

Exploring the link between customer loyalty and advocacy: A conceptual perspective

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Abstract

This article examines the correlation between customer loyalty and customer advocacy by integrating current literature to elucidate how loyalty motivates customers to become proactive brand champions. Customer loyalty, which includes both behavioral repetition and a stronger emotional connection, is the basis for customer advocacy, in which people promote a company and spread favorable word-of-mouth. This study conducts a thorough literature evaluation to pinpoint essential relational variables, including trust, satisfaction, and commitment, that facilitate the loyalty-advocacy connection. The study also talks about how organizational approaches like giving employees more control, co-creating value, and getting people involved can help build loyalty and advocacy. The results show how important it is to build strong emotional and behavioral ties with customers, as well as supportive organizational settings, in order to turn loyalty into real advocacy. These discoveries have important implications for firms that want to use loyal consumers as brand evangelists to improve brand equity and gain a competitive edge.

Keywords: Customer Loyalty, Customer Advocacy, Brand Loyalty, Word-of-Mouth, Trust, Satisfaction

Introduction

A consistent, favorable relationship between a customer and a business that leads to repeat business and a desire to pick the company over rivals even when there are alternatives is known as customer loyalty. Loyalty was traditionally understood to mean just buying the same brand again. Modern research, however, makes a distinction between deeper attitudinal commitment and simple behavioral repetition. While attitudinal loyalty displays a customer's innate commitment and advocacy for the brand, defying competitors' marketing efforts, behavioral loyalty refers to repeat buying, which can occasionally be induced by inertia or a lack of alternatives.

Oliver (1997, 1999)^[9, 10], for instance, put out a Four Stage Model of Loyalty: action loyalty (actual repurchase or referral), affective loyalty (emotional attachment), conative loyalty (intent to act), and cognitive loyalty (based on facts and beliefs). This paradigm emphasizes how loyalty is multifaceted, develops gradually, and incorporates both emotional and logical components. Because it reduces acquisition costs, boosts retention, and encourages expansion through positive word-of-mouth, customer loyalty is essential for corporate success. On the other hand, customer advocacy surpasses loyalty. Customers actively promote a brand in social or personal networks, defend it against criticism, and suggest it to others. Advocacy is built on loyalty because devoted consumers are more likely to become brand ambassadors who spread the word about the company and sway other people's decisions to buy. Essentially, advocacy is the outward manifestation of loyalty through actions that are beneficial to the brand, whereas loyalty stresses continued preference and repeat business.

Literature Review

The literature consistently demonstrates a robust and reciprocal relationship between customer loyalty and customer advocacy across various sectors, particularly in

banking and services. Early foundational studies established that customer advocacy—characterized by active recommendation and defense of a brand—increases brand loyalty through the mediating roles of trust and relationship quality (Urban, 2005; Lawer & Knox, 2006; Roy & Eshghi, 2013; Junaid *et al.*, 2020; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Gremler *et al.*, 2001; Roy, 2013)^[4, 6, 7, 8, 13, 16]. Sarmad *et al.* (2023) empirically confirmed, using a structural equation modeling approach, that brand relationship quality and trust serve as sequential mediators, amplifying the positive impact of advocacy on loyalty. Such findings echo those of Wallace *et al.* (2012), Bhati & Verma (2020)^[1], Seifert & Kwon (2020), and Yi & Gong (2013)^[18], who showed that advocacy fosters higher cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty by mobilizing “brand evangelists.” Direct effects of satisfaction, trust, and commitment on advocacy are significant, but their ultimate influence is dependent on loyalty as a pathway (Bhati & Verma, 2020; Wallace *et al.*, 2012)^[2].

