

LOYALTY DETERMINANTS TO A TECHNOLOGY BRAND: THE SONY PLAYSTATION

DETERMINANTES DA LEALDADE A UMA MARCA TECNOLÓGICA: A SONY PLAYSTATION

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Abstract

In a market with high competition, companies must strive to create loyalty bonds with their customers. Thus, the purpose of this study focuses on identifying the most important antecedents of loyalty to the Sony PlayStation brand. In this way, we will try to fill a gap in academic literature, as there is no known study in Portugal that examines the relationships between variables that have been considered essential in achieving loyalty to the Sony PlayStation brand. This is the case of brand experience, brand awareness, brand satisfaction, brand engagement, and brand loyalty.

This research proposes a theoretical model, tested through structural equation models. For this purpose, an online questionnaire was used, posted on Facebook brand communities, and also sent, via email to several IPC students and a circle of friends, and 236 valid questionnaires were collected.

The results obtained indicate that the experience with the brand has a positive effect on both brand awareness and brand engagement. In turn, brand awareness positively influences brand engagement and brand satisfaction. Brand engagement, on the other hand, has a positive impact not only on brand satisfaction but also on Sony PlayStation brand loyalty. Finally, satisfied customers become loyal to the Sony PlayStation brand.

KEYWORDS: Brand Awareness, Brand Experience, Brand Engagement, Brand Satisfaction, Brand Loyalty.

Resumo

Num mercado com elevada concorrência, as empresas devem esforçar-se por criar laços de fidelidade com os seus clientes. Assim, o objetivo deste estudo centra-se na identificação dos antecedentes mais importantes da lealdade à marca Playstation da Sony. Desta forma, tentaremos preencher uma lacuna na literatura académica, uma vez que não existe um estudo conhecido em Portugal que examine as relações entre variáveis que foram consideradas essenciais para alcançar a lealdade à marca Playstation da Sony. Este é o caso da experiência da marca, da notoriedade da marca, da satisfação com a marca, do *brand engagement* e da lealdade à marca.

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Esta investigação propõe um modelo teórico, testado através dos modelos de equações estruturais. Para este fim, foi utilizado um questionário online, colocado nas comunidades de marca do Facebook, e enviado também através de e-mail a vários estudantes do IPC e a um círculo de amigos, tendo sido recolhidos 236 questionários válidos.

Os resultados obtidos indicam que a experiência com a marca tem um efeito positivo tanto na notoriedade da marca como no brand engagement. Por sua vez, a notoriedade da marca influencia positivamente o brand engagement e a satisfação com a marca. A notoriedade da marca, por outro lado, tem um impacto positivo não só na satisfação com a marca, mas também na lealdade à marca Playstation da Sony. Finalmente, clientes satisfeitos tornam-se leais à marca Playstation da Sony.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Notoriedade da Marca, Experiência com a Marca, *Brand Engagement*, Satisfação com a Marca, Lealdade à Marca.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a highly competitive market, companies must strive to make their customers loyal as loyal customers are willing to pay more for a product/service even beyond their expectations as they place trust in the brand and have no intentions of leaving the brand (Bowen & McCain, 2015). The shift to the relationship marketing paradigm has made brand loyalty a key indicator of customer relationships (Oliver, 1999). Consequently, the issue of the antecedents of brand loyalty is becoming a primary focus of research (Jang et al., 2008). While previous studies on loyalty focused on components such as perceived value, brand trust and customer satisfaction, recent studies on brand loyalty have gradually adopted an integrated approach (He, Li & Harris, 2012). The relationship between consumers and brands is important in building brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998).

The connection of relationship marketing with the gaming sector is still too fragile for it to be used as a value proposition and loyalty tool. The increasingly easy way to communicate and interact in online brand communities makes consumers quickly change their opinion about brands. In the specific case of the gaming world, consumers often look for the brand/product that their acquaintances use, so that they can enjoy the same game at the same time (in the case of Sony's brand, you can only play online with people who have the same type of console). The choice of theme has to do with trying to understand how the gamer consumer forms an attitude of loyalty with his brand/product. In this specific case, the chosen brand was Sony with the product PlayStation, because it is a product with a high demand and because it is a brand with which many of us identify ourselves.

