

Impact of store personality on store loyalty: A study of specialty store chains in Vietnam

NGUYEN LE THAI HOA

Open University of HCMC – hoamai54@yahoo.com

HOANG THI PHUONG THAO

Open University of HCMC – thao.htp@ou.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

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The purposes of this study are: (i) to develop store personality measurement scale tailor-made for household and electronics store chains in Vietnam, an Asian transitional economy; and (ii) to examine the degree of influence of each store personality dimensions on store loyalty. The scale development is conducted in two stages: item generation and item purification. The new scale is applied to a data survey of 268 shoppers in Ho Chi Minh City (a metropolitan city in southern Vietnam) by systematic sampling. Multivariate data analysis techniques, such as exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling, are used to analyze the data. The results reveal that store personality measurement scale is structured into four dimensions: reliability, sophistication, economy, and enthusiasm with 22 items as observed variables and store personality impacts on loyalty behavior mediated by attitudinal loyalty. Particularly, these four dimensions are found to be correlated significantly with attitudinal loyalty but not with loyalty behavior except for economy—reliability and sophistication have positive impacts, whereas economy and enthusiasm negatively relate to attitudinal loyalty. The findings help retail managers with effective positioning strategy. This paper is the first to design the scale for store personality and to explore the impact of each dimensions of store personality on attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in Vietnam and in the specialty-store-chain context.

1. Introduction

With the population of more than 100 million people, Vietnam has a potential retail market. However, the competition is very severe since several new retail formats are emerging together with the arrival of giant foreign players, such as Aeon (Japan), Auchan (France), Central Group (Thailand), Lotte (Korea), etc. in spite of the fact that some retail markets seem saturated. Moreover, shopping behavior is changing rapidly. Particularly, consumers have more shopping options than before, and customer loyalty is decreasing. To survive in current tough retail environment and to create sustainable development, retail companies have to stand out from the competition and have to become a brand themselves. Thus, branding the store is becoming crucial for success, because retail differentiation cannot be achieved without branding (Floor, 2006).

There are three main benefits of a brand to users, including functional, experiential, and symbolic (Keller, 1998). Functional benefit describes the problem-solving capacity of a brand. Experiential benefit is perceived as the sensory pleasure or cognitive arousal derived from using brands. Lastly, the symbolic benefit is the signal effect of using brands, which refers to what the brands say about the consumer to consumer and to others, based on the image of a generalized or typical users of the brand and/or the personality of the brand itself (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004). Brand personality is defined as “a set of human characteristics associated to a brand” (Aaker, 1997). For instance, the personalities of BMW are young,

sporty, and dynamic.

In recent years branding and brand management have been applied to not only product brands but also retail brands (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). One of the most important trends in retail branding research is the attribution of human personality characteristics or traits to retail brand. It is a logical proposition to the coining of the term—retail brand personality or retailer personality or store personality (Das, 2014). Store personality, a multi-dimensional construct, is defined as “a consumer’s perception of the human personality traits attributed to a retail brand” (Das et al., 2012a). Then, store personality is considered a sustainable competitive advantage of retailers since it is a powerful tool to position and differentiate a retail store from its competitors (Merrilees & Miller, 2001). Furthermore, consumers are likely to choose brands whose personalities match their own (Wee, 2004; Kotler, 2003; Floor, 2006) and to select retailers for shopping when price, quality, and service are similar (Martineau, 1958). Previous studies have also found that store personality contributed to the overall store image, help to reach positioning goals, and increase store loyalty, purchase intentions, sales, and profitability (Moller & Herm, 2013).

