

Brand Loyalty Drivers of Indian Gen Z

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Abstract

Introduction: Born somewhere in mid-1990, Gen Z is estimated to be around 2 billion young people (Eva Heukäuffer, Jane Cheung and Trevor Davis, July 2017) and be the largest segment of customers globally in coming years. Some studies about Gen Z have taken shape in western world and a very few have been done on Indian Gen Z. Marketers unanimously agree and realize that to market to each generation it is imperative to study their characteristics.

Research Objectives: Brand loyalty is implicit in the attitude and the behavior of the customers regarding their willingness to repurchase the product and actual repurchase action (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). In dynamic technology market, brand value is largely based on mix of functional and social benefits offered by brand (Yeh et al. (2016). This study explores the Brand value dimensions and its relation with Brand Loyalty of Indian Generation Z in smart phones.

Research Methodology: This is a cross-sectional exploratory research. The study includes a survey of Gen Z through a structured Questionnaire on a sample of 300 respondents in the state of Maharashtra. Scale items were adopted from Boakye et al. (2014), Sweeney and Soutar (2001), Tsai (2005), Sondoh et al. (2007). Factor analysis was employed to identify the underlying dimensions of brand loyalty of Generation Z using smart phones.

Conclusion and Managerial implications: It highlights that for Gen Z, brand value comprises of functional dimensions (Functional Value-Quality and Functional Value-price) as well as affective dimensions (emotional value, social value).

The results indicate that out of the above four dimensions of brand value; three have significant influence on brand loyalty. These three dimensions are Functional value (Quality), Social Value and Emotional value. The only non-significant dimension of Brand value was functional value price.

This gives us enough basis to state that brand Loyalty of Gen Z is very significantly influenced by the affective dimensions and less by Functional dimension.

Thus, marketers can drive brand loyalty among Gen Z by effectively formulating the strategy based on offering Quality, Emotional value and social value.

Keywords: Generation Z, Brand Loyalty, Brand Value, Indian, Drivers, Strategy

Introduction

By the time we are aggressively marketing to millennials, the next demographic cohort is in the final years of their formal education and some of them have already started with their professional career! Welcome Gen Z! Call them post millennials, iGeneration or Gen Z. Their consumption pattern and buying decisions are very different from earlier generations (Williams and Page, 2010; Schlossberg, 2016). Gen Z is estimated to be around 2 billion young people (Eva Heukäuffer, Jane Cheung and Trevor Davis, 2017) and be the largest segment of customers globally in coming years. This thriving segment is very distinctive and discreet in their behavior specifically with regards to Brands. Since the study focuses on Gen Z, it is important to ascertain the birth year span of Gen Z to arrive at Operational definition. Gen Z birth years have been defined variedly but are commonly accepted to be born between 1997 to 2011. Hence for the purpose of this study Gen Z is defined by their birth years starting from 1997 to 2011. (Oblinger and Oblinger 2005). This is the generation that is born in internet-connected world and parented by Gen X/early millennials.

Brand Loyalty is a significant aspect of consumer behavior. Brand Loyalty becomes more important and crucial in case of generations, which have adopted internet at an early age. (Bernstein, 2015; Schlossberg, 2016)

Brand loyalty can be described as the psychological and behavioral factors that determine the commitment of the consumer to a specific brand in terms of future repurchases, so brand loyalty can be considered the favorable attitude of the customer towards a particular brand (Pride & Ferrell, 2012:400; MacDowell, Batten & National Broadcaster Association, 2005:28).

Many studies have explored the factors driving Brand Loyalty (Lee, Moon, Kim, Mun - 2015 :Aktuglu ve Temel, 2016: 44) but no Gen Z specific research seems to have been done. In addition, not much research around Gen Z with specific reference to Indian Gen Z seems to be available. Brand loyalty has two dimensions: attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty is characterized as the willingness of the consumer to repurchase the brand irrespective of the difficulties, while behavioral loyalty is manifested by repurchasing action (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Huang et al., 2015). Bandyopadhyay and Martell (2007) comment that attitudinal loyalty significantly determines behavioral loyalty and guarantees a lifetime customer-brand relationship. Hence for this study we shall be looking at the Attitudinal Loyalty dimension of Brand Loyalty wherein customer's attitude towards Brand is driven by the value he seeks form it.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the underlying dimensions of brand value
2. To examine the relationship between brand value dimensions and brand loyalty.