Sony brand loyalty was the topic chosen for this study. Thus, the most relevant determinants of brand loyalty in the literature are investigated. To understand the determinants of brand loyalty and to develop a conceptual model, the following specific objectives were defined: ascertain if the brand experience influences brand awareness, brand engagement, and brand loyalty. To understand how brand awareness influences brand engagement. Identify the effects that brand awareness and brand engagement have on brand satisfaction. Analyse the effect of brand engagement on brand loyalty. Finally, understand how brand satisfaction influences brand loyalty.

In section 1, Introduction, the research objectives are defined, and the article structure is presented. In section 2, literature review and research hypotheses, it was carried out a literature review about the concepts, framed in the study, concerning loyalty and its determinants, and presented the conceptual model and the research hypotheses. In section 3, the methodology is presented, and, in section 4, the results obtained using structural equation modeling are presented. Section 5 presents the conclusions, with a discussion of the results of the study presented.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

There are many variables that we believe have a decisive influence on the loyalty of a technological brand, particularly in gaming. Among the most important, we considered as determinants of loyalty to a technological brand, brand awareness, brand experience, brand engagement, and brand satisfaction.

2.1. Concept Revision

2.1.1. Brand Loyalty

Oliver (1997) defined customer loyalty as a deeply consolidated commitment to purchase a product/service repeatedly in the future, despite the influences and efforts of competing brands that have the potential to cause switching behaviour. Brand loyalty is then more than repurchasing products or services from a brand, a long-term psychological relationship (Oliver, 1999). Dick and Basu (1994) also indicate that consumers' emotional state influences their brand loyalty. It is well established that attitudinal loyalty influences the consumer's ability to defend the brand (Fullerton, 2005).

Loyalty has been widely investigated, not only because it is a very important issue in the companies' marketing strategy, but also because customers have become more volatile and have reasons to be less loyal. Before defining any strategy, companies must know their customers well, their preferences and how they can serve them better, so that the relationship can be long-term (Dick & Basu, 1994). Loyalty is, in a common way, recognised in the literature as a dimensional construct (Rundle-Thiele & Bennett, 2001), categorised as behavioural, attitudinal or a combination of both. For several years, researchers have considered perceived quality, switching costs and especially satisfaction as fundamental to brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009; Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015).

However, with the new role of consumers as co-owners and co-creators of the brand (Gong, 2018), the emphasis has changed and brands have started to focus on a more relational perspective (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005), where the value of a brand is the result of external relationships, that is, of an engagement with the customer. As such, the antecedents of loyalty now encompass new concepts (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015), such as brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) and especially, as of 2014, customer brand engagement (CBE) (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dessart, Veloutsoi, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). CBE has thus gained increased importance in brand management (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and can help companies create an emotionally loyal environment with their customers (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015). However, research corroborating the dominant contribution of CBE to loyalty is still mainly exploratory due to the small number of existing quantitative studies (Dwivedi, 2015; Calder, Malthouse & Maslowsk, 2016). Brand awareness, we think it is important to consider as another essential determinant of loyalty to PlayStation Sony.

Therefore, in the context of CBE, loyalty encompasses not only repeat purchases, but also positive internal attitudes towards the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Conceptual work asserts that since the relationship generates positive attitudes towards the brand, it can make consumers feel more loyal (Hollebeek, 2011) through interactive experiences beyond the purchase and by a lasting psychological connection (Brodie et al., 2011). Due to its interactive and immersive nature, the relationship leads to intense relational bonds with a brand, which consumers may wish to maintain in the future (Dwivedi, 2015). Thus, the longer the relationship, the more the brand expects satisfaction and loyalty to be higher (Brodie et al., 2013).

Consumers with high levels of brand loyalty are less likely to switch brands (Thompson & Sinha, 2008) and less sensitive to price increases or to failures in their favorite brand (Amine, 1998).

