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BRAND LOYALTY TOWARDS CHANG'AN CAR BRAND
IN XI'AN CITY, SHAANXI, CHINA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors affecting brand loyalty and how these factors (customer satisfaction, brand trust, price fairness, brand affect, brand value, brand image) influence brand loyalty of customers. This research focus on brand loyalty of Chang'an Car in Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province, China. 400 questionnaires were distributed to the customers who are the owner of Chang'an car between April 2014 and May 2014. The findings show that the brand image has a strong positive effect on brand loyalty. Additionally, price fairness has a medium positive effect on brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction, brand trust, brand affect and brand value have a low positive impact on brand loyalty. A series of recommendations are made based on these findings.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Trust, Price Fairness, Brand Affect, Brand Value, Brand Image

1. Introduction

Today, the automobile industry has become one of the most important industries in the world and one on the increase in recent decades (Vickery, 1996). At the present, there are more than 100 domestic automobile manufacturers in China. In recent years, market share of second-tier cities and third-tier cities increased a lot. According to the statistics of China Automobile Association, the market share of first-tier cities decreased 2%-3% every year. The market share of third-tier city will be more than 60% in 2014. Which means the future automobile market should focus on the second and third-tier cities. and the second and third-tier cities prefer more low price level car. (<http://www.findoout.com/bbs/v2235/> accessed the data on 31th May, 2014)

Brand loyalty is very important to all kind of businesses. It may increase the life-time value of customers. The return on investment of a brand loyal customer is hard to gauge, if a customer holds onto your brand for a long time, their value and investment will be higher

(Gustafsson *et al.*, 2005). Brand loyal customers become the people who promote your product. Those customers that feel passion behind your brand are the same ones that will promote it every day and defend it to the bone (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010).

Brand loyalty may increase sales per customer. The customers will invest more when they are dedicated to one brand. In the same way, brand loyal customers will be the first ones who tell their experiences to friends and family. (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002). Brand loyalty could discover meaningful and powerful market research. Businesses benefit greatly from customers and could bring great benefit and brand loyal within their market research. To know what products and service the customer want may seem like an easy way to build brand loyalty, but the ones that know best are those that are hardcore for standing behind you (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

1.1 Background of Chinese Car industry

At the present, there are more than 100 domestic automobile manufacturers in China. In 2013, the top 10 automobile production enterprises are Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation (SAIC), China FAW Group Corporation, Changan Automobile Company, China BAW Group Corporation, Dongfeng Motor Corporation, China GAC Group Corporation, Chery Automobile Company, Build Your Dream Automobile Company (BYD), Huachen Auto Group, and Jianghuai Automobile company. The sales in units of each company respectively are 3,5584 million, 2.72 million, 2.56 million, 2.38 million, 1.49 million, 724,200, 682,100, 519,800, 501,400 and 458,500. The above ten companies sold 15.6 million cars which represents 86% of the whole car market. There are four companies whose market share is more than 10%, which are SAIC (19.7%), Dongfeng (15.1%), FAW (14.2%), and Chang 'an (13.2%). The market share of BAW was 8.2%. The rest of the each company's market share is less than 5%.

In recent years, market share of second-tier cities and third-tier cities increased a lot. According to the statistics of China Automobile Association, the market share of first-tier cities decreased 2%-3% every year. The market share of third-tier city will be more than 60% in 2014 (Xu, 2010). Which means the future automobile market should focus on the second and third-tier cities. (<http://www.findoout.com/bbs/v2235> accessed the data on 31th May, 2014)

Table 1 The total sales and automobile market share of top 20 brands in 2013

		Brands	Sales in units	Year-on -year growth	Market share
1	大众	Volkswagen	2,471,839	16%	14.7%
2	现代	Hyundai	1,047,763	18%	6.3%
3	丰田	Toyota	908,177	14%	5.4%
4	日产	Nissan	843,324	12%	5.0%
5	别克	Buick	810,359	16%	4.8%
6	本田	Honda	752,262	28%	4.5%
7	雪佛兰	Chevrolet	715,266	4%	4.3%
8	福特	Ford	701,541	65%	4.2%
9	起亚	Kia	578,720	13%	3.5%
10	比亚迪	BYD	506,189	11%	3.0%
11	奥迪	Audi	490,822	20%	2.9%

