The role of store-image and functional image congruity in determining brand loyalty: Cognitive, affective, and conative brand loyalty in the context of brand coffee shops

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ABSTRACT

This study employs two marketing theories: 1) the theory of image congruity and 2) the theory of brand loyalty. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between self-image and functional image toward brand coffee shops. In addition, this study specifically identifies positive influential paths between congruity constructs and each designated loyalty. Direct paths among cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty are investigated to help marketers’ understanding of how consumers truly become loyal. Findings from this study suggest consumers’ image congruity on either the image of brand coffee shops or functional attributes of the store appear to evoke different levels of brand loyalty. Understanding the effects of consumers’ image congruity on attitudinal brand loyalty is worthy to establish marketing strategies for customer retention.

Keywords: self image congruity, functional congruity, cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty

INTRODUCTION

With increasingly changing life styles and culture, Korea has entered a new phase in coffee consumption over the past decades. Since the 1990s, more than 11 brand coffee chains (i.e., Starbucks, Hollys, Coffee Bean, and Davinci Coffee) have opened and operated over a thousand stores across the country (Kim, 2009). There is a newly created word indicating this new trend in coffee consumption, coffice (coffee + office) tribe, which means individuals who drink coffee and engage in other activities, such as meeting friends, reading, working, and studying (Kim, 2010). As brand coffee shops have marketed their stores as another place to enjoy coffee and meet friends (Plog, 2005), consumers may visit such coffee shops not for just a cup of coffee, but for specialties the coffee shops provides them.
This new trend in coffee consumption in Korea can be explained via a concept of consumer’s image congruity with a particular brand toward a store. Image congruity theory explains the process of matching images among consumers and a given product (or brand/store). In previous studies, results showed a positive effect of store image on store loyalty (Sirgy & Samli, 1985; Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991). As competition among brand coffee shops becomes more intense, retaining existing customers becomes more important than attracting new customers. A brand loyalty model developed by Back and Parks (2003) provides a holistic view of brand loyalty, including behavioral and attitudinal aspects. Attitudinal brand loyalty is found to be a predictor of behavioral brand loyalty, such as positive intention to repurchase.

To explain the trend of coffee consumption in Korea explained above, this study employs the self-image congruity model (Sirgy et al., 1991) and brand loyalty model (Back & Parks, 2003). This study aims to 1) examine a direct relationship between self-image congruity and functional congruity toward a coffeehouse, 2) specifically identify positive influential paths between congruity constructs and each designated loyalty, and 3) examine direct paths from cognitive to affective loyalty, and then to conative loyalty. The results of this study contribute to extending the scope of literature on both image congruity and brand loyalty theory in the context of hospitality and providing store managers with new aspects of customers’ perceptions and loyalty.

To further understand why consumers are willing to pay a premium price for their experience in brand coffee shops, marketers need to investigate consumers’ congruity processes, which help create loyalty with existing customers. Consequently, the proposed research model in this study explains how consumers connect themselves to their coffeehouses and become loyal customers by examining various phases of brand loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Image congruity theory

Image congruity is defined as the degrees of matching the image of a consumer and the image of a given product (or brand/store). To examine consumers’ decision-making in more detail, researchers have developed two concepts of congruity measures—self-congruity and functional congruity (Sirgy & Samli, 1985; Sirgy et al., 1991). Both image congruity has been used to explain consumer’s cognitive process of evaluating the products or services (Sirgy, et al., 2005). Self-congruity is defined as a comparison between consumers’ own image and a product image. At this stage of image congruity, consumers focus on sybolic product attributes which can be described with various abjectives (e.g., friendly, modern, or traditional) reflecting the image of product user (Sirgy et al., 1997). Functional congruity refers to discrepancies between consumer perception toward product attributes and their evaluation. A measure of functional attributes involves product quality, price, store atmosphere, and performance (Sirgy, Grewal, &
Mangleburg, 2000). Positive effects of image congruity indicate the higher the congruity the more positive consumer behavior occurs (He & Mukherjee, 2007).