Although some authors maintain that brand engagement is antecedent to brand loyalty (Kim, Morris, & Swait, 2008), others believe that it is an intrinsic part of brand loyalty (Odin, Odin, & Valette-Florence, 2001). However, brand engagement is a psychological, emotional, or attitudinal relationship with a brand (Fournier, 1998; Fullerton, 2005), while brand loyalty also has a behavioural component. Thus, consumers, who have strong brand loyalty, will be more likely to have negative attitudes towards competing brands. Brand loyalty can be intensified, when attempts are made to denigrate competing brands (i.e., there is a desire to harm) and express negative opinions about them (i.e., bad-mouthing), using, nowadays, for example, the social media that are now available to consumers.

2.1.2. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is regarded as the first component for building the brand equity of a product (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2001). Buil, Martinez and Chernatony, (2013) point out that brand awareness is the primary step in development of brand equity. Therefore, brand awareness is an important element of brand equity, which refers to the strength of the brand in customers (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012). Further, many authors consider brand awareness to be one of the constructs of brand equity and have already shown empirically in their study that brand awareness leads to the creation of strong brand equity (Guha, Mandal & Kujur, 2021). Brand awareness captures ‘the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category’ (Aaker, 1991, p. 61) and is an asset of brand presence in the mind of target consumers which means that how consumers will remember and distinguish the brand in the presences of other brands and under different conditions.

Brand awareness can be strengthened by supporting a brand name with complete brand elements including logo, symbols, packaging, character, and slogan which are easy to memorize and influence purchase decision and advertising is a major tool to increase familiarity and brand awareness. Brand awareness refers to the probability that customers are aware of or familiar with the life and availability of the product. In this way, consumers connect the brand to the product in question directly. Keller (2001) points out that brand awareness includes two key components—brand recognition and brand recall, to maintain brand stocks for the long-term relationship of the brand, namely, brand resonance and brand awareness. Keller (2001) defines brand recognition as “the consumers’ ability to authenticate earlier revelation to the brand when given the brand as an indication” while brand recall is “consumers’ ability to recoup the brand from memory when given the product category, the needs satisfied by the category or a purchase or habit situation as a reminder.” Brand awareness is the key and required requirement for the entire brand network to reflect the willingness of consumers to remember the brand under different conditions: the ability to identify and make it convenient for a brand name (Keller, 1993).

2.1.3. Brand Experience

Consumers form their choices based on the experiential factors that a brand offers (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), they desire something that touches their heart and engages their senses (Schmitt, 2009). This requires marketers to design unique experiences for brands to achieve competitive advantage and long-term consumer loyalty (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998).

Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009) reported the four dimensions of the brand experience such as sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. Thus, we can define brand experience as a response given at affective, sensory, intellectual, and behavioural levels, enticed by brand-related stimuli. Affective responses refer to the feeling or feelings evoked by the brand and its emotional relationship with consumers. That is, it includes the mood, emotion and feeling of consumers

(Ding & Tseng, 2015). Sensory responses include olfactory, visual, tactile, gustatory, and auditory stimuli provided by the brand (Schmitt, 2009). The “sensory” dimension defines the visual and brand aspects that are perceived through the consumer’s sensory body part (Hwang & Hyun, 2012). This brand’s aesthetic facet can augment sensorial experiences since it arouses consumer’s senses involving, touch, vision, hearing, and smell (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Moreover, several marketers suggest that sensorial experiences are modeled via aesthetic designs (for example, materials, color, and style) and themes (for example, visual signs and slogans) which are underlined in the content of the brand (Hultén, 2011). Intellectual responses refer to the brand’s ability to make the consumer think or feel curiosity (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Intellectual brand experience involves thinking differently and convergingly and enables consumers to change their thinking about brand. Intellectual experiences are referred to as events that trigger consumers’ thoughts and induce their curiosity (Schmitt, 1999). Since intellectual experience is associated with the individual’s thoughts toward a brand, intellectual appeals should attempt to persuade and influence favorable and pleasing memories (Kang et al., 2017). Behavioural responses consist of body experiences, lifestyle, and interaction with the brand (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). The “behavioral” component is denoted by specific forms of behavioral reactions toward a brand provoked by particular brand stimuli. Consumers are motivated to engage in bodily experiences and physical actions that attempt to generate remarkable visible experiences with the brand (Kang et al., 2017).