		Brands	Sales in units	Year-on -year growth	Market share
12	奇瑞	Chery	420,659	-17%	2.5%
13	长安	Changan	409,599	77%	2.4%
14	宝马	BMW	375,223	20%	2.2%
15	长城	GreatWall	347,672	31%	2.1%
16	东风	Dongfeng	324,950	45%	1.9%
17	雪铁龙	Citroen	284,756	27%	1.7%
18	哈弗	Haval	279,762	27%	1.7%
19	标致	Peugeot	273,221	25%	1.6%
20	梅赛德斯-奔驰	Mercedes-Benz	233,788	15%	1.4%
		Total	16,760,412	18%	78.6%

Source: <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-cars-320160-1.shtml> accessed the data on 31th May, 2014.

As table 1 shows, there are 20 brands which are in the top 20 of the Chinese car market. Volkswagen has the highest market share which is 14.7 % from all brands. And Chang'an has the highest increase which is 77% from year-on-year growth. That means more and more Chinese customers are starting to choose the local brands.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to identify the factors that affect Brand loyalty towards Chang'an Cars. This research focused on studying the attitude toward customer satisfaction, price fairness, brand trust, brand affect, brand image, and brand value. The main objectives of this research are as follows:

- To identify a relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.
- To analyze a relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.
- To test a relationship between price fairness and brand loyalty.
- To recognize a relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty
- To identify a relationship between brand value and brand loyalty.
- To analyze a relationship between brand image and brand loyalty.

1.3 Research questions

To understand the factors affecting the brand loyalty of Chang'an the marketers should improve the service experiences. Thus, the researcher focused on many independent variables of satisfaction, brand trust, price fairness, brand affect, brand image, and brand value, which affect brand loyalty as the researcher developed the conceptual framework based on many previous studies.

The research questions of this research are shown below:

- Is there a significant relationship between satisfaction and brand loyalty?
- Is there a significant relationship between price fairness and brand loyalty?
- Is there a significant relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty?
- Is there a significant relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty?
- Is there a significant relationship between brand image and brand loyalty?
- Is there a significant relationship between brand value and brand loyalty?

This study will benefit the managers of the Chang'an Automobile Company who decide the market strategy to understand the relationship between brand loyalty and other related factors. And this research may provide some suggestion for how to develop and maintain the loyalty of the Chang'an brand. The researcher also stated the situation of the Chinese automobile industry. The national automobile companies in China have stronger competitiveness, because the Chinese government provides lots of policies to encourage the domestic automobile industry. Such as, when the customer buys the car from the national automobile company, the government will help the customers pay from 5% to 10% of the price. Moreover, through the results of this research, the Chang'an Automobile Company can determine what kinds of marketing strategies can help the company get more loyal customers and it would help the managers make the better decisions to increase sales.

2. Literature Review:

Customer satisfaction has a strong relationship with loyalty; also there are some other variables that can impact upon brand loyalty (Ostrowski *et al.*, 1993). Liljander and Strandvik (1997) suggested that customer satisfaction could not be clearly understood without loyalty.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined brand trust as a merchant's commitment to customers. Taylor *et al.* (2004) found brand trust is the key role of customer commitment, especially in high involvement purchase scenarios, it has a stronger effect compared with full satisfaction. Ballester & Alemán (2001) presented that brand trust leads to brand loyalty. Amine (1998) stated that brand trust and brand affect are two main factors that influence customer attitudes and behaviors through brand loyalty.