Literature Review

Generation theory proposes that each cohort share similar beliefs and attitudes because of the similarity of their life experiences (Meriac et al., 2010). Gen Z is unique as they are the young adults who were born surrounded by brands and are highly informed, tech savvy,

innovative and creative (Bassiouni Hackley, 2014; Fister-Gale, 2015) which has ensued this generation to display a different reaction to the brands as compared to earlier generations (Schlossberg 2016). Consumer behaviour focuses on decisions and actions related to identifying and purchasing products and services for their consumption (Durmaz etc., 2011: 116). It is very important for marketers to understand about their choices and decision making to target them specifically for their products. There are some factors, which influence the consumer behaviour and govern the consumer decision-making process (Akat etc., 2006: 15). Broadly these factors can be grouped in two categories, Marketing mix factors and economic, psychological, sociocultural, situational, and demographic factors. Gen Z poses a big challenge to the retailers as they have experienced a lot in their brief life span and witnessed colossal changes in Social, Political, Technological and Economic Front (Earnst & Young 2015). A brand is likely to attract customer towards buying by offering the product attributes, which are unique and innovative in comparison to other brands (Andrews & Kim, 2007). Since they are having more exposure towards Brands and choice in consumption due to Technology and changing trends, they consider firm is manipulative and believe more in experience and their knowledge (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001). Their reactions are varied to different brands and much unpredicted. They seek value while selecting and using a particular brand and even referring to their friends and family. Brand value can be defined in different ways as per the perspectives of different customers.

Brand Value

“Brand value is at the heart of what consumers pursue from a marketing exchange “ (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Operationalization of brand value can be seen from two perspectives. First perspective looks at brand value as one-dimensional while the second perspective looks at it as multidimensional. (Leroi-Werelds et al., 2014).

Functional value

Functional value can be defined as utility obtained from the quality of the product and the expected product performance and is key factor in influencing the customer for the choice of product. Key determinants of the functional value are Price and quality of the product. For a technology product like smart phone, functional attributes will include features like display, camera, music, battery and storage etc. providing convenience and accessibility to internet. (Liao & Hsieh, 2013; Park & Han, 2013). Talking about Gen Z, more apps like maps, information search, location based apps and games are of immense importance (Okazaki & Mendez, 2013a). Previous studies have discussed the relation between functional value and brand loyalty. Functional value creates satisfaction and higher customer preference which in turn drives higher brand loyalty.

Emotional Value:

Customers also are attached to their product once they get the feeling or affective state spawned from the product. Emotional value range from playfulness to pleasure depending on features and attributes of device and the usage of customers (Alba & Williams, 2013; Arruda-Filho et al., 2010). In case of smart phone, aesthetics and

fashion appeal also play an important role to enhance emotional value (Liao and Hsieh (2013). It is observed that customers having greater emotional value for a product or brand displays more brand loyalty (Pihlström and Brush (2008) and has positive word of mouth encouraging others for brand repurchase. Thus, emotional value has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

Social Value

Enhancing social self-concept or self-image is something, which gen Z, is careful about. Smart phone decides the social acceptance and the level of social belongingness for customers that leads the customers to use the smart phones enhancing their social value. Arruda-Filho et al. (2010) carried out netnographic analysis of i phone users and concluded that customers derive high social value acquiring and using iPhone. Using iPhone symbolise high social status and luxury (Liao & Hsieh, 2013). Customer perceiving higher social value from a brand display greater brand loyalty (Pihlström and Brush, 2008). Thus, social value positively influences brand loyalty.

