Tripartite Model of Attitude construct has provided it with a bright potential to exhibit positive linkages with behavioral loyalty, that will be highly beneficial for both researchers (in enriching the extant literature) and practitioners (in predicting the outcomes of their marketing programs).

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