It is therefore important that experiential marketing is well managed by the marketer to reduce the downsides. More recently, Prentice et al. (2019) defined brand experience as not only a consumer’s experience of buying and consuming from the brand/organisation, but also a brand’s influence on non-consumers.

2.1.4. Brand Satisfaction

For several years, satisfaction has been studied by researchers and marketing specialists, although there is no concrete definition. For many researchers, satisfaction arises from the relationship between the performance of the product/service and the expectations of the consumer.

Oliver (1997) defined satisfaction as a feeling of pleasure received by an individual, after the consumption of a product, where it fulfilled his need, goal, or desire. Fraering and Minor (2013) and Kotler and Armstrong (2014) defined satisfaction as a personal feeling of pleasure resulting from the comparison between the performance perceived by the consumer and the expectations created around a product/service by the consumer. The user experience and actual performance of a product/service are strongly related to satisfaction (Sengupta et al., 2015). Izogo and Ogba (2015) state that satisfaction is the result of the level of enjoyment or disappointment towards a brand. For Kotler and Armstrong (2014), satisfaction arises from the result between what is received and what is expected from a product/service, being included in this result the purchase decision itself, the needs and the desires associated with it.

For companies, and especially for marketers, satisfaction is an important factor, as it can lead to positive word-of-mouth, loyalty and repurchase intentions. When consumers are satisfied with a brand, they are more likely to buy products of the same brand again and to recommend it to people they know (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004). According to Dimitriadis (2006), satisfied customers are less sensitive to price fluctuations and are less influenced by campaigns devised by competitor companies, thus being more loyal and with positive word-of-mouth behaviour. For Kotler and Armstrong (2014), the profile of the satisfied consumer has the following characteristics: he/she is loyal for longer, buys new products of the same brand over time, has a positive word-of-mouth about the brand and its products, is less sensitive to price fluctuations and does not pay attention to competing brands.

Consumer satisfaction is also positively influenced by consumers’ affective responses, such as

their enjoyment, and pleasure in using the product/service (Wolfenbarger, & Gilly, 2001). Customer satisfaction is defined as a potential consequence of the consumer's relationship with the brand, in the case of new/existing consumers, although it may also represent an antecedent of the relationship, especially for current consumers (Hollebeek, 2011). Feiz and Moradi (2020) defined satisfaction as the result of a long-lasting consumer-brand relationship, in which purchase behaviours exist.

2.1.5. Brand Engagement

Brand engagement assumes that consumers are willing to invest time, energy, money, or other resources in addition to those invested in the purchase or consumption. In one of the most comprehensive definitions in the literature, Brodie et al. (2011) consider engagement as a highly context-dependent psychological state, comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the relational exchange process.

Engagement has gained considerable attention in the literature following a recent shift in academic emphasis towards a broader relational orientation (Vivek et al., 2014), focusing on the importance of establishing an interactive CBE (Customer Brand Engagement) (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Within this emerging research stream, which encompasses other concepts such as brand trust, brand experience and brand love (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009), CBE is gaining traction as it is more comprehensive and affects the dynamics of focal brand relationships when compared to traditional concepts (Dwivedi, 2015). CBE has gained an important and growing role in brand management (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and can help companies create an emotionally loyal customer base (Kandampully, Zhang & Bilgihan, 2015). CBE, unlike satisfaction, is a highly personal and motivational state (Calder, Malthouse & Maslowsk, 2016) that focuses on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dynamics of the consumer during interactions with the brand.

Customer engagement is believed to be directly and positively related to a set of brand relationship outcomes such as satisfaction, trust, affective commitment, and loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011). Thus, the focus that was associated with relationship marketing has shifted to engagement marketing, placing emphasis on the role of customers as brand marketers and looking beyond the traditional transactional perspective based on purchases and consumption (Harmeling et al., 2017; Palmatier, et al., 2017).

