Research Article
Analyzing Sport Consumer Behaviour toward Sportswear Store: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to elucidate in sportswear store setting the relationships among psychological traits, loyalty to salesperson and behavioural intentions in three different sport consumers according to their switching behaviour. By means of structural equation modelling, we find a clear difference in the behaviour of the three groups. The results show that loyalty to salesperson is more influenced by need for social affiliation for the stayer customers. Whereas, for the dissatisfied and the satisfied switchers, need for variety makes the greatest contribution in explaining customer loyalty toward salespersons. These findings imply that sportswear stores must concentrate on employing enthusiastic, sociable salespersons who genuinely like being with people; and salesperson should be trained to solve patron problems and become personally concerned with the customer.

INTRODUCTION

In retailing, relationship marketing perspective asserts that customers maintain relationships with the store as well as with the salesperson and that these relationships build the basis for several retail loyalties (Berry and Gressham, 1986). Moreover, several authors show that interpersonal relationships are more important in retail settings where customers prefer personalized service and where retailers really intend to build a long term relationship with the customers and desire to invest in a relationship building (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008). Recently, Reynolds and Beatty (1999) affirm that in these relationships selling contexts the relationship loyalty of the customer in to the salesperson and not the firm. Since these customers are more likely to build a high relationship quality with their salesperson than they are with the store (Beatty *et al.*, 2010). This salesperson loyalty is then thought to "spill over" and influences customer behavioural intentions. This hypothesis has received some empirical support (Gremler and Brown, 1996). Therefore, the few researches that have investigated retail relationships show that a relationship customer forms his primary loyalty to the salesperson which then positively affects customer behaviour.

Yet, we find in related study evidence that the impact of a relationship loyalty to the salesperson reach far beyond merely "spill over" to behavioural intentions. For instance, in their research, Macintosh and Lockshin (1997) note that an interpersonal relationship will be connected to purchase behaviour over and above the impacts that accrue through one's feelings about the retail store. So, relationship loyalty to salesperson is likely to lead to different store level outcomes. Moreover, no past research has studied this relationship; we find multiple reasons in other studies that corroborate this affirmation. First, pervious researches hypothesize several outcomes of loyalty. For instance, in their study, Dick and Basu (1994) assert that, in retail setting, loyalty to salesperson can lead directly to a number of important outcomes. Second, the implementation of loyalty to salespeople and its impact on retail store outcomes is more likely to occur in those retail contexts where customers as well as retailers prefer close relationships (Beatty *et al.*, 2010). It is in these contexts where relationship satisfaction, relational commitment and interpersonal trust are able to form, thus laying the foundation for an interpersonal loyalty (Oliver, 1997). In addition, customers develop relationships with vendors since they appreciate some social bonds and these bonds are developed in close contact as well as customized personal services (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008).

In USA, the overall market size of the sportswear industry is increasing from 145000000 dollar in 2007 to 166000000 dollar by 2014 (Just-Style.Com, 2008). Just-Style.Com. (2008) states that individual in Canada or USA spends 56 dollar on footwear. Whereas, Korean consumer spends 64.8 dollar. In effect, the sportswear

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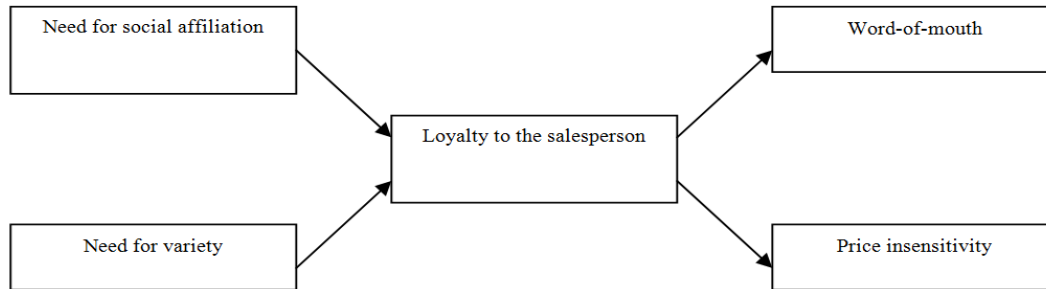
Fig. 1: Conceptual model

market of Korea is estimated at over 2.5000000 dollar. Nevertheless, developed countries preserve 70% of the sportswear market (Just-Style.Com., 2008), at the same time as the rest of the world, comprising 86% of the population, claimed 30%. By 2014, some academicians such as Eunjua *et al.* (2008) report that the sports shoe market of China would be the biggest retail market: over 2000000 dollar in 2006. Effectively recognize reachable segments of sufficient size is central to this process.