Haws and Bearden, (2006) defined price fairness as the customers' judgment of the price of the products or service. In automobile industry, it means the car price is fair and acceptable. Virvilaite, Saladiene and Skindaras (2009) stated that price fairness has a direct positive influence on brand loyalty. It is possible for the consumers to rebuy or display the intention of repeat purchase behavior, when the price of a products or received service is reasonable.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook, (2001) defined brand affect as the potential element that motivates positive emotional responses from consumers. In automobile industry, it means the customer's feeling and emotion from one vehicle brand. Iglesias *et al.*, (2011) found that brand affect is also studied widely in the car industry. Sung and Kim, (2010) stated it was empirically evident that brand affect has a significant impact on brand loyalty.

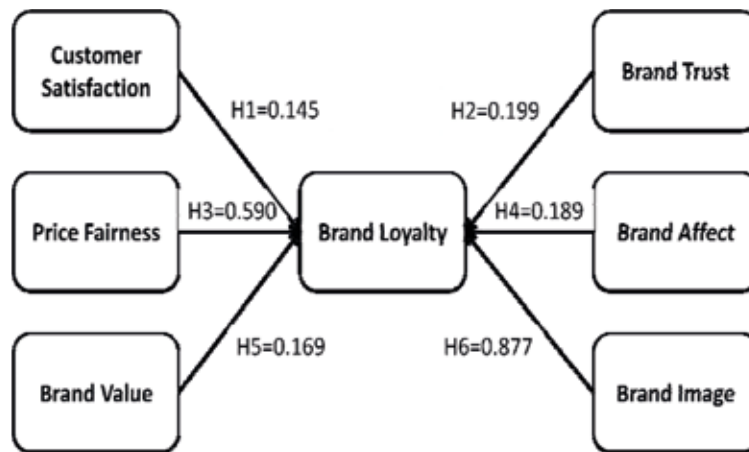
Woodruff, (1997) defined brand value as the car design, function, reliability, package and brand extension which could improve the value of brand. Pitta and Katsanis (1995) stated that brand value is one of the important factors that effect on brand loyalty. The impact of brand value on brand loyalty has not been forgotten. Various previous researchers found that brand value has effects on brand loyalty (Vranesec and Stancec, 2003).

Abdullah *et al* (2000) defined brand image as the entire thing that a consumer can possibly associate with a car brand in the consumer's memory. According to Andreassen and Lindestad (1998), there is a significant effect on brand loyalty from brand image. Brand image has an indirect relationship with loyalty through customer satisfaction; he found that both brand image and customer satisfaction have a positive relationship with brand loyalty (Selnes, 1993).

Asseal, (1991) defined brand loyalty as repurchasing the same specific brand of vehicle, is also of major concern for manufacturers. If a customer purchases a Brand A vehicle, manufacturers want to keep them within that brand. In some cases, it can be valued higher than corporate loyalty. . In the automotive world, one manufacturer may define loyalty as purchasing a vehicle from that manufacturer regardless of the brand.

3. Conceptual Framework and Research Methodology

This conceptual framework is developed on the basis of various research models as follows: Marti'n-Consuegra, D., Molina, A., and Esteban, A. (2007), Taylor, S., Celuch, K., and Goodwin, S. (2005), Kuikka, A., and Laukkanen, T. (2012), and Hsieh, A., and Li, C. (2008). In this conceptual framework, the brand loyalty may be affected by six variables: customer satisfaction, brand trust, price fairness, brand affect, brand value and brand image.



Source: Developed by the author for this study

The research seeks to determine the relationship between customer satisfaction, brand trust, price fairness, brand affect, brand value, brand image and brand loyalty in Xi'an City, Shaanxi, China. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to customer who are the owner of Chang'an car in April 2014 to May 2014.

The questionnaire consists of 32 items designed to obtain quantitative and qualitative data from the respondents. Part 1 is screen question which was designed to identify the customers who are qualified to answer the questionnaire. There are six variables (customer satisfaction, brand trust, brand affect, price fairness, brand value, and brand image) with 22 questions in Part 2. There are 5 questions in Part 3 to measure the degree of brand loyalty. Part 4 is used to collect the personal information about each respondent with 5 related questions. Such as age, gender, education level, occupation, and monthly income.. A seven-point Likert Scale was applied, ranking from "Strongly Agree=7" to "Strongly Disagree=1".