CBE is the core concept of this new paradigm, which is embedded in fostering and enhancing customer-brand relationships beyond transactions (van Doorn et al., 2010; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar & Nayak, 2019). CBE is termed as the new brand relationship variable (Dwivedi, 2015) which involves the voluntary investment of customer resources (time, money, and energy) beyond transactions and the display of behaviours such as creating and joining brand communities, brand image advocacy (brand advocates associated with loyalty) and voluntary support to others on brand-related issues and problems (van Doorn et al., 2010).

For the engagement between brand and consumer, adequate means are required (Brodie et al., 2011) and brand communities provide this perfect environment for customer-brand interactions. A brand community involves a group of consumers (Veloutsou, 2009), who in a common way admire a brand, which leads them to interact, socialize and sympathize with other members of the community. Moreover, consumers, associated with a brand community, must engage with the brand, so that their relationship goes beyond traditional consumption. The concept of engagement is linked to the investment of resources that consumers have in their possession in the form of knowledge, network, persuasion and creativity in brand-related activities and interactions (Harmeling et al., 2017).

The brand is then the central element of customer interactions in brand communities and brand relationships constitute a core component of the community (Veloutsou, 2009). These

theories create a basis for exploring ‘brand engagement in brand communities’ which have received less attention (Dessart, Veloutsoi, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Brand-engaged consumers tend to develop positive attitudes towards the brand compared to those who are not engaged (Brodie et al., 2011). CBE also increases liking for “engagement” objects (Halaszovich & Nel, 2017), consumers’ engagement with social media (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015) and involvement in brand marketing events (Snell, 2015).

2.2. Hypotheses Proposed

2.2.1. The impact of Brand Experience on Brand Awareness, on Brand Engagement and on Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is one of the most cited concepts in the field of marketing, with both academics and practitioners recognizing the range of benefits that accrue from it (Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011). Studies have addressed loyalty in various market-specific contexts, reflecting service loyalty, store loyalty and supplier loyalty, as well as customer and brand loyalty, as units of measure (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann 2005). Competitive advantages deliver consistent brand value to consumers, thereby increasing brand loyalty (Reichheld & Schefer, 2000). Brand loyalty facilitates efforts to retain customers (Reichheld & Schefer, 2000) and helps prevent competitors from poaching loyal customers (Dick & Basu, 1994). Ultimately, brand loyalty is a powerful tool to help compete in a competitive environment (Amine, 1998).

Brand awareness means consumers’ ability to recall and recognize the brand under different circumstances and relate it to the logo, jingle, brand name and other linked measures. Brand recall and brand recognition are parts of brand awareness. By having more awareness about the brand, consumers can easily recognize the brand and recall it among products or services category (Altaf et al., 2017). Awareness of the brand reflects the superiority of that brand in the mind of the customer (Im et al., 2012). Brand awareness is the probability that, consumers are familiar about the availability and accessibility of a company’s product and service. Brand awareness is one of the main factors in creating brand added value and is also considered as one of the key factors affecting the knowledge level of consumers about the brand (Ekhveh & Darvishi 2015). The awareness of the brand plays a significant role while purchasing a product or service and may have control on perceived risk evaluation of consumers and their level of assurance about the buying decision due to awareness with the brand and its uniqueness (Malik et al., 2013). Awareness can affect people’s perceptions and attitudes, lead to brand selection, and be effective in strengthening brand loyalty. Accordingly, Xi and Hamari (2020), brand loyalty refers to the tendency to be loyal to a focal brand, which is demonstrated by an intention to buy the brand as a primary choice (Yoo & Donthu, 2001); and brand awareness or brand association is the ability for customers to recognize or recall a brand as a member of a certain product category (Keller, 1993).