The relationship between self-store congruity and functional congruity

Wang (2004) emphasized a holistic view of image congruity in the context of retail, since all attributes of a given store involve symbolic and functional attributes, which might influence consumers’ image congruity simultaneously. Sirgy & Samli (1985) measured two dimensions of store image, functional and symbolic, to assess store image as a holistic perspective. Symbolic store image describes a typical image of store patrons. For instance, a store designed in an antique style, illuminated by soft light may create a luxurious image for the store to provide this image with affluent customers (Sirgy et al., 2000). On the other hand, a functional store image involves physical attributes of the store, such as product, price, atmosphere, and the attitude of employees (Sirgy & Samli, 1985). In this manner, consumers at brand coffee shops may perceive themselves as people who enjoy high quality gourmet coffee compared to other consumers.

Marketing studies have found causal relationship between functional congruity and self-congruity. Samli & Sirgy (1981) revealed a significant correlation between them. Later, Sirgy and his colleagues (1985, 1991) also found a causal relationship among self-congruity, functional congruity, and store loyalty. Both studies indicated that functional congruity has strong influence on store loyalty when it is primarily influenced by self-congruity (i.e., biasing effect). In other words, stronger impact of functional congruity on consumer behavior can be expected when functional congruity is primarily and closely related to self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1991).

In the context of hospitality and tourism, Kwun & Oh (2006) examined the effect of self-image in fine dining restaurants and found an important effect of self-congruity on consumers’ intentions to repurchase and recommend. Self-congruity has been found as a strong indicator to predict destination choice and tourists’ satisfaction with their travel experience (Sirgy & Su, 2000; Beerli, Meneses, & Gil, 2007). Although self-congruity seems to be an ordinary topic in the hospitality marketing research, examining a causal relationship between self-congruity and functional congruity is considered worthy, due to the lack of empirical studies on this relationship in hospitality research. Thus, we propose an image congruity model for both self-congruity and functional congruity in the context of brand coffeehouses. Hereafter, the image congruity between self and store refers to self-store congruity (SSC); whereas, functional congruity toward store attributes refers to functional store congruity (FSC). From a thorough literature review, a positive relationship between SSC and FSC is hypothesized.

H1: SSC is positively related to FSC.
Brand loyalty

Oliver (1997) defined “loyalty is a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (p. 34). Many researchers often use the frequency of purchase and repeat purchase to measure behavioral brand loyalty. Since hospitality managers and researchers view brand loyalty as more than consumers’ constant purchase behavior, brand loyalty should be evaluated with two constructs: 1) behavioral and 2) attitudinal (Back, 2005). In the hospitality industry, assessing different levels of brand loyalty, especially focusing on the attitudinal component, is important because measuring brand loyalty with frequency is not enough to explain consumers’ psychological process of being loyal to a specific product or service (Mattila, 2001; Scholl, 2003). Attitudinal brand loyalty has three different stages, including cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty (Oliver, 1997).

Cognitive loyalty is a preference over competing brand attitude. It is formatted, based upon the product information available to the customer (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). Affective loyalty is an affective preference toward the product and affect refers to emotional responses. This emotional attitude to a product is based upon an established connection between the consumer and product. Conation loyalty is behavioral willingness to keep on using the brand in the future (Back, 2005). This attitude is assumed to be the strongest behavioral intention compared to cognitive and affective loyalty (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001).