The role of store personality in retail marketing has been confirmed, but the research on developing store personality measurement scale was limited (d’Atous & Levesque, 2003; Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004; Willems et al., 2011; Das et al., 2012a). However, store personality may be changed from format to format and from culture to culture (Brenghman & Willems, 2009;

Das et al., 2012b). It is also necessary to develop the store personality scale for a specific retail format and a specific culture. Therefore, the first objective of this paper is to develop store personality scale tailor-made for technical consumer goods super-markets and/or centers, the most common specialty store chains in Vietnam. The second objective is to investigate the impacts of each dimensions of store personality on store loyalty since there are few studies that confirm the significant link between store personality and loyalty up till now, namely Das (2014b) for Indian retail context, Zentes et al. (2008) for retail brands in Germany, and Lombart and Louis (2012) for French grocery and clothing sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. Retail brand

As Zentes et al. (2008, p.167) stated, “a retail brand is a group of the retailers’ outlets which carry a unique name, symbol, logo or combination thereof.” Ailawadi and Keller (2004) argued that “retail brand identifies the goods and services of a retailer and differentiates them from those of competitors.” Zentes et al. (2008) also differentiated retail brand from store brand, implying that retail brand refers to a retailer as a brand while store brand refers to brand owned by a retailer. For instance, Big C is a retail brand, and WOW is a store brand or private label of Big C.

2.2. Retail brand (store) personality

Store personality plays an important role in perceived differentiation, satisfaction, store patronage, and loyalty behavior (Chun

& Davies, 2006; Zentes et al., 2008; Das, 2014). The power of these durable brand personality traits in the consumer’s mind springs from human need to simplify buying decisions by creating symbolic representations (Lindquist, 1974, 1975), which serves as a decision heuristic in situations of uncertainty.

The general definition of retail brand personality has been shown on marketing literature, starting with the concept of brand personality defined as “a set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997). A large number of studies have been conducted on product brand personality, whereas research on retail brand or store personality is rare. Surprisingly, the idea of store personality was firstly mentioned almost 60 years ago in Martineau’s seminal article. Store personality was then identified as “the way in which store is defined in the shopper’s mind partly by its functional qualities and partly an aura of psychological attributes.” However, Martineau pointed out four store personality dimensions, namely layout and architecture, symbols and colors, advertising, and sales personnel, which were actually considered the concept of functional store image. Consequently, d’Atous and Levesque (2003) distinguished store personality from store image when they argued that while store image is mental representation that encompasses all dimensions associated with a store (value for money, product selection, quality of service, etc.), and that store personality is restricted to those mental dimensions corresponding to human traits. For example, although product variety is an important attribute of an overall

store image, it is clearly not a personality trait, as it is not attributed to a human being. In light of this conceptualization, Das et al. (2012b) clarified department store personality as a consumer's perception of the human personality traits attributed to a department store.

Store personality is a multi-dimensional construct (d'Atous & Levesque, 2003; Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004; Willems et al., 2011; Das et al., 2012a). Each different

research context has different dimensions (see Table 1).

From Table 1 it can be stated that the dimensions of store personality of various retail formats and cultures are quite different. Different from product brand personality, which refers to all positive dimensions (Aaker, 1997), the store personality is also composed of negative ones such as unpleasantness (d'Atous & Levesque, 2003), deceitfulness (Ambroise & Valette-Florence,

Table 1

Retail brand personality dimensions

| No. | Authors & year | Context | Dimensions | No. of items |
|-----|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Aaker (1997) | Products in general | Excitement, competence, sophistication, sincerity, and ruggedness | 34 items |
| 2 | d'Atous and Levesque (2003) | Four department stores and two automobile and electronic equipment stores in Canada. | Enthusiasm, sophistication, genuineness, solidity, and unpleasantness | 34 items Reduced scale: 20 items |
| 3 | Helgeson and Supphellen (2004) | Swedish clothing retailers | Classis (sophistication), modern (excitement) | |
| 4 | Davies et al. (2004) | Grocer sectors | Agreeableness, competence, enterprise, chic, ruthlessness, machismo, and informality | 49 items |
| 5 | Ambroise et al. (2004); Louis and Lombart (2011) | Grocery and clothing sectors | Elegant/glamorous Reliable/rigorous Exciting/cheerful | 21 items |
| 6 | Ambroise and Valette-Florence (2010) | French retailers in general | Introversion, congeniality, seduction, creativity, conscientiousness, originality, preciousness, deceitfulness | 23 items |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|---|----------|
| 7 | Willems et al. (2011) | Fashion stores | Chaos, innovativeness, sophistication, agreeableness, conspicuousness | |
| 8 | Das et al. (2012) | Indian department stores | Sophistication, vibrancy, dependability, authenticity, empathy | 26 items |

2010), and chaos (Willems et al., 2011).