Recent scholarship has further deepened the understanding of this relationship by examining the processes and moderators that underlie loyalty-driven advocacy. Empirical results from Quaye *et al.* (2022)^[11] indicated that advocacy not only influences direct relational bonds but also enhances co-creation of value, ultimately feeding back into further loyalty. Relationship quality—often measured by satisfaction, trust, and commitment—emerges repeatedly as a dominant antecedent of advocacy, as supported by findings in Fernandes & Pinto (2020), Artanti *et al.* (2020), Fatma & Khan (2023), and studies on relationship and advocacy marketing integration. Studies by Gremler *et al.* (2001)^[4] and Harrigan *et al.* (2021)^[6] highlight the role of organizational support and staff empowerment in reinforcing these dynamics. Notably, customer advocacy not only increases the effectiveness of marketing efforts but also provides insulation against competitors and environmental volatility (Urban, 2005; Roy, 2013; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020)^[13, 16].

The cumulative evidence thus underscores the centrality of customer loyalty as both a foundation for and an outcome of advocacy, mediated significantly by trust, satisfaction, commitment, staff empowerment, and the quality of relationship marketing interventions. Current literature recognizes advocacy as largely contingent on relational constructs (commitment, relationship quality, trust) and calls for further investigation into industry-specific mechanisms (Fernandes & Pinto, 2020; Fatma & Khan, 2023; Gremler *et al.*, 2001) ^[4]. Methodologically, researchers advocate for more nuanced, context-sensitive models (e.g., mediation and moderation analyses), with a focus on digital contexts and emerging markets (Junaid *et al.*, 2020; Sarmad *et al.*, 2023; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021) ^[6, 7]. These insights are foundational for designing both theoretical frameworks and practical strategies aimed at maximizing advocacy through targeted loyalty-building initiatives.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand how customer loyalty leads to customer advocacy.
2. To explore the role of trust and satisfaction in connecting loyalty and advocacy.
3. To identify company actions that help build both loyalty and advocacy among customers.

Research Methodology

The following structure could serve as an appropriate methodology for the research study on the relationship between customer advocacy and customer loyalty, which would be centered on a literature-based approach devoid of statistical computations:

Research Design: Use an exploratory, qualitative approach based on a thorough literature study. This method enables the critical synthesis and analysis of current theoretical and empirical research on the connection between advocacy and consumer loyalty.

Data Collection: Make use of secondary data gathered from books, industry reports, peer-reviewed journal papers, and reliable websites that address consumer advocacy, customer loyalty, and their connections. The sources will be found by conducting systematic database searches (e.g., Google Scholar, Scopus) using pertinent keywords like "customer advocacy," "customer loyalty," "brand loyalty," and "relationship marketing."

Studies that offer conceptual definitions, theoretical frameworks, empirical data, or useful insights on how loyalty affects advocacy and the mediators/moderators involved (such as trust, satisfaction, and engagement) are chosen for inclusion. Influential foundational works and recent publications (within the last ten years) will be prioritized.

Data Analysis: To identify important themes, trends, and structures that connect advocacy and loyalty, perform thematic content analysis. Provide a summary of research on the nature of the relationship between advocacy and loyalty, the part played by behavioral and emotional factors, and organizational strategies that support it.

Synthesis: Create a conceptual framework or model that integrates mediating components found in the literature to show the influence routes from customer advocacy to customer loyalty (e.g., emotional attachment, brand trust, relationship quality).

Results and Analysis

This literature-based analysis reveals a clear and consistent relationship between customer loyalty and customer advocacy, supported by multiple theoretical and empirical sources. Across the reviewed studies, customer loyalty emerges as a foundational construct that strongly influences the likelihood of customers engaging in advocacy behaviors such as positive word-of-mouth, brand recommendations, and defense of the brand in social contexts. Oliver's (1997, 1999) ^[9, 10] multi-dimensional model of loyalty resonates across the literature, where both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty are found critical in fostering advocacy.