In order to give insight into the design and implementation of effective sport consumer retention tactics, we categorize shoppers into three segments: stayer shoppers, dissatisfied switchers (shoppers who switch because of their unsatisfactory experiences) and satisfied switchers (shoppers who switch because of other reasons than dissatisfaction) (Ganesh *et al.*, 2000). It is worth noting that previous studies affirm that a relationship loyalty within certain stores will be increasingly focused on and in fact channelled to the salesperson. Moreover, this loyalty to the salesperson will have a significant effect on customer behaviour. Yet, no study to date has investigated these different streams of research in an integrated model of loyalty to the salesperson. Some authors, for example Macintosh and Lockshin (1997), have recognized this gap by specifically calling for investigation of the impacts of salesperson loyalty on retail store outcomes among relationship customers.

In response to this call, it is our purpose to empirically test an integrated model of salesperson loyalty in sport retailing, specifically focusing on one hand on personality traits and on the other hand on important behavioural consequences of loyalty to the salesperson. By demonstrating that loyalty to the salesperson is directly affected by need for social affiliation and need for variety and furthermore loyalty is indirectly connected to significant behavioural intentions such as word-of-mouth as well as price insensitivity.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on this previous research, we hypothesize an integrated model which exhibits the importance of loyalty to the salesperson in retail store context. As shown in Fig. 1, need for social affiliation and need for variety are hypothesized as a key determinant of salesperson loyalty. Loyalty to the salesperson is also hypothesized to result in four important behavioural outcomes: word-of-mouth and price insensitivity. The model is now discussed in more detail and formal research hypotheses are advanced.

Need for social affiliation and loyalty to the salesperson: Bloemer *et al.* (2003) define need for social affiliation as a preference to be with other people and to engage in relationships. From a service setting, need for social affiliation can be fulfilled in retailing because shopper contact is needed in this people-based service delivery process. This process enables shoppers to have encounters with the service provider and also with other customers (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2007). From a trade friendship perspective, according to Bloemer *et al.* (2003), this concept has been referred to as sociability and can be considered as a tendency to affiliate with others and to prefer being with others to remaining alone. Price and Arnould (1999) consider sociability as one of the factor affecting the development of trade friendships in a service context. The service delivered by a store is considered to be symbolic rather than functional (Sirgy *et al.*, 2000). Thus, it will be so hard for retailer to offer high quality services to consumers who dislike contact. Thus, need for social affiliation seems to be precursor to successful service delivery. According to Bloemer *et al.* (2003), need for social affiliation can be established through maintaining a relationship with a service provider. Therefore, we expect need for social affiliation to directly influence loyalty to the salesperson:

H₁: The higher the need for social affiliation the higher the level of the loyalty to the salesperson.

Need for variety and loyalty to the salesperson: Consumer may be moved by personality factors to seek variety as something primordial and desirable in itself. The tendency to seek activities has been analyzed by the Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL) theory. A generally accepted conceptual treatment of need for variety of a certain level of stimulation. When the level

of stimulation at a given instant falls below the optimum level, the person will seek additional variety from the environment in order to increase stimulation. On the other hand, if the stimulation level is above this optimum level, the person will try to reduce it (Zuckerman, 1994). In marketing, need for variety has a clear significance because it helps to elucidate difference between customers in relation to several dimensions of consumer behaviour. The majority of activities people achieve in order to recover their OSL have been encompassed by the concept "consumer exploratory behaviour" which can be defined as the search for novelty (Waters, 1974). To the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical study suggesting a connection between need for variety and loyalty to the salesperson. Burgess and Harris (1998) affirm that the OSL is important to distinguish disloyal and loyal customers. Need for variety stimulates supplier switching behaviour in spite of a perception of satisfactory relationship quality (Henning-Thurau and Klee, 1997). All of the evidence adduced on this psychological trait to suggest that customers with a high need for variety may have a lower loyalty to the salesperson. This is because their inherent need for change would make them less connected to the relationship developed with their current provider. Hence:

H₂: Need for variety is inversely related to loyalty towards the salesperson.