2.3. Store loyalty

Customer loyalty is considered as an important key to organizational success and profitability. Loyalty, over the past decade, has become a crucial construct in marketing, and particularly in the burgeoning field of customer relationship management (Ball et al., 2004; Soderlund, 2006). Customer loyalty can be classified into brand loyalty, vendor loyalty, service loyalty, and store loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994). Store loyalty is defined as “the tendency to be loyal to a focal retailer as demonstrated by the intention to buy from the retailer as a primary choice” (Pappu & Quester, 2006).

Firstly, loyalty was researched in terms of individual brand and understood as behavioral concept. Researchers focused on observing and measuring the continuation of purchases in the past, namely purchasing history, probability of purchase of the same product, or time for a specific brand (Juyal, 2011). According to Jacoby and Chestnut (1978), loyalty is a biased behavioral reaction of consumers in the choice of one among many alternatives in a period of time, and it can be represented as a function of decision-making process. Jeuland (1979) defined brand loyalty as long-term probability

of choice or purchase ratio of a specific brand among total product categories, and such behavior was named as inertia. In summary, behavioral definition of store loyalty is a tendency of consumers to purchase repetitively in a period of time, and it can be operationally defined and measured as a purchase ratio as repetitive purchase behavior (Raj, 1982), purchase frequency. The definition enables us to measure objectively and distinguish store loyalty with various stores. However, it also limits researchers from easily using subjective judgments and from explaining how the store loyalty is formed or why it changes.

As a result, another tendency of attitudinal definition argues that store loyalty is store preference or psychological commitment. More particularly, it is a favorable attitude to the specified store, and operationally it can be measured future probability of purchase (Oh, 1995). By this definition, we can perceive the process of psychological formation of store loyalty, but a favorable attitude to specific store is not certainly converted to a real action to buy. Therefore, marketing practitioners will have little practical value if they define store loyalty using the attitudinal approach.

Dick and Basu (1994) have developed a

framework for customer loyalty that combines both attitudinal and behavioral measures. Loyalty is determined by a combination of repeat purchase levels and relative attitude. The framework illustrates loyalty conditions, in which loyalty, with its high repeat patronage and high relative attitude, would be obviously be an ultimate goal for marketers. This definition is very desirable since either favorable attitude or repetitive purchase alone cannot become necessary and sufficient conditions of index of store loyalty, and both must be considered together with respect to consumer behavior.

2.4. The impact of retail brand personality on store loyalty

Though several studies have found the positive link between product brand personality and customer loyalty (Fournier, 1998; Villegas et al., 2000), the research on the relationship between store personality and store loyalty is limited. As mentioned above, store personality positions target customers, enhances customer loyalty, retail sales and profit-ability (Moller & Herm, 2013). By using general brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997), Zentes et al. (2008) found direct influence of retail brand personality dimensions on store loyalty in German different retail sectors (food, furniture, books, beauty and health care, clothing, consumer electronics). Previously, Merrilees and Miller (2002) demonstrated that only "Sincerity" dimension had a direct influence on store loyalty without commenting on the other four dimensions. Subsequently, Lombart and Louis (2012) empirically showed that customer satisfaction and loyalty were two

important consequences of store personality. In 2014, with partial least squares analysis (PLS), these two authors also asserted that CSR and price image impacted significantly on store personality and store personality had influence on satisfaction, trust and loyalty toward retailers (measured by their attitude and future behavioral intentions) in French grocery retail context. Recently, Das et al. (2014b) indicated that Indian department store personality positively affects store loyalty with age and gender moderator. However, the authors only considered the construct "store personality" as a single dimensional construct and invited future research to investigate store personality as multidimensional construct and explore which dimension has the strongest influence on loyalty. Furthermore, Zentes et al. (2008) argued that retail brand personality could be used to adequately explain the attitudinal loyalty of consumers toward the retail brand, but it was not sufficient to explain behavior. Thus, this study looks at store personality as a multidimensional construct, which impacts both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty.