4. Summary of Finding

As shown in Table 2 there are more male respondents (81%) than the females (19%). The respondents of the highest age level group is 26 - 35 years old (41.30%). The highest education level group is Bachelor's degree (50.20%). The largest occupation group is company staff (35%) and the largest monthly income group is between 3,001 - 5,000 Yuan (36.50%).

Table 2 Summary of Demographic Factors Analysis

Demographics Factor	Characteristics	Frequency (<i>f</i>)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	324	81%
Age	26 – 35	165	41.30%
Education level	Bachelor degree	201	50.20%
Occupation	Company staff	140	35%
Monthly income	3,001 - 5,000 Yuan	146	36.50%

In this research, The researcher investigated that from the six hypotheses, four (H_1 , H_2 , H_4 and H_5) have low positive relationship between each variable which means that there is a low positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, brand trust and brand loyalty, brand affect and brand loyalty, and brand value and brand loyalty. The researcher also explored that the other one hypothesis (H_3) shows a medium positive relationship between price fairness and brand loyalty. Finally, the researcher discovered that the H_6 indicates that there is a high positive relationship between brand image and brand loyalty.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

5.1 Customer Satisfaction

Based on the results of hypothesis one, the researcher found that there is a significant relationship between satisfaction and brand loyalty. The Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is 0.145, and the researcher can conclude that there is a low positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. As the minds of young people are active, they are bold in innovation and easy to accept new things. The newfangled things and products could easily attract the them. Then, the young people may change their mind to a new product or new model in a short time. Most researchers found that there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Martín-Consuegra et al. (2007), Liljander and Strandvik (1997), Wong and Zhou (2006)). However, in this study, the statistical relationship was a little bit low between these two variables, because it depends on its age group and products.

Based on this result, Chang'an should carefully consider customers' needs and feelings in order to ensure the customers feel satisfied with its products and services. Also, the researcher suggests the managers improve the function, safety, quality, design, after sales service, accessories and other information relating to the product to satisfy customer needs. At the same time, it can improve brand loyalty and maintain the loyalty of customers especially that the customer profile is young people. They always follow the popular trend and change their mind. Therefore, the company should design more new car and new model to satisfy customer needs.

5.2 Brand Trust

Based on the results of hypothesis two, the researcher found that there is a significant relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. The Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is 0.199, and the researcher can conclude that there is a low positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. Teenagers and young people may trust some brand, but not for long time. If the company made some minor mistakes, even the young people can feel uncomfortable about the brand; they will easily switch to another brand. Taylor et al. (2005) found that there is a positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. However, based on the majority and the age of demographic factor, the result is quite low.

The result imply that the positive brand trust can play a significant role for increasing brand loyalty. Also building brand trust is a way of maintaining or increasing loyalty. The research findings have shown that brand loyalty is positively influenced by brand trust. Therefore, building brand trust is a way of maintaining or increasing loyalty. The researcher suggests that long warranty, high quality, good service could aid in gaining trust from customers; at the same time, the manager could use media to demonstrate its products and its advantages to inform people.

5.3 Price Fairness

Based on the results of hypothesis three, the researcher found that there is a significant relationship between price fairness and brand loyalty. The Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is 0.590, and the researcher can conclude that there is a medium positive relationship between the price fairness and brand loyalty. This would imply that the lower price can play a significant role for maintaining brand loyalty. In China, Chang'an is famous for its economical and practical products. Low price level attracts the teenager who just began working and is financially challenged. It is possible for consumers to rebuy or display the intention of repeat purchase behavior, when the price of a product or received service is reasonable. But the consumers may not repurchase again if they perceive the price is not worthwhile even when they are satisfied with the product or service.