Loyalty to the salesperson and behavioural intentions: The conceptualisation and measurement of behavioural intentions has often remained limited (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008). In this study, in line with Zeithaml *et al.* (1996) we distinguish four biased behavioural responses. In fact, in service field, Zeithaml *et al.* (1996) suggested a comprehensive, multi-dimensional framework of consumer behaviour intentions. This framework was conceptually comprised of the following two main dimensions:

- Word-of-mouth communications
- Price insensitivity

Macintosh and Lockshin (1997) suppose that interpersonal relationship will be associated to purchase behaviour over above the impacts that accrue through one's feelings about the store. Thus, we assume there exists a positive relationship between loyalty to the salesperson and the four behavioural intentions' dimensions. We suggest the following hypotheses:

H₃ₐ: Loyalty to the salesperson is positively related to positive word-of-mouth.
H₃ᵦ: Loyalty to the salesperson is positively related to price insensitivity.

METHODOLOGY

Sample characteristics: We conducted a survey of retailing customers in Tunisia. The respondents were composed of 54.3% women and 45.7% men, ranged in age from 17 to 60 years. The sample sizes of three groups were as follows 330 stayers, 295 dissatisfied switchers and 284 satisfied switchers.

Measures: The questionnaire was based on measurement scales that have been validated and developed in previous academic researches. All constructs were measured on 5 point Likert scales. Ganesh *et al*. (2000) suggest that a company's customer base can comprise three groups of customers: stayers (customers who have not switched from other companies), dissatisfied switchers (are those who have switched from other companies because of their dissatisfaction) and satisfied switchers (are those who have switched from other firms for reasons other than dissatisfaction). Respondents were asked to indicate whether the current retail store was their first store (stayer) or they had switched from a previous store (switcher). If a respondent indicated the second alternative, he was required to state whether the reasons for doing so were because of:

- Overall dissatisfaction
- Reasons others than dissatisfaction (job relocation, the previous store closed down, etc.)

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Measurement model evaluation: The measurement model is presented in the Fig. 2.

Need for Social Affiliation (NSA), Loyalty to the Salesperson (LS), Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Need for Variety (NV) and Price Insensitivity (PI) are latent variables. The measurement model posits no unidirectional paths between latent variables. A covariance is estimated to join each latent variable with every other latent variable in the model. Letter L corresponds to the coefficient of the manifest variables to the latent variables and letter C denotes covariance between latent factors. Normality of data was tested via skewness and kurtosis statistics to detect any violation of the assumption required in structural equations modeling. The Maximum Likelihood method was used. Overall fit statistics were quite satisfactory as exhibited by χ^2 (55) = 245.012 (degrees of freedom = 55), probability level = 0.000, GFI = 0.96, AGFI = 0.93, NFI = 0.95 and RMSEA = 0.06. The modification indices were generally low as well as all the loadings were significant. Evidence for the uni-dimensionality of each construct was based upon a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) revealing that the appropriate items loaded at least 0.7 on their respective hypothesized component. A Jöreskog reliability index [$\rho = (\Sigma\lambda_i)^2 / (\Sigma\lambda_i)^2 + \Sigma var (\varepsilon_i)$] for each latent construct was
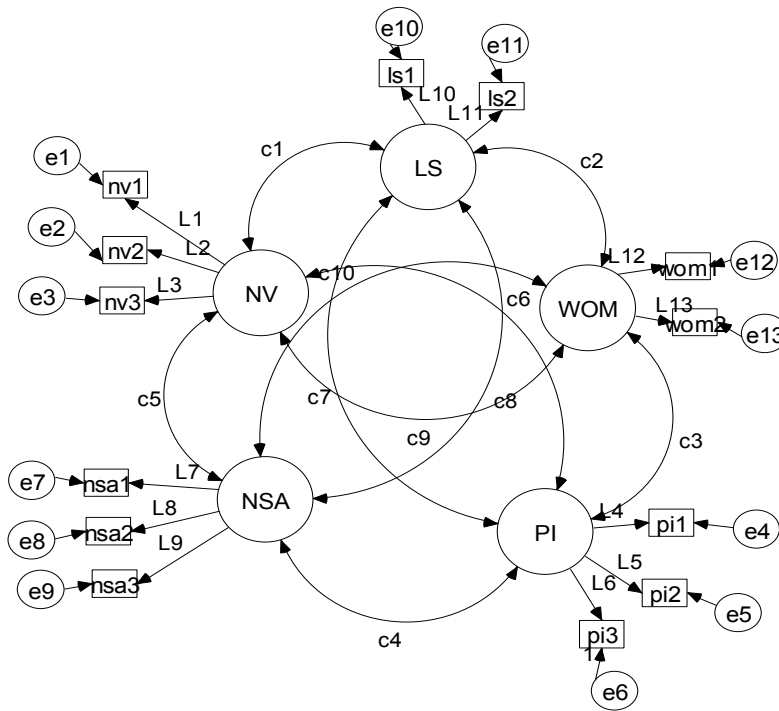
Fig. 2: The measurement model with parameters to be estimated