2.5. Impact of attitudinal loyalty on behavior

Several studies proved that the positive attitudinal loyalty of consumers toward a brand leads to the positive behavior and vice versa (Dick & Basu, 1994; Soderlund, 2006). Lombart and Louis (2014) also evaluated the store loyalty through the attitude and future behavioral intention.

3. Methodology

3.1. Retail brand/store personality measurement scale development

So far, there is no study on developing measurement scale of retail brand personality for any retail formats in Vietnam. Therefore, the retail brand personality scale was developed especially for this study since the scale may vary, depending on culture and retail format. The scale development process was carried out in two stages: item generation and purification.

Item generation

The first list of retail brand personality was collected from existing scales, including Aaker (1997), d'Atous and Levesque (2003), Helgeson and Supphellen (2004), Davies et al. (2004), Willems et al. (2011), and Das et al. (2012) (see Table 1).

After all items from the above-mentioned scales are generated and the synonym items are eliminated, the extensive list consists of 69 items. Next, the authors conducted 10 interviews with five men and five women, aged between 20 and 50 in Ho Chi Minh City in order to validate the list of 69 items and to obtain more relevant adjectives for electronics store personality. In the interviews we introduced the concept of retail brand personality and 69 traits. By using triadic sorting method (showing one set of three retail brands of electronics store chains), the respondents were asked to select some important personality traits from these three stores considered for shopping and to point out which items were similar in two stores and different from others. Data saturation point was obtained when they could

not find out any new adjectives. There were seven more adjectives to be added to the list, such as economical, easy-going, chastity, hard-working, shy, considerable, and caring. Subsequently, the preliminary reduction stage was carried out, following Das et al.'s (2012) procedure. Twenty shoppers were required to rate these 76 items with five-point interval scale (1 = very uncharacteristic and 5 = completely characteristic). With three criteria the items must get the minimum rating point of four, the item should be rated by at least 25% of respondents, and they must be suitable for human beings. As a result, 32 personality items remained, and were used for next purification.

Item purification

Due to the fact that the customer perception of store personality differs from format to format and from culture to culture (Bregman & Willems, 2009; Das et al., 2012a; Willems et al., 2011), this research only selects one retail format, specialized supermarkets (particularly, household and electronics supermarkets/centers) for analysis. There are some reasons for this choice. Firstly, household and electronics commodity has higher symbolic meaning than food (Zentes et al., 2008). Additionally, Willems et al. (2011) argued that store personality of non-food retailers was different from those of food retailers. Buttle (1992) also asserted that shopping for non-food products is a scope for self-expression. Moreover, previous studies found the links between non-food choice, personality, self-concept, and personal value (Das et al., 2012b).

A survey was conducted with 268 shoppers in five top electronics supermarkets in

Table 2

Rotated component matrix (loading factors of the items retained from EFA)

| Item | Code | Component | | | |
|--------------|--------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| | | Reliability (REL) | Sophistication (SOP) | Economy (ECO) | Enthusiasm (ENT) |
| CONSIDERATE | REL 01 | 0.882 | | | |
| PUNCTUAL | REL 02 | 0.868 | | | |
| RELIABLE | REL 03 | 0.842 | | | |
| FRIENDLY | REL 04 | 0.804 | | | |
| CARING | REL 05 | 0.796 | | | |
| HONEST | REL 06 | 0.780 | | | |
| REPUTABLE | REL 07 | 0.760 | | | |
| TRENDY | SOP 01 | | 0.818 | | |
| GLAMOROUS | SOP 02 | | 0.801 | | |
| ELEGANT | SOP 03 | | 0.798 | | |
| CHARMING | SOP 04 | | 0.775 | | |
| STYLIST | SOP 05 | | 0.762 | | |
| FASHIONABLE | SOP 06 | | 0.746 | | |
| CLASSY | SOP 07 | | 0.671 | | |
| COMICAL | SOP 08 | | 0.642 | | |
| ECONOMICAL | ECO 01 | | | 0.873 | |
| HARD-WORKING | ECO 02 | | | 0.860 | |
| CHASTITY | ECO 03 | | | 0.815 | |
| EASY-GOING | ECO 04 | | | 0.808 | |
| SHY | ECO 05 | | | 0.583 | |
| ENERGETIC | ENT 01 | | | | 0.857 |
| CHEERFUL | ENT 02 | | | | 0.855 |
| ENTHUSIASTIC | ENT 03 | | | | 0.806 |
| LIVELY | ENT 04 | | | | 0.740 |