Brand engagement is a result of co-creative customer experience where consumers interact with the service portfolio and service providers representing the brand, which then further reflects the nature of consumers’ particular interactive brand relationships (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Brand engagement has been conceptualized to compose mainly of emotional, cognitive, and social engagement (Vivek et al., 2014). The emotional aspect of brand engagement is related to affection and refers to “a consumer’s degree of positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer/brand interaction” (Hollebeek et al., 2014) or enthusiasm and refers to “the zealous reactions and feelings of a person related to using or interacting with the focus of their engagement” (So, King, & Sparks, 2014; Vivek et al., 2014). Cognitive brand engagement refers to the degree of interest the person has or wishes to have in interacting with the focus of their engagement, named conscious attention (Vivek et al., 2014), the duration of focus (So, King, & Sparks, 2014), or the brand-related thought processing and elaboration in brand interaction

(Hollebeek et al., 2014). Social brand engagement involves the enhancement of the interaction based on the inclusion of others with the focus of engagement (van Doorn et al., 2010), which is more relevant with online aspects, and involves socializing and participating in the online community with others (Vivek et al., 2014).

A few empirical studies on gamification also indicate that gamification can affect brand engagement. Gatautis et al. (2016) investigated the impact of gamification on consumer brand engagement in the Lithuanian market, while the relationship was not strong according to their empirical results. Additionally, Berger et al. (2017) showed that gamified interactions which are highly interactive and optimally challenging, are positively related to the emotional and cognitive dimensions of brand engagement.

Brand experience is defined as “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feeling and cognitions) and behavioral responses brought into mind by brand-related stimuli” (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 53). Successful brands form close bonds with their consumers, which in turn drives them away from other competing brands. The first step in establishing these bonds is encountering and experiencing the brand. Brand experience is a concept that was introduced by Schmitt (1999) into the experiential marketing literature and whose importance has increased in recent times (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2014). Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009) discuss brand experience, as we saw, in four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual (cognitive), and behavioral. Thus, brand experience is a multifacet construct and should be evaluated in a holistic manner (Kang et al., 2017). For instance, some technological products have been proposed to have both hedonic and utilitarian attributes. Hedonic attributes such as the color, design, and softness. However, the utilitarian involves characteristics such as battery life, software, and sound system (Yu & Yuan, 2019). Prior studies in the technological industry have also shown that hedonic value triggers brand experience more than the utilitarian value because of the intimate relationship between the consumers and their technologies, where they access their technologies frequently every day (Yu & Yuan, 2019).

Brand experience is the outcome of stimulations that trigger customers’ enthusiasm and enjoyment; thus, customers will be encouraged to repeat those experiences frequently over time (Ong, Lee, & Ramayah, 2018). Furthermore, “brand experience should affect not only past-directed satisfaction judgments but also future-directed consumer loyalty” (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Therefore, consumers would be more probable to purchase products from this brand again, suggest it to others and less probable to purchase from competitors (Oliver, 1997). Moreover, Kang et al. (2017) claimed that brand experience is a factor that plays a key role in achieving and maintaining success for businesses and in building a long-term bond with consumers. Brands that are consistent at all touch points between the brand and customer can build brand loyalty and spread (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Generally, brands that provide excellent brand experiences are differentiated from other brands and are more favored, thereby building brand loyalty and promoting the spread of the brand (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009).

Brand experience is an important factor affecting the awareness brand. Therefore, many studies have found a positive influence of brand experience on brand awareness (Altaf et al., 2017; Naggar & Bendary, 2017; Feiz & Moradi, 2020; Eslami, 2020; Xi & Hamari, 2020; Jeon & Yoo, 2021; Beig & Nika, 2022). Also, the significance of brand experience stems from its impact on brand loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Huang, 2017; Choi, Ok & Hyun, 2017; Han et al., 2020; Akoglu & Ozbeg, 2021; Fang, Li, & Bhatti, 2021; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021; Rasool, Shah & Tanveer, 2021; Chung & Peachey, 2022; Revaldi, 2022; Salam & Bajaba, 2022).