The relationship between SSC, FSC, and brand loyalty

Many studies in image congruity and brand loyalty have explained the link between image congruity and brand loyalty (Sirgy, 1985; Chon, 1990; Back, 2005). In the retail setting, Sirgy & Samli (1985) found causal relationships among store loyalty determinants, such as store-image evaluation, shopping-complex, and self-image congruity toward store image. Prendergast and Man (2002) examined the effect of image congruities on store loyalty in the quick service restaurant industry. Kressmann et al. (2006) found direct and indirect relationships between self-image and brand loyalty, as well as a direct relationship between functional congruity and brand loyalty in the automobile setting. Their findings showed powerful effects of store image on store loyalty. However, these studies considered brand loyalty as a solely construct that represent consumers’ commitment to repurchase or repatronize preferred products or services (Oliver, 1997). Due to the lack of research that proposes specific relationships between image congruity and the attitudinal brand loyalty (i.e., cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty), this study propose specific paths from image congruity to designated loyalty constructs to explain consumers’ psychological process of evaluating brand loyalty in regards to the image.
The link between SSC and cognitive brand loyalty can be explained based on how consumers evaluate stores with respect to its symbolic attributes and create the image of store patrons who has great emotional commitment to the specific store. Consumers use various information to create patron’s image. The information drawn from store environment includes atmospheric attributes such as music (e.g., jazz or newage music), lighting, and interior design (e.g., modern, fashionable) (Sirgy, et al., 2000). Consumer’s cognitive loyalty is determined by assessing these information. Since the evaluation of consumer experiences affects cognitive loyalty (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006), the extent to which consumers match their image and store patron image directs cognitive loyalty.

The relationship between SSC and affective brand loyalty can be explained based on store environmental attributes, especially atmospheric cues. Consumers’ overall impression about the store, other patrons in the store, and employees’ performance are different set of information that has tantamount importance in consumers’ self-congruity process (Sirgy, et al., 2000). If consumers satisfy the service performance provided by employees, they are likely to exhibit favorable attitude toward the store. In other words, affective loyalty can be driven after perceived performance meets consumer satisfaction (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006).

In a similar manner explained the path from SSC to cognitive loyalty, the link between FSC and cognitive brand loyalty can be explained. The information in regards to functional congruity includes price, location, and products (Sirgy, et al., 2000). Consumers use cognitive thinking processes to evaluate these functional attributes and then, match the evaluation results with their expectation (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). When consumers perceive benefits of consumption, cognitive loyalty is directed from functional congruity. Based on the discussion above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: SSC is positively related to cognitive brand loyalty.
H3: SSC is positively related to affective brand loyalty.
H4: FSC is positively related to cognitive brand loyalty.

The relationship between cognitive, affective, and conative brand loyalty

Oliver (1997) argues that attitudinal brand loyalty phases show a learning process that highlights different elements of the attitude development structure. A consumer’s initial loyalty starts with a cognitive sense, followed by an affective manner, and later in a conative sense (Oliver, 1997; Back & Parks, 2003). For instance, if a bank offers higher saving rate than other bank, customers may use the bank to save money as a cognitive manner. If the customers are satisfied with the saving product of a bank, the customers will develop affective loyalty to the product and the customers may expand to use other products in the same bank (brand). Finally, the customers are willing to have an intention to keep on using the bank (brand) in the future (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001).
Back & Park (2003) investigated the mediating effects of three types of attitudinal brand loyalty in business travelers who stayed at an upper-middle-class business hotel. Pike and Ryan (2004) explored destination positioning analysis through a comparison of cognitive, affective, and conative perceptions. Recently, Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim (2010) examined destination attachment to use the effects on customer satisfaction and cognitive, affective, and conative loyalty. These studies indicate that attitudinal brand loyalty has significant relationships for each level of attitudinal phases. However, relatively little empirical research has been conducted on testing the connection of attitudinal phases of brand loyalty in hospitality discipline. In this perspective, following hypothesis are proposed to test customers’ brand loyalty in different loyalty phases at brand coffee shops.

\[ H_5: \text{Cognitive brand loyalty is positively related to affective brand loyalty.} \]

\[ H_6: \text{Affective brand loyalty is positively related to conative brand loyalty.} \]

Based on the discussions above, the conceptual model is proposed (Figure 1). In this study, we investigated the relationship between self-congruity, functional congruity, and three phases of attitudinal loyalty, including cognitive, affective, and conative brand loyalty.