Notes:

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Ho Chi Minh City, namely, Dien May Xanh (63 stores), Nguyen Kim (24 stores), Cho Lon (22 stores), Phan Khang (8 stores), and Thien Hoa (5 stores). The respondents were asked to select one of these five retail brands and rate the brand with 32 personality traits by using 5-point interval scale (1 = very uncharacteristic and 5 = very characteristic). Convenience sample was collected from these five stores of different districts. Data collection was also done on different time slots of the day, weekdays, and weekends. After that, exploratory factor analysis was processed to extract dimensions and purify the items by using principal component analysis and varimax rotations. Eight rounds of item elimination based on loading factors (below 0.50) and the gap between two figures of the item (less than 0.3) (Nunnally, 1978). Four-factor structure formed with the Eigenvalues of each factor is 5.411, 4.766, 3.872, and 2.031 (greater than one) and cumulative variance explaining 66.996%. This structure is also meaningful and interpretable, renamed with 24 items: reliability (seven items), sophistication (eight items), economy (five items), and enthusiasm (four items) (see Table 2).

Next, we perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to reconfirm the above result by AMOS software (version 22). The results indicate the model fit (chi-square = 512.193; degrees of freedom = 245; probability level = 0.000; GFI = 0.820; AGFI = 0.779; CFI = 0.904; TLI = 0.891; RMSEA = 0.077) (Hair et al., 2010) (to make better fit for the structure, the error of item “chastity” and “easy-going” was allowed for covariance). All loading factors are higher than 0.50 except

for the item “Shy” (0.437). Covariance among four dimensions is nearly significantly indicated, except for the covariances between “Reliability” and “Sophistication,” as well as between “Reliability” and “Enthusiasm” and “Sophistication” and “Enthusiasm.” Cronbach’s alpha coefficients are 0.922 for Reliability, 0.889 for Sophistication, 0.907 for Economy, and 0.85 for Enthusiasm after the items “Comical” and “Shy” are eliminated. All coefficients are higher than 0.70, meeting the minimum statistics requirement (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Accordingly, there remain 22 items in four dimensions concerning the final list of Vietnamese electronics store chain personality.

3.2. *Store loyalty scale*

Attitudinal store loyalty is measured based on four items, namely intention to recommend to friends and family (Osman, 1993), commitment to store as the first choice, considering oneself loyal to the store, and not buying products from other retailers if the store has (Pappu & Quester, 2006). Respondent evaluation is based on five-point Likert scale (1 = do not agree at all; 5 = fully agree). Cronbach’s alpha is 0.854, and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), performed to confirm the factor value for store loyalty measure.

Behavioral store loyalty is measured based on two items (Dick & Basu, 1994), namely, frequency of shopping and budget allocation in a category to a store. Frequency of shopping features five-point interval scale (1 = very seldom; 5 = very often), whereas budget allocation is also referred to with five

options (1 = 0–20%; 2 = 20–40%; 3 = 40–60%; 4 = 60–80%; 5 = 80–100%). Cronbach's alpha is 0.763. EFA is also carried out for confirmation.

3.3. Research proposed model

Following the theoretical background and new developed scale, we propose the research model and construct several hypotheses as follows:

H1: Store personality dimensions of reliability (H1a), sophistication (H1b), economy (H1c), and enthusiasm (H1d) have positive impacts on attitudinal loyalty.

H2: Store personality dimensions of reliability (H2a), sophistication (H2b), economy (H2c), and enthusiasm (H2d) have positive impacts on behavioral loyalty.

H3: The attitudinal loyalty of consumers toward a retail brand positively affects behavioral loyalty.