Several mediating factors consistently appear in the studies as important facilitators of the loyalty-advocacy link. Trust and satisfaction are highlighted as primary relational drivers that deepen customers' emotional commitment (Urban, 2005; Roy & Eshghi, 2013; Bhati & Verma, 2020) ^[1, 13, 16]. These constructs function as emotional bonds that strengthen the customer-brand relationship quality, which in turn encourages advocacy behaviors. Likewise, commitment and perceived value are found to enhance this relationship, with customers more likely to become active advocates when they feel personally connected to the brand and perceive consistent value (Wallace *et al.*, 2012; Fernandes & Pinto, 2020; Sarmad *et al.*, 2023).

Organizational practices such as staff empowerment, engagement strategies, and value co-creation also play pivotal roles. Studies demonstrate that companies investing in relationship marketing and creating supportive environments for customers can significantly boost not only loyalty but also advocacy rates (Gremler *et al.*, 2001; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Quaye *et al.*, 2022) ^[4, 6, 11]. These practices foster relational quality and emotional resonance, transforming satisfied loyal customers into enthusiastic brand advocates. The analysis thus consolidates the understanding that customer loyalty, underpinned by trust, satisfaction, and quality relationships, is a significant predictor and enabler of customer advocacy.

Discussion

The findings from the literature review highlight the integral role of customer loyalty as a precursor to customer advocacy. Consistent with Oliver's (1997, 1999) ^[9, 10] multidimensional loyalty framework, it is clear that advocacy is not merely a function of repeat purchases but is deeply rooted in attitudinal loyalty, which encompasses emotional attachment and commitment to the brand. This suggests that companies aiming to cultivate brand advocates need to focus on fostering not just behavioral loyalty but also deeper emotional bonds with their customers.

Trust and satisfaction emerge as crucial relational constructs that mediate the transition from loyalty to advocacy, supporting prior research that emphasizes their centrality in shaping strong customer-brand relationships (Urban, 2005; Roy & Eshghi, 2013; Bhati & Verma, 2020) ^[1, 13, 16]. These factors build emotional resonance and reinforce the perception that the brand consistently meets or exceeds customer expectations, making customers more willing to champion the brand publicly. Furthermore, commitment and perceived value bolster this effect by enhancing customers' sense of belonging and personal investment in the brand's success (Wallace *et al.*, 2012; Fernandes & Pinto, 2020; Sarmad *et al.*, 2023). This underscores the importance of relationship quality in converting loyal customers into active advocates.

Organizational practices also play a significant role in this dynamic, particularly through staff empowerment, engagement strategies, and value co-creation (Gremler *et al.*, 2001; Harrigan *et al.*, 2021; Quaye *et al.*, 2022) ^[4, 6, 11]. By fostering an environment that values customer interaction and participation, firms can strengthen relational bonds and encourage customers to take on advocacy roles. This approach aligns with the strategic imperative for not only satisfying and retaining customers but also mobilizing them as proactive promoters of the brand. The cumulative insights suggest that brands should adopt a holistic approach that integrates emotional, behavioral, and organizational elements to effectively translate customer loyalty into meaningful advocacy, which ultimately drives sustainable competitive advantage.

Conclusion

This research affirms that customer loyalty is a critical foundation for fostering customer advocacy. The literature reveals that loyalty is not only about repeat purchases but also involves emotional attachment, trust, and satisfaction, which collectively encourage customers to become active brand advocates. Key relational constructs such as trust, satisfaction, and commitment mediate the loyalty-advocacy relationship, emphasizing the importance of strong, quality customer-brand relationships. Furthermore, organizational practices including staff empowerment, engagement initiatives, and value co-creation significantly enhance both loyalty and advocacy outcomes.

By integrating behavioral, attitudinal, and organizational dimensions, businesses can effectively convert loyal customers into passionate advocates, generating positive word-of-mouth, brand promotion, and competitive advantage. This synthesis underscores the need for holistic, relationship-focused strategies to maximize the benefits of customer loyalty in driving advocacy. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the loyalty-advocacy nexus and offers valuable insights for academics and practitioners seeking to strengthen brand-customer connections.

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