Brand Loyalty

Previous studies have defined and upgraded the definition of Brand loyalty with changing times and generation with new perspective. However, most basic definition remains the same, preferring a particular brand to others repetitively after using and evaluating each time (Jacoby and Chestnut 1978). Punniyamorthy, Raj (2007) discussed evolution of Brand loyalty in three phases. First phase emphasized loyalty as an outcome of customer behaviour, which was in line with earlier researches based on mathematical models (Markov chain or linear regression). Second phase was marked with criticism from many contemporary studies (Dick and Basu 1994; Cooper Withey, M. J. 1989) stating attitude and emotions as integral part of repurchase decision along with other situational factors such as lack of alternatives or high cost for switching. Here the Brand loyalty is professed based on level of liking for the brand. The third phase was more comprehensive as it encompassed Brand loyalty as multidimensional component measured through multivariate analysis (Park, 1996).

This is further reinstated by adding the psychological dimensions as behaviour (Oliver 1999) and attitude (Gee et al., 2008). In most of the studies, it is either the enabler or the outcome of other attributes (Aaker, 1991; Erdem and Swait, 1998) and hence a very important asset for the brand as well as the marketers. In one of the studies, Consumer Value theory is related to Brand loyalty (Yeha, Wanga, and Yieh 2016) wherein repeated purchase is based on customer's decision about the value proposition expected from the brand. This is in line with (Yang and Petersson, 2004) concept which underlines value as subordinate goal regulating loyalty at subordinate level. Again as value concept is derived from Utility theory where the customer purchase decision is based on brand evaluation as per their attributes and utility to the customers. (Zeithaml, 1988:3). Value is perceived to be higher with high quality evaluations yielding more benefits to the customers (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Here the value or the benefits are

proposed beyond functional aspect (Hirschman and Holbrook's, 1982). This was reflected in Sheth et al.'s (1991) and Pihlström and Brush (2008) where they highlighted functional, social, emotion and epistemic and conditional values as part of customer value concept. Sweeney and Sutar, (2001), expanded this research by classifying customer value into functional, social and emotional dimensions in retail perspective. Later studies concluded that customer value can be expressed beyond functional/Quality aspect to functional/value for money (Kim et al., 2011; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Brand loyalty is accepted as behavioural component consisting of repeat purchase and Attitudinal component as level of dispositional commitment towards the brand having some unique value to the customers (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). This is translated towards brand trust, which is crucial in influencing the brand loyalty of customers (Ramesh and Advani, 2005).

Brand loyalty is very significant dimension of brand value, as brand loyalty increases the brand value tend to increase accordingly.

Research Methodology

The present study is exploratory in nature. The study included a survey of Gen Z through an Online Questionnaire on a sample of 300 respondents in the state of Maharashtra. This research considered non-probability (Convenience) sampling. The scope of the study was focused on emerging devices especially 'smart phones'.

Operationalization of Variables

This study was primarily a quantitative study wherein respondents were students from Pune. Convenient sampling was used and the structured questionnaire was employed to collect the responses.

Survey participants were asked to mention the brand of smartphone they currently own and then evaluate it on given parameters. The total sample size targeted was 300 respondents.

Brand Value consists of four components. Functional Value (FVQ) was identified by attributes, design and Boakye et al. (2014) measured reliability with five-item scale. Functional Value was Price identified by Price and economic value was measured by four-item scale proposed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001). For Emotional value as well, the scale adopted was of Sweeney and Soutar (2001). Social values (SV) was measured through scale proposed by Tsai (2005), Sweeney, and Soutar (2001).

Data Analysis Result

Sample Profile Our sample consisted 106 male respondents and 161 female respondents of total 267. The sample consisted MBA students, few of them are already working (10.5%) or have their own business (1%) who are from different states, predominantly from Maharashtra (54%), followed by UP (37%), West Bengal (20%) and Delhi (20%). The working students are on sabbatical or taken study leave for the course and self-employed have their family

business. However, largely it was sample of respondents who were categorically fussy about their smart phones and upgrade it regularly.