3.4. Sampling

The survey was carried out with 268

shoppers in Ho Chi Minh City, the biggest city in Vietnam on the purpose of investigating the impact of technical consumer goods store personality dimensions on attitudinal and behavioral store loyalty. The survey was done in five top stores at different time slots of the day, weekdays, and weekends to avoid periodicity and non-coverage problems (Pappu & Quester, 2008). The authors were there to assist and supervise trained marketing staffs for doing interviews with the shoppers sitting on waiting benches for a rest. Convenience sample was collected with the range of ages from 18 to 60, in which the age between 30 and 45 accounted for roughly 60%. Males occupied for 63.4% compared with 37.6% of females. Regarding education level, above 60% of respondents were bachelor holders with the income of more than 10 million Vietnam dong (USD450).

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Measurement model

The full measurement model including

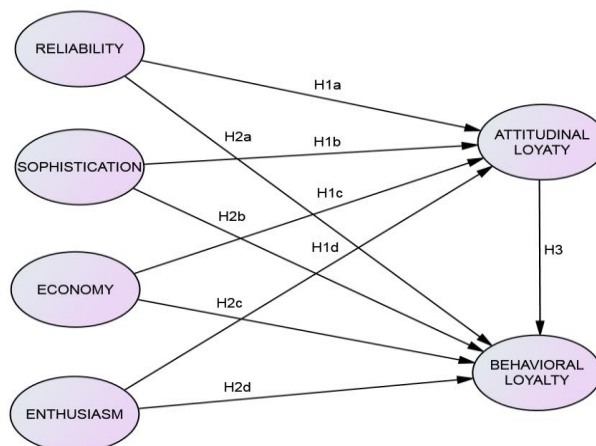


Figure 1. Research model describing the link between retail brand personality and store loyalty

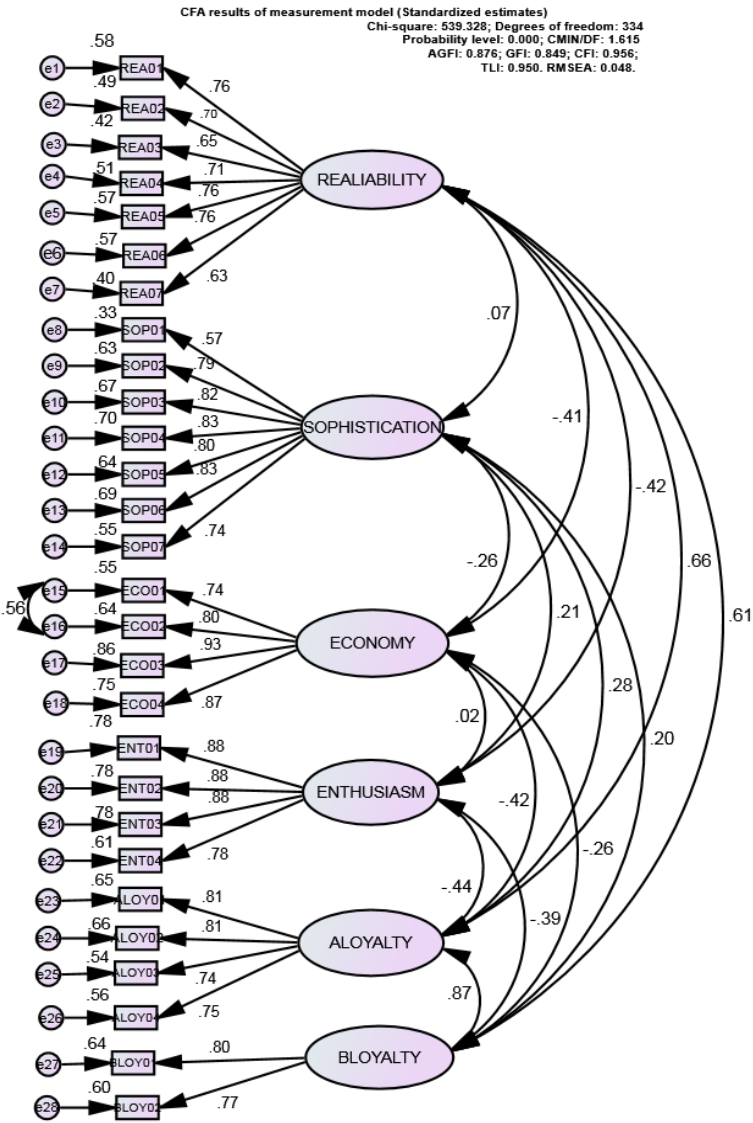


Figure 2. CFA results of full measurement model (standardized estimates)

