The Impact of Brand Commitment on the Satisfaction Loyalty Relationship

Brands continue to be a central issue in the marketing management literature (Fournier, 1998). Over the past decade, marketing scholars have developed a wide body of literature in the field of relationship marketing (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). For the most part, this literature has developed in two areas of study; business-to-business exchanges and consumer services. Recently, researchers have started to investigate the relational variables that lie at the heart of a consumer-brand relationship (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002).

The commitment construct is central to marketing relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and it is becoming well-researched in marketing. Many marketing scholars have borrowed from the Allen and Meyer (1990) three-component model of organizational commitment and applied it in a marketing context (Fullerton, 2003; Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Gruen-Summers and Acito, 2000; Harrison-Walker, 2001). In marketing, we generally recognize that customer commitment has at least two components, an affective component and a continuance component (Fullerton, 2003; Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Harrison-Walker, 2002).

There can be no question that consumers form relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998). It is also likely the case that commitment lies at the heart of these relationships, although there have been few definitive studies of the role that customer commitment plays in the consumer-brand relationship (Coulter, Price and Feick, 2003). Intuitively, affective commitment would lie at the heart of a consumer brand relationship because consumers come to identify with and be involved with their brands (Fournier, 1998). The question is whether or not continuance commitment exists in consumer brand relationships. If it does, this would further validate the work in marketing that has borrowed from the organizational commitment literature. Secondly, how does each component of commitment play a role in consumer-brand relationships?

These questions were examined in the context of a consumer relationship with a retail brand. The brand chosen was a major international retailer of men’s, women’s and children’s clothing (The Gap). Participants were undergraduate students in a large Canadian Business School. There were three basic conclusions derived from this study. First, it was found that the multiple component perspective on customer commitment that has been applied in many business to business and consumer services contexts (Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Fullerton, 2003; Gruen, Summers and Acito, 2000) also seems to apply in the context of a consumer brand relationship. Second, customer commitment is a complete mediator of the brand satisfaction- brand loyalty-related intentions relationshi.. This is important because it means that customer commitment to the brand is a more important determinant of repurchase than customer satisfaction with the elements of the brand. Third, there is some evidence of a dark-side to marketing relationships through the negative effect of continuance commitment. While continuance commitment had a weak effect on customer repurchase intentions, it had a negative impact on advocacy intentions. It is necessary to examine the extent to which both forms of customer commitment play a role in other consumer brand relationships before more definitive conclusions can be made.