The researcher suggests that a firm should focus more on delivering the right quality at the right price and on treating the customers fairly rather than focusing on competitors' prices. To manage pricing decisions effectively, the marketer must be able to understand both economic and psychological responses to various prices and price changes. When a service provider explains how a price is derived and shows that price increases are due to uncontrollable external factors such as increase in fuel costs, the consumer is more likely to accept the price increase and perceive it as being fair, or at least less unfair.

5.4 Brand Affect

Based on the results of hypothesis four, the researcher found that there is a significant relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty. The Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is 0.189, and the researcher can conclude that there is a low positive relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty. Based on the demographic factor, most of customers are male teenagers. The male customers like practical and stable products more than female customers. Teenagers are emotional. They may purchase the product without deeply thinking. The impulsive purchasing mostly happens to teenager

group. As the author from AUTOFAN (01/06/2013) magazine stated that the young people are easily attracted by design and new technology. Taylor et al. (2005), and Sung and Kim, (2010) found that there is a positive relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty. However, based on the majority and the age of demographic factor, the result is quite low.

It is pointed out that if the customers' emotional value towards the brand is positive or high, the brand loyalty of customers will also be high. This research finding can support that brand affect is an important antecedent to maintain consumer's brand loyalty. Where there is an increase in the number of brands in the automotive industry, brand affect becomes a driving factor of brand loyalty. The researcher suggests for the manager to focus on diversification and innovation to enrich affective association.

5.5 Brand Value

Hypothesis Five (H_5): Based on the results of hypothesis five, the researcher found that there is a significant relationship between brand value and brand loyalty. The Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is 0.169, and the researcher can conclude that there is a low positive relationship between brand value and brand loyalty. Product design, function, package, reliability, quality, extension influence purchasing behavior and loyalty of teenagers to the product. Most researchers found that there is a positive relationship between brand value and brand loyalty (Kuikka and Laukkanen (2012), Feldwick (2001), Keller and Lehmann (2006)). However, in this study, the statistical relationship was a little bit low between these two variables because it depends on its young age group and products.

It is pointed out that if the brand value from customers is positive or high, the brand loyalty of customers will also be high. This research finding can support that brand value is an important factor for consumer's brand loyalty. The researcher suggests the manager to improve the quality, design and function of the product. Also, Chang'an can focus on brand extension for the new car version.

5.6 Brand Image

According to the results obtained from hypothesis six, there is a significant relationship between brand image and brand loyalty. The Pearson correlation coefficient between these two variables is 0.877, and the researcher can conclude that there is a high positive relationship between brand image and brand loyalty. The result illustrated that if the brand image of the customer is positive and high, the purchase intention or brand loyalty will be high. In China, Chang'an becomes the first choice of household car because of its lower price and better quality. In recent years, Chang'an Company improved its technique for car control and optimization, and automobile emissions. Also, it invited domestic and foreign first-class designers in model designing to create the perfect flow line. Hsieh and Li (2008), and Lee and Wu (2011) also supported that a company with an inferior brand image acquires one with a superior or average brand image and affects the brand association and brand loyalty.

This result demonstrated that if the image of the brand is high, brand loyalty will also be high. Consumers firstly evaluate the image by using the information about the brand. Brand image is one of the important factors in automobile industry. The positive brand image can be evaluated to increase the consumers' aspiration towards that product. The personality of Chang'an brand is young, economical and practical. That is the reason that most customers

in 2013 are young people after the new products come into the market. The researcher suggests that the Chang'an manager should focus on environmental protection, public image, science and technology to improve brand image. Understanding consumer needs has already transcended the issues of products and services, and that the concept of image exploration is of growing importance (Fredericks et al. 2001).

6. Limitation of Research

The research is limited to the brand loyalty of the people who are the owner of Chang'an car, also who are customers of each of the five selected branches in Xi'an city, Shaanxi, China. There are hundreds of branches in China; the study must be limited to these consumers in Xi'an city only. The research focused on the car operation sector and cannot represent other results of other industries.

