AN ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE FACTORS OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP, BRAND IMAGE, BRAND TRUST, AND BRAND LOYALTY; FOCUSING ON SPORTING GOODS COMPANIES

Author:
Se-Yun Kim

email:
sse6sse@naver.com

Co-authors:
Yong-Man, Kim(Dankook University)
Ae-Rang, Kim(Dankook University)
Se-Hyuk, Park(Seoul National University of Science and Technology)

University:
Dankook university

Abstract

Introduction

Nowadays it is difficult to make your brand stand out among others because the technological development of sporting goods has made no differences in quality between brands. Therefore, a lot of companies producing sporting goods are competing desperately to secure their present customers. Under these circumstances, sporting goods companies are trying very hard to provide the products and diverse benefits that could be perceived as desirable and valuable by their customers. They know that this effort will bring some great benefits to the companies such as creating stronger relationships with their customers, reducing outflow rates, securing customer loyalty, and increasing repurchase intention. In relation to this matter, Ledingham & Bruning(1998) stated that organization-public relationship which forms centering on reliability, loyalty and open communication with the public has an influence on a consumer's loyalty. Obviously, under this kind of competitive business environment, securing a strong relationship with the customers becomes a very important factor in preventing the customer outflow, and increasing the repurchase intentions of the customers. This is the basic assumption that wasfound during the research conducted. Based on this assumption, the research was ultimately aimed to identify the relationship among factors such as customer relationship of sporting goods companies, brand image, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Kim & Lee[2008] measured organization-public relationship through the concept of public relationship which was developed to meet the cultural properties of Korea on the basis of the precedent research.

Methods

The convenient sampling method was used to select a total of 300 students from D, S, and H Universities, located in Cheon-An, one of the largest cities in South Korea. The reason this research selected college students as its research object is that college students are more likely to be exposed to several brands and more sensitive to brands than other strata(Jung, Lee, & Kim, 2005). The selected people were asked to answer the questions through questionnaires, in a self-administered method. Among all the collected questionnaires, 20 copies were excluded because they were improperly answered, so only 280 copies of the questionnaires were utilized for the final analysis of this research. The collected data was analyzed bythe following statistical methods; first, frequency analysis using SPSSWIN Ver.15.0 was applied. Second, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model analysis using AMOS 7.0 were also applied for this research.

Results

The research results were as the following; first, itwas found that the subordinate factors of sporting goods company-consumer relationships, which are connectedness and balance in communication, have a significant effect on the brand image, whereas the factor such as involvement in community doesn't have such a great effect on it. Second, brand image was found to have a huge effect on brand trust and brand loyalty. Lastly, brand trust also affected the brand loyalty.

Conclusion

This research revealed the fact thatsporting goods company-consumer relationships have an effect on brand loyalty, through brand image, and brand trust. Therefore, if a marketer at a sporting goods company is interested in having a smooth relationship with customers, the companies should continuously form a strong bond with the customers, seekits subsequent strategy, and use that strategy aggressively. This will allow companies to create positive brand images, trust, and ultimately enhance a customer's loyalty to the brands. Especially, a sporting goods business are advised to put its focus on connectedness and balance in communication in order to improve the relationship with a consumer.

※Key words: Customer Relationship, Brand Image, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty

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