computed to review the extent to which items are free from random error and accordingly give up reliable findings. Reliability indexes in the measurement model ranged from 0.70 to 0.91, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Discriminant validity was tested in a series of nested confirmatory factor model comparison in which correlations between latent constructs were constrained to 1 and indeed $\Delta\chi^2$ differences were significant for all model comparisons (p<0.01). In addition, the average percentage of variance extracted for each construct was greater than 0.5. In sum, the measurement model is adequate, with evidence for uni-dimensionality, convergent validity, reliability and discriminant validity.

Overall model evaluation: The model has a χ^2 value of 246.99 (degree of freedom = 61). The Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) of 0.94 is a measure of the relative amounts of variances and covariances jointly accounted for by the model with values closer to 1 indicating a good fit. Another measure, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.05) less than 0.08 would indicate a close fit. Thus, all measures indicate a close fit.

Hypotheses testing: To investigate whether the hypotheses are supported for all the groups, we categorize the data into three groups and estimated the parameter estimates (γ and β freely) in each group. Next, we constrained all the parameter estimates in a particular group to be the same as in another group. We

performed a χ^2 difference test to evaluate the difference in fit between the unconstrained and constrained models. The difference between two χ^2 values range from 16.4 to 100.99 (df = 5, p<0.01) among three groups, which indicates that two groups are significantly different in the estimated parameters.

For the unconstrained model of stayers (n = 330), the overall fit is moderate (χ^2 = 146.006, df = 61, p<0.05, GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.91 and RMSEA = 0.06). Moreover, the model is well grounded, the potential for model specification should be considered to increase the degree to which the conceptualization captures the data and, in turn enhance the validity (Bentler and Chou, 1987) (Fig. 3).

As in Fig. 3, the findings indicate that all parameter estimates are significant, in support of the 4 hypotheses. The χ^2 value is 146.006 (df = 61), which is lower than the original model (χ^2 = 246.99, df = 61). The difference between two χ^2 is 100.99 which is significant at 0.001. These results indicate that the fit of the model in Fig. 3 has significantly improved over the original model in Fig. 2. The findings show that loyalty to salesperson moderates the bonds between psychological traits and the five dimensions of behavioral intentions. It seems that their loyalty is more influenced by need for social affiliation (γ_1 = 0.89). In addition, loyalty to salesperson has the equal impact on price insensitivity and word-of-mouth ($\beta_1 = \beta_2$= 0.5). Need for social affiliation is so important for stayers since they seek to build a steady relationship with the firm and with the other customers.
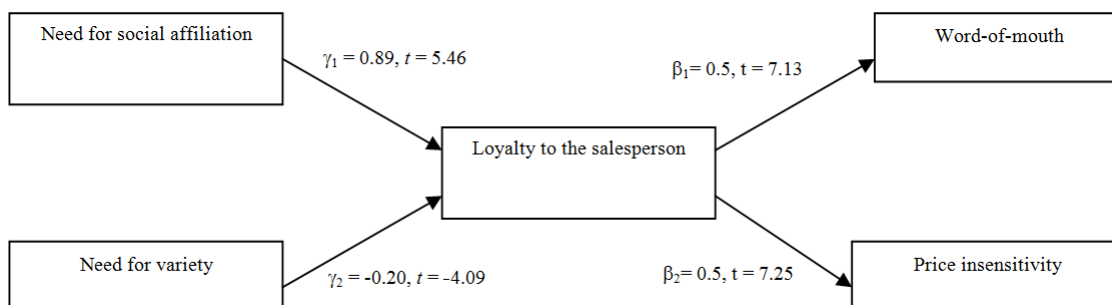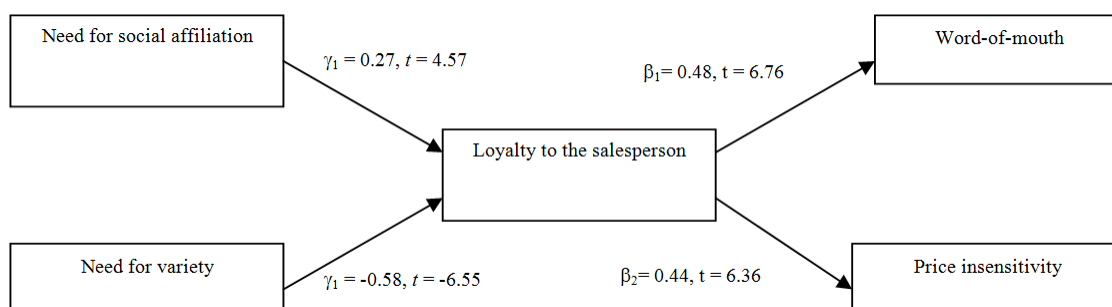
Fig. 3: Structural model of stayers