28 items as indicator variables and 6 constructs as latent variables is analyzed by performing CFA. The results reveal a good model fit (chi-square = 539.328; degrees of freedom = 334; probability level = 0.000; CMIN/DF = 1.615). Also, there are some other fit statistics (RMR = 0.056; AGFI = 0.876; GFI = 0.849; CFI = 0.956; TLI = 0.950; RMSEA = 0.048) (Figure 2). To improve some statistics indicators for better model fit, the errors of item ECO01 and ECO02 are covarianced since MIs (modification indices) of this pair reach the highest (Hair et al., 2008). All t-test of the indicator variables are significant at the 0.001 level, and the loading factors are above 0.50 and significant. All factor correlations are significant with p-value below 0.05. Therefore, the model exhibits the convergent and discriminant validity between constructs (Steenkamp & van Trijp, 1991). Besides, the composite reliability and average variance

extracted also meet the requirement of above 0.60 and 0.50 (50%).

4.2. Structural model

The results indicate that the structural model also achieves a good level of fit (chi-square = 539.328; degrees of freedom = 334; probability level = 0.000; CMIN/DF = 1.615), besides other fit statistics (RMR = 0.056; AGFI = 0.876; GFI = 0.849; CFI = 0.956; TLI = 0.950; RMSEA = 0.048). Comparing the AIC, the indirect model is chosen since its AIC (Akaike information criterion) is smaller (Hair et al, 2008). The results in the indirect model demonstrate that the two dimensions of store personality, namely Reliability and Sophistication, have positive impacts on Attitudinal loyalty at the significant level of 0.01, and the remaining dimensions, namely Economy and Enthusiasm, have negative effects on Attitudinal loyalty

Table 3

Regression weights

| | Estimate | S.E | C.R. | P | Hypothesis |
|---|----------|-------|--------|-------|---------------|
| Attitudinal loyalty <--- Reliability | 0.692 | 0.114 | 6.076 | *** | H1a supported |
| Attitudinal loyalty <--- Sophistication | 0.249 | 0.053 | 4.738 | *** | H1b supported |
| Attitudinal loyalty <--- Economy | -0.125 | 0.057 | -2.186 | 0.029 | H1c supported |
| Attitudinal loyalty <--- Enthusiasm | -0.297 | 0.062 | -4.829 | *** | H1d supported |
| Behavioral loyalty <--- Reliability | 0.130 | 0.108 | 1.209 | 0.227 | H2a rejected |
| Behavioral loyalty <--- Sophistication | -0.027 | 0.051 | -0.530 | 0.596 | H2b rejected |
| Behavioral loyalty <--- Economy | 0.132 | 0.054 | 2.433 | 0.015 | H2c supported |
| Behavioral loyalty <--- Enthusiasm | 0.052 | 0.060 | 0.865 | 0.378 | H2d rejected |
| Behavioral loyalty <--- Attitudinal loyalty | 0.762 | 0.064 | 11.864 | *** | H3 supported |

at significant level of 0.05. Attitudinal loyalty impacts positively and significantly on Behavioral loyalty (Table 3). SMCs (squared multi correlations) are 0.573 for Attitudinal loyalty and 0.748 for Behavioral loyalty, implying that the explanatory power of the model is fairly good.

As indicated by the structural model, three dimensions including reliability, sophistication, and enthusiasm are not significantly related to behavioral loyalty because the p-value is greater than 0.05. As a result, H2a, H2b, and H2d are rejected. Only economy is found to be correlated with behavioral loyalty, but the regression weight estimate is not considerably high. Hence, it should be concluded that store personality has a direct impact on attitudinal loyalty and an indirect impact on behavioral loyalty through attitudinal loyalty as a mediator.