![Figure 1. A Conceptual Model for Image Congruity and Brand Loyalty](image)

**METHODOLOGY**

**Survey instruments**

Based on the literature review, the questionnaire was developed and modified for the context of coffee shops. First, this study employed and modified a scenario for a tourism context to measure self-congruity in a brand coffee shop setting. After reading this scenario, each respondent was asked to rate a 5-point Likert-type scale to the extent of how they agree with the four self-image statements (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Second, respondents were asked to rate 10 items of functional attributes with a 5-point Likert-type scale. Eight were from Ryu, Han, and Kim.
and two new items (i.e., Wifi and order) were added. The third part of the survey asked questions about three attitudinal loyalty constructs originated from Back and Parks (2003). A total of nine items for attitudinal brand loyalty was measured by a 7-point Likert scale. The last part of the survey requested demographic information.

Data collection and analysis

A questionnaire was developed and translated into Korean under the double translation rule. To ensure the reliability and validity of scales, a pilot study was conducted at a major university in the Midwestern section of the United States. Data were collected at four different brand coffee shops (i.e., Starbucks, Coffee Bean, Angel-in-us, and Hollys) in Seoul, the capital of South Korea in 2010. A self-administered survey was distributed to customers at the coffee shops. A total of 389 surveys were used to analyze these data after deleting incomplete 12 responses. Two statistics softwares (i.e., SPSS 16.0 and AMOS 16.0) were used to analyze data. After conducting descriptive statistics analysis, missing data entries were replaced with mean values. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the overall fit of the measurement model. Five factors were found in accord with the number of factors in the proposed model. The structural model was tested to examine the proposed hypotheses.

RESULTS

The measurement model for this study consisted of five factors including two exogenous constructs (i.e., self-congruity and functional congruity) and three attitudinal brand loyalty (i.e., cognitive, affective, and conative brand loyalty). From the results of CFA, the goodness-of-fit statistics was provided; $\chi^2=477.402$, df=220, p<.001, GFI=.899, CFI=.911, RMSEA=.055. All factor loadings were significant at p<.001.

The measurement model also presents a strong composite reliability for scales ranging from 0.764 to 0.937, which exceeds the recommended minimum level of .7 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.663 to 0.909, which was larger than the recommended minimum level of .5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). A strong convergent validity was found, based on all indicators significantly loaded on the proposed constructs at p<.001 and larger AVE values (i.e., greater than .5). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the squared correlation between one construct and the other constructs with the AVE for each construct. All AVE values were larger than the squared correlation between the pair of constructs, except for two pairs of constructs (i.e, cognitive and conative loyalty, affective and conative loyalty) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

In the analysis of the structural model, eight items for the functional congruity were used, drawn from Ryu et al. (2008). The goodness-of-fit statistics were acceptable ($\chi^2=370.917$, df=183, p<.001, GFI=.916, CFI=.930, RMSEA=.051). All proposed hypotheses were supported
(Sirgy et al., 1991; Sirgy et al., 1997; Back & Parks, 2003): SSC \( \rightarrow \) FSC (H1: \( \beta = .15, p<.05 \)), SSC \( \rightarrow \) cognitive loyalty (H2: \( \beta = .45, p<.001 \)), SSC \( \rightarrow \) affective loyalty (H3: \( \beta = .16, p<.001 \)), FSC \( \rightarrow \) cognitive loyalty (H4: \( \beta = .13, p<.05 \)), cognitive loyalty \( \rightarrow \) affective loyalty (H5: \( \beta = .56, p<.001 \)), and affective loyalty \( \rightarrow \) conative loyalty (H6: \( \beta = .96, p<.001 \)).

![Diagram showing the relationship between self-store congruity, functional congruity, cognitive brand loyalty, affective brand loyalty, and conative brand loyalty.]