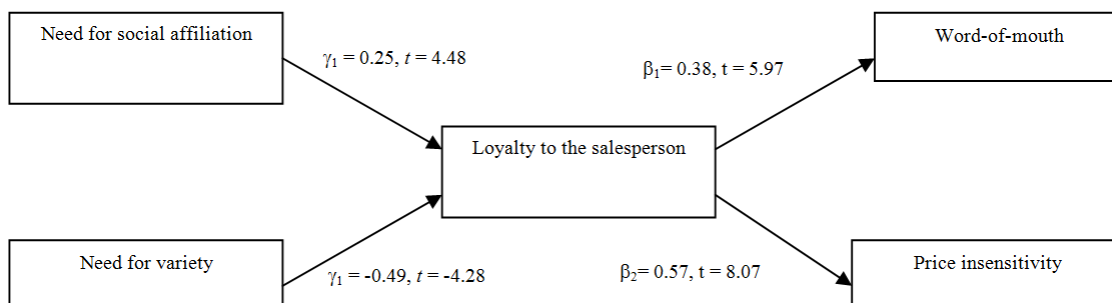Fig. 4: Structural model of dissatisfied switchers

Fig. 5: Structural model of satisfied switchers

For the unconstrained model of dissatisfied switchers (n = 295) (Fig. 4), χ^2 is 169.43 (df = 61, p<0.05), CFI is 0.93, GFI is 0.92, AGFI is 0.88 and RMSEA is 0.07, so the overall fit is acceptable. It seems from the results that need for variety may be a better indicator of loyalty to the salesperson than need for social affiliation for dissatisfied switchers. Whereas, for the stayer customers, need for social affiliation is more important in explaining their loyalty to salesperson than did need for variety.

For the unconstrained model of satisfied switchers (n = 284) (Fig. 5), χ^2 is 230.59 (df = 61, p<0.05), which is lower than the original model (χ^2 = 246.99, df = 61, p<0.05) and CFI, GFI, RMR and RMSEA are 0.92, 0.90, 0.09 and 0.09, respectively, which suggest that the overall fit is acceptable. The difference between two χ^2 is 16.4 which is significant at 0.01.

These results indicate that the fit of the model in Fig. 5 has significantly improved over the original model in Fig. 1. In terms of the importance of the

independent variables in contributing to the estimation of the dependent variables, it can be argued that the need for social affiliation makes the largest contribution in the model of stayers customers (γ = 0.89) compared to the case of the dissatisfied switchers (γ = 0.27) and satisfied switchers models (γ = 0.25). The findings show that all parameters estimating the relationships between loyalty to salesperson and the two dimensions of behavioral intention are significant in the case of all the models. Whereas, their impacts are moderate.

DISCUSSION

The findings illustrated here point up the pivotal role of salesperson in converting a relationship customer's interpersonal loyalty into important vendor and behavioural intentions. This is imperative since authors have questioned the extensive application of developing relationships with customers. For instance, Fournier *et al*. (1998) mention a number of examples of

consumers who are so bombarded with the efforts of firms to construct "relationships" that they no longer take these efforts seriously or see the relationships as helpful or precious. Yet, the current study gives confirmation that in retailing, developing salesperson customer relationships results in real value to the retail store.