5. Conclusion and discussion

There are two separate parts to be carried out in this study including: (i) store personality scale development; and (ii) the impact of store personality dimensions on store loyalty measured by attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. Because store personality differs from format to format and from culture to culture (Breneman & Willems, 2009; Das et al., 2012b), the new scale has been developed based on household and electronics supermarkets/centers in Vietnam, an Asia-Pacific transitional economy. The new scale was included in the four-factor structure, different from several previous five-factor scales, for example, department store personality in Das et al. (2012a), general brand personality in Aaker (1997), retail

brand personality in d'Atous and Lévesque (2003). There are three dimensions nearly the same as other existing scales, namely reliability, sophistication, and enthusiasm, whereas the dimension "Economy" is completely different. This dimension consists of four new items: chastity, easy-going, hard-working, and economical. It can be assumed that Vietnamese collectivism culture, family oriented traditions, and hard living conditions contribute to the formation of specific characteristics of Vietnamese people, such as being thrifty, laborious, and empathetic.

Regarding the second research objective, the analysis results present evidence that reliability is the most influential trait for consumers, since it takes a long time to measure the quality of electronics products. Then, the purchase decision depends much on consumer belief toward a certain retailer, and the belief comes from retailer reputation and reliability. Next, the positive effect of Sophistication on attitudinal loyalty indicates that nowadays Vietnamese consumers purchase electronics goods not only for functional use, but also for self-expression. This may be the reason why "Economy" and "Enthusiasm" have negative effects on attitudinal loyalty. The results also reveal that store personality except for economy does not impact directly on actual shopping behavior, but is mediated by attitudinal loyalty. Situational factors (e.g., budget restrictions, location convenience, etc.) are attributable to this finding. Perceived economy exerts a negative influence on attitudinal loyalty yet a positive influence on behavioral loyalty. Vietnamese consumers do not desire to be considered low class or cheapness; they,

nevertheless, act differently; for instance, sometimes they buy some products on sales promotion.

6. Implications and future research

The scale developed in this paper may be a significant contribution to the marketing literature, adding to the total number of measurement scales for specialty store chain personality in the context of Vietnam retail market. It will be the source of reference for future research in this regard. Furthermore, based on empirical results of this study, we argue that store personality has an indirect impact on loyalty behavior through the mediator of attitudinal loyalty. Perceived store reliability and sophistication exert positive and direct effects on attitudinal loyalty, while perceived store economy and enthusiasm produce negative effects. These also provide insights into store personality and loyalty relationship.

The study has some managerial implications. A new measurement scale specifically developed for specialty store chains in this study is helpful for retailers to understand how their customers perceive their stores and those of their competitors on the symbolic image of store. Therefore, we recommend that retailers should position and differentiate themselves from their competitors by considering which store personality dimensions suit their target customers. Furthermore, the findings of this study also raise retail managers' awareness that store personality plays a crucial role in both attitudinal loyalty and actual shopping behavior. In the past, retailers only focus on the func-

tional attributes of store and neglect its symbolic values; thus, it is imperative that retail managers develop effective positioning strategies in terms of embedding positive store personality in target customer perception. Particularly, reliability is the most important characteristics for technical consumer goods centers/supermarkets to account for consumer loyalty. Then, retailers should focus their marketing activities on enhancing retailer reliability. For instance, they are supposed to absolutely avoid offering fake or fraudulent products with relatively cheap prices and only sell genuine ones with clear origin and approved quality. In addition, managers should build an attractive and classy in-store environment together with professional staff to create the sophistication for their stores.

The present paper has some limitations. Firstly, the paper has been conducted for one retail format, specialty store chain (electronics stores) and in one city (Ho Chi Minh City). Thus, other formats are recommended for future research, such as generalized supermarkets including food sector, department stores, coffee shops, restaurants, and so on, and other regions are also to be considered. Service providers, where the symbolic image and self-expression are highly appreciated, should be taken into account for testing. Secondly, the paper only looks at the impact of store personality on loyalty without referring to other consequences (e.g., satisfaction, trust, store choice, purchase intention, etc.), or which factors contributes to store personality. Therefore, further investigations should involve these constructs and extend the suggested model. Finally, the

moderating variables have not been included, so we suggest that the moderating role of age, gender, income, shopping experience mood, and culture be explored with regard to this relationship■

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