In addition, the results of the research will represent the brand loyalty of Chang'an cars from those who have a Chang'an car which means that this is the research focus and it will not collect data from people who do not have a Chang'an car, because they will not be able to provide any feedback on the product. Moreover, the research also has a time limitation. Then, the researcher cannot collect data from all of the population who have a Chang'an car. Also, this research was limited in terms of the period of time. The researcher collected the data from May to June 2014. Therefore, the results may not be true at all periods of time or cannot be applied to other period time in all situations. And all the independent factors in this study may not cover all the independent factors that may influence the dependent factor of this brand loyalty.

7. Research Implications

Establish a effectiveness brand strategy is a valid method to improve brand loyalty and earn more profit. For the automobile companies, most of them expand its brand image to improve brand loyalty through TV, internet, magazine etc. Most of them just have the entity shop in big cities, the small cities do not have it that can let customer touch and feel. thus, most of the automobile companies only active within first-tier and second-tier cities, and ignore the largest population group of small cities, to find a effectiveness brand strategy to increase brand loyalty must follow the step below.

First step, focus on the brand strategy to improve brand loyalty. the result indicated customer satisfaction, brand trust, brand affect, brand value have low positive relationship with brand loyalty, but it can through enhance the customer satisfaction, brand trust, brand affect and brand value to improve brand loyalty. Thus companies should improve the car function, safety, quality, design, after sales service, accessories and other information relating to the product to satisfy customer needs. At the same time, it can improve brand loyalty and maintain the loyalty of customers especially that the customer profile is young people. They always follow the popular trend and change their mind. Therefore, the company should design more new car and new model to satisfy customer needs. long warranty, high quality, good service could aid in gaining trust from customers; at the same time, the manager could use media to demonstrate its products and its advantages to inform people. the company should focus on diversification and innovation to enrich affective association to increase brand affect. the company should improve the quality, design and function of the product. Also, Chang'an can focus on brand extension for the new car version.

Second step, while companies improve brand loyalty, it must focus on the price. the result indicated price fairness have medium positive relationship with brand loyalty, and it can indirectly improve brand loyalty through influenced on price fairness, and it is significant factor for automobile companies. the company must be able to understand both economic and psychological responses to various prices and price changes When a service provider explains how a price is derived and shows that price increases are due to uncontrollable external factors such as increase in fuel costs, the consumer is more likely to accept the price increase and perceive it as being fair, or at least less unfair. thus the company should establish price policy which consider more about low-price level products.

Last step, for improve brand loyalty, it must focus on brand image. the result indicated brand image has high positive relationship with brand loyalty. most of the customers are young people, so the company should focus on young generation style, such as the environmental protection, public image, science and technology to improve brand image.

8. Further Research

The research mainly focused on the factors affecting brand loyalty for those who own a Chang'an car. The questionnaires were completed by the people who are living in Xi'an City, Shaanxi, China. For developing the results of this research, several further studies would be able to conduct this investigation as follows:

Firstly, based on the current research, only a set of critical factors is deemed as being important. However, there are many other factors cited as being important as indicated in the other related literatures. These factors are satisfaction, brand trust, price fairness, brand affect, brand value and brand image that are dependent on brand loyalty. Therefore, a suggestion for future study would be to cover more independent factors in order to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the elements that influence people to own a Chang'an car and be loyal with the brand.

Secondly, future researchers may study from different geographic areas such as Chang'an car showroom located in other cities around China. The customers who come to the Chang'an showroom must pay deep interest in Chang'an brand. Therefore, to give them the questionnaires must be more effective than those who have completed it at the five branches in Xi'an city, Shaanxi, China. All will get the stability of the responses with a stronger result about their satisfaction, brand trust, price fairness, brand affect, brand value and brand image toward the Chang'an car.

Thirdly, Chang'an Company has several production lines that are in joint venture with Mazda, Mitsubishi, and Ford in China. This research used the same conceptual framework to study the other products that are all developed by Chang'an Company. Future studies can extend to other products which are jointly produced by two or more companies. Finally, further studies could be carried out to compare brand loyalty of automobile among several brands, such as The Great Wall, BYD and Kia.

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