Research has also documented numerous other benefits for retailers of developing relationships with customers. For instance, the personalization of service encounters (Mittal and Lassar, 1996) and relational selling behaviours (Crosby *et al*., 1990) have been found to be major determinant of behavioural intentions. Furthermore, partners who establish relationships that are more personal have been found to be more loyal than those who are less socially linked (Wilson and Mummalaneni, 1986). Finally, a social relationship could prompt consumers to be understanding once a service failure takes place. In this case, customers may allow the retailer to react to competitive offerings (Berry, 1995). Preserving constant relationships with seller has benefits for the customer also. For instance, research has documented the payback that patrons obtain from a service relationship, containing self-assurance, distinctive treatment as well as social benefits (Gwinner *et al*., 1998). Self-assurance benefits consist of reduced perceptions of anxiety and perceived risk and higher levels of self-confidence and trust. Distinctive treatment benefits comprise financial and social bonds. Economic or financial bonds are usually referred to as frequency marketing or retention marketing, where the service provider uses economic benefits, such as price, discounts or other financial incentives to secure customer loyalty (Lin *et al*., 2003). Social bonds are the degree to which certain ties link and hold a buyer and seller together closely in a personal (emotional sense). Berry (1995) referred to social bonds as level two (intermediate level) of relationship marketing in securing customer loyalty. At this level, the service provider goes further than price incentives to build lasting relationships by building social bridges with customers without neglecting the price competition. From a strategic standpoint, developing close customer sales person relationships in retail setting can be input to prosperous differentiation strategy. Given the range of service and product options that patrons have, due largely to parity among brands and technology, delivering distinctive and differentiable value obviously causes a real defy in today's souk. This is particularly factual in retailing, where nearly all stores offer similar products and services at indistinguishable price (Ibrahim and Najjar, 2008). Within the retail context, research shows that salesperson plays a crucial role in providing the basis for an accurate differentiation in an aggressively competitive souk. For instance, in their study, Beatty *et al*. (2010) show that vendor provide added value to their clientele by learning their exact needs and catering to those needs. According to Ganesh *et al*. (2000) findings, customers who switched firms because of

their dissatisfactions with their prior service firm diverged significantly from other customer groups in terms of their behaviour. As switchers may have received comparable services and had experiences within the industry (Grace and O'Cass, 2001), which modified their expectations compared to the stayers. As Parasuraman *et al*. (1985) suggest, service quality corresponds to the variation between customer expectations and perceptions. Consequently, different levels of customer expectations may cause different levels of service assessment, which would give an explanation for the behavioural dissimilarities among stayers, satisfied switchers and dissatisfied switchers.

In order to scrutinize if the hypotheses accepted for the groups, we explore the relationships among psychological traits, loyalty to salesperson and different dimensions of behavioural intentions among these three groups. As we suggest, all the hypotheses are accepted by the three groups. Moreover, the modified models are significantly better than the original model. The results of this research establish that loyalty to salesperson is more influenced by need for social affiliation for the stayer customers. Whereas, for the dissatisfied and the satisfied switchers, need for variety makes the greatest contribution in explaining customer loyalty toward salespersons. In terms of the effect of the loyalty to the salesperson on the customer behavioural intentions, the present study suggests that the bond between these two variables is significant. But, the impacts are moderate. In fact, for each group, we find that some behavioural intentions dimensions are more influenced by loyalty to the salesperson than the other dimensions.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings show that shoppers can be segmented efficiently according to their switching behaviour. In sequence, retailers should focus on some psychological traits, such as, need for social affiliation or need for variety and use them as a means to differentiate the firm from competitors for each customer group. Moreover, the results imply that retail stores must concentrate on employing enthusiastic, sociable salespersons who genuinely like being with people (Mittal and Lassar, 1996). Salesperson should be trained to solve patron problems and become personally concerned with the customer.

Along with our results come several areas that require potential assessment, researchers must study the impact of additional personality traits on the loyalty to the salesperson and ultimately on behavioural intentions. We think that further construct not integrated in our conceptual model, can facilitate more discrepancy in the outcome variables.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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