Figure 3. The results of analysis. *\( p<0.05 \), **\( p<0.001 \).

DISCUSSIONS

Overall, the proposed model for this study discovered and proved the relationship between self-congruity and functional congruity, and relationships between cognitive, affective, and conative brand loyalty in brand coffee shops. Previous studies in the hospitality context provided positive outcomes of image congruity by solely examining the effect of self-congruity (Kwun & Oh, 2006; Beerli et al., 2007) or functional congruity (Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008), otherwise by investigating both the effects of self and functional congruity, but separately (Prendergast & Man, 2002). Thus, the findings from this study enhance the applicability of the path from SSC to FSC suggested in other contexts (Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy et al., 1991; Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, & Su, 2005).

Another finding presented all positive paths from cognitive to conative brand loyalty. Thus, this supported the study of brand loyalty stages by Oliver (1997) and Back & Parks (2003). These findings indicated when consumers have strong beliefs for certain coffee brands they have an increased degree of preference for the coffee brand. In addition, results showed that a positive commitment of certain coffee brand leads to repurchase of particular coffee brand items. Therefore, this study confirmed the importance of identifying the stages of attitudinal brand loyalty to provide a better understanding of repurchasing intentions in the brand coffeehouse industry. Moreover, the findings has a number of implications for brand coffee shops managers, when they deelpe marketing plans for the different stages of attitudinal brand loyalty.
The findings of this study identified particular paths that connect from self-congruity to affective brand loyalty, as well as from functional congruity and cognitive brand loyalty. Consumers perceived and evaluated functional attributes at a conscious level, which, in turn, influence their preferences (Sirgy et al., 1991). Cognition refers to one’s thoughts and beliefs about the attitude toward given products (Oliver, 1997). The path from functional congruity and cognitive brand loyalty seems reasonable, since both components are processed in one’s conscious level. In a similar way, the path from self-congruity to affective brand loyalty can be explained. Consumers are less likely to use conscious thoughts in assessing the attributes of self-congruity (Oliver, 1997). Affect is one’s emotional responses (Back & Parks, 2003). The path from self-congruity and cognitive brand loyalty indicates that consumers use cognitive thinking process in evaluating self-congruity, since self-congruity is activated at higher-level in the cognitive hierarchy (Andreassen, 2010).

In conclusion, consumers’ behaviors in matching their images with brand coffee shops are found to be a predictor of their positive loyalty toward brands. The finding of this study has a couple of limitations. First, the results cannot be generalized all brand coffee shops because the data collected from one single country. Also, this study leaves out what kind of SSC among the four self-image congruities (i.e., actual, social, ideal, or ideal social image congruence) is more influential to evoke affective loyalty. Thus, further study is needed to measure self-image congruence toward a brand coffee shop with multiple items. Assessing the effect of each SSC may increase an understanding of what kind of image these brand coffee shop consumers desire to purchase.

Implications and future study

The findings of this study provide theoretical and empirical evidences to support the proposed model. The results of this study suggest that a coffee shop marketer should constantly monitor how consumers perceive their coffee brand. Brand coffee business in Korea are characterized by intangibility (i.e., brand image and store image). Marketers should maintain a consistent store image that meets target consumers’ image. Additionally, marketers need to establish marketing strategies to reduce the difference in consumers expectation and experience toward functional attributes (e.g., products and service). Consequently, marketers can expect to achieve consumers’ different level of brand loyalty when considering consumers’ image congruence including symbolic and functional attributes.

This study has limitations in data collection: (1) the high portion of younger generation in the sample population and (2) the limited area of data collection. Collecting data from various age ranges and geographic locations can improve the findings of this study. Researchers can suggest better managerial implications which are applicable broader market. We suggest including other variables (e.g., satisfaction, perceived value) that explain consumer’s experience at a brand coffee shop.
REFERENCES