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	106	39.7
Gender	161	60.3
Occupation		
Students	236	88.4
Employed	28	10.5
Own business/professional	3	1.1
Average number of years of mobile phone usage		5.28 years

Initially an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions of the brand value. The principal component analysis procedure indicated four dimensions of brand value, which accounted for 60.58 percent of the variance named as emotional value, social value, functional value quality and functional value price. These dimensions are in line with the dimensions of value proposed by earlier theories. The details of the EFA are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Brand Value - VARIMAX-Rotated Component Analysis Factor Matrix

Factor	Item	Loading	% Variance Explained
Emotional value	<i>Brand X gives me pleasure</i>	.827	19.647
	<i>Brand X makes me feel delighted</i>	.809	
	<i>Brand X makes me feel good</i>	.761	
	<i>Brand X increases my frequency of use</i>	.700	
Social value	<i>Brand X helps me to better fit into my social group</i>	.907	19.592
	<i>Brand X helps me feel accepted</i>	.894	
	<i>Brand X enhances the perceptions that I have a desirable lifestyle</i>	.893	
	<i>Usage of brand X prevents me from looking cheap</i>	.598	
Functional value quality	<i>Brand X is reliable in its performance</i>	.848	19.081
	<i>Brand X has an acceptable standard of quality</i>	.841	
	<i>Brand X has good technical specifications</i>	.727	
	<i>I like the design of Brand X</i>	.632	
Functional value price	<i>Brand X is reasonably priced</i>	.885	18.817
	<i>Brand X would be economical</i>	.853	
	<i>Brand X is good for their price</i>	.837	
	<i>Brand X offers value for money</i>	.830	

Subsequently, multiple regression was carried out to examine the influence of each of the four types of values identified above on brand loyalty. The results are summarized in Table 2. The results indicate that out of the four dimensions of brand value, three have significant influence on brand loyalty. The only non-significant dimension of value dimension was functional value price.

Table 2. Multiple Regression results

Variables	Standardized Beta	t-value	F-Value	R-square
Functional value quality	.272	3.996 (p < 0.05)	28.259 (p < 0.05)	.301
Functional value price	-.088	-1.649		
Emotional value	.423	5.236 (p < 0.05)		
Social value	.171	2.607 (p < 0.05)		

Note: The dependent variable is Brand Loyalty

Discussions

The results reinforce the previous studies which have argued brand value to be multidimensional (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Aaker, 2002; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007; Gummerus, 2013).

This study indicates that for Gen Z, brand value comprises of major dimensions namely Emotional Value, Social Value, Functional Value (Quality) and Functional Value (Price).

It highlights that for Gen Z, brand value comprises of functional dimensions (Functional Value-Quality and price) as well as affective dimensions (emotional value, social value).

The results indicate that out of the above four dimensions of brand value; three have significant influence on brand loyalty. These three dimensions are Functional value (Quality), Social Value and Emotional value. The only non-significant dimension of Brand value was functional value price.

This gives us enough basis to state that brand Loyalty of Gen Z is very significantly influenced by the affective dimensions and less by Functional dimension.

The affective dimension comprised of Emotional Value and Social value. This gives a significant insight about Gen Z. Gen Z will remain loyal to a brand that offers them better emotional value and social value.

The significant influence of social value over brand loyalty for Gen Z is a significant different finding over similar studies done for Gen Y and emerging devices (Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2017). It suggests that the enhancement of social image or the creation of a specific social identity through the purchase of new devices (smartphones) is a primary concern for Gen Z where Gen Y does not seem to be concerned about it.

The influence of emotional value on brand loyalty clearly indicates that brands should create engaging experiences for Gen Z, which make them feel good and delighted for driving brand loyalty.

The influence of Social value on brand loyalty indicates that brands should create opportunities for Gen Z to help them gain recognition through brand affiliation/ownership, enhances their self-image and provides better social acceptance. This might help brands to develop campaigns that position the band as giving social identity. This can in turn drive brand loyalty.

Quality as a dimension of function value seem to be influencing the brand loyalty. This implies that Gen Z would be more loyal to brands that offer good specifications, reliable performance and the design rather than the price.

Thus, marketers can drive brand loyalty among Gen Z by effectively formulating the strategy based on offering Quality, Emotional value and social value.

Limitations and suggestions for further research.

This study is confined to a specific geographic region and hence there are limitations for generalization of the findings. This study being 'Cross sectional' in nature, longitudinal study is required to assess whether the dimensions of Brand value remain the same as found out or change with time for Gen Z.

Based on this study further studies can be done to study impact of the socio-cultural variables on shaping brand loyalty.

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