As for the relationship between brand experience and brand engagement, there is no consensus as to the direction of influence between the two variables. Some authors argue that when there is brand engagement there is a pleasant relationship with the brand (Islam et al., 2019; Sadek & Heba, 2020; Pour et al., 2021; Rasool, Shah & Tanveer, 2021), while others advocate that when the brand experience is pleasant, brand engagement becomes strong (Kumar & Nayak, 2019; Touni et al., 2020; Yasin et al., 2020; Farhat, Mokhtar & Salleh, 2021; Martini et al., 2021;

Paramita et al., 2021; Wijardi et al., 2021; Amin & Nika, 2022; Huang & Chen, 2022; Waqas, 2022). We advocate that in gaming, when the player has a positive experience with the brand, he feels that the brand awareness justifies this, and he engages more strongly with the brand and build brand loyalty. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Brand Experience has a positive influence on the Brand Awareness.
- H2: Brand Experience has a positive influence on the Brand Engagement.
- H3: Brand Experience has a positive influence on the Brand Loyalty.

2.2.2. The impact of Brand Awareness on Brand Engagement and Brand Satisfaction

When it comes to the relationship between brand awareness and brand engagement, while some studies have found a significant influence of brand awareness on brand engagement (Hughes, Swaminathan & Brooks 2019; Khamwon & Nantasuk, 2020; Schivinski, 2021), others have shown a positive effect of brand engagement on brand awareness (Cheung, Pires & Rosenberger, 2020; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020; Xi & Hamari, 2020; Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021; Sadyk & Islam, 2022).

While many studies have found a positive influence of brand awareness on brand satisfaction (Bihamta et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2019; Kusumah & Lee, 2020; Quan et al., 2020; Imiru, 2022), there are also some studies that have shown that this relationship is inverse, i.e., brand satisfaction exerts a positive effect on brand awareness (Biedenbach, Bengtsoon & Marell, 2015; Izzudin & Novadanri, 2021).

In gaming, we expect that brand awareness has a positive influence on brand engagement and brand satisfaction. Therefore, based on the literature, the following hypotheses is advanced:

- H4: Brand Awareness has a positive influence on the Brand Engagement.
- H5: Brand Awareness has a positive influence on the Brand Satisfaction.

2.2.3. The impact of Brand Engagement on Brand Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty

Several studies have investigated the antecedents and consequences of engagement in different contexts (Bowden, 2009; Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson, 2016). Various factors, such as trust, commitment, customer value, customer equity, satisfaction, and loyalty have been identified and investigated as consequences of consumer engagement, with loyalty and satisfaction being among the most important ones (Bryce et al., 2015). As a psychological process, consumer engagement includes cognitive and emotional domains and results in consumer satisfaction; while from a behavioral perspective, consumer engagement is indicated by customer loyalty towards a brand/object, which is reflected in their tendency to repurchase (Bowden, 2009; Bryce et al., 2015). Satisfaction represents positive consumer feelings towards a brand; therefore, from a psychological perspective, consumer engagement has a positive effect on satisfaction (Bryce et al., 2015). Moreover, loyalty represents the willingness of consumer to re-buy a brand product consistently. Consumer engagement demonstrates deep commitment and connection with brand, which can enhance the consumer feelings and behaviors (Hollebeek, 2011; So, King, & Sparks, 2014).

Engagement reflects motivation, resulting from an individual's interactive experiences with a focal object (Vale & Fernandes, 2018) and increase brand awareness in the process (Colicev et al., 2018). Moreover, a high level of engagement reflects a deeper emotional connection that will induce customer willingness to develop and sustain a relationship (Zainol et al., 2016). Brand en-

agement is essential to satisfy customers (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019; Srivastava & Balaji, 2021; Susanti, Rafika, & Melinda, 2021; Shankar, 2022). However, other studies have demonstrated an inverse relation, i.e., brand satisfaction is fundamental to brand engagement (Moliner-Tena, Monferrer-Tirado, & Estrada-Guillén, 2019; Lashkova, Antón, & Camarero, 2020; Rodríguez-López, Barrio-García, & Alcántara-Pilar, 2020; Wijiardi et al., 2021; Imiru, 2022; Qian 2022). Many studies have shown a significant impact of brand engagement on brand loyalty (Islam et al., 2019; Joshi & Garg, 2020; Lashkova, Antón, & Camarero, 2020; Kwon et al., 2021; Mostafa e Kasamani, 2021; Rasool, Shah & Tanveer, 2021; Rasoolmanesh et al., 2021; Aljuhmani et al., 2022; Habib, Hamadneh & Hassan, 2022; Hari, Iyer & Sampat, 2022; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022). Specifically, customers who have a higher engagement with a brand can be more satisfied with the brand and exhibit higher loyalty (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019). Based on the literature, the following hypotheses is advanced:

H6: Brand engagement has a positive influence on brand satisfaction.

H7: Brand engagement has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

2.2.4. The impact of Brand Satisfaction on Brand Loyalty

Based on the theory of relationship marketing, several studies have investigated the positive effect of satisfaction on loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Gallarza & Saura, 2006; Bowden, 2009). Many recent studies demonstrated that if consumers are satisfied, they become loyal (Lashkova, Antón, & Camarero, 2020; Amegbe, Dzandu, & Hanu, 2021; Cruz-Milan, 2021; Mahadin, Elsamén & El-Adly, 2021; Mishra, 2021; Chung & Peachey, 2022). Therefore, the following effect is hypothesized:

H8: Brand satisfaction has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The conceptual model proposed in the present study is depicted in figure 1. This research model investigates the impact of brand experience on brand awareness, on brand satisfaction and on brand loyalty. In turn, brand awareness influences brand engagement and brand satisfaction. Brand engagement impacts on brand satisfaction and on brand loyalty. Finally, brand satisfaction influences brand loyalty.

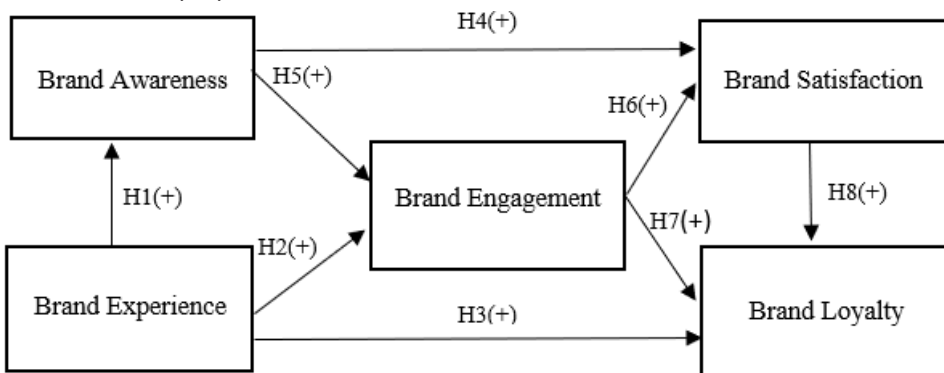


Figure 1- Proposed conceptual model

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

3.1. Sample selection and data collection

This research study used a structured and self-administered questionnaire that addressed all the information needed. A sample of convenient elements was obtained by using a non-probabilistic convenience sample. Data was collected through a survey, which was developed in an online format.

3.2. Measurement scales

The measurement scales of the constructs were based on the literature and adapted from academic literature on the topic. All variables, presented in Table 2, were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree.

The brand experience measures were adapted from Brakus Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009). The brand awareness was adapted from Langaro, Rita, and Salgueiro (2018). The brand engagement was measured using Islam et al. (2019) and Xi and Hamari (2020). The brand satisfaction measures were adapted from Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy and Coote (2007). The brand loyalty measures were adapted from Su & Chang (2018) and Boonlertvanich (2019).

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model

An initial screening of each scale was conducted using item-total correlations, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS 26.0. Following the two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), a measurement model was estimated before testing the hypotheses, using a structural model. The data analysis was realized through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) using the statistical software AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) version 26.0. Maximum likelihood estimation procedures were used since these afford more security in samples that might not present multivariate normality.

Measurement model fits the data well. To test a model's fit, the chi-square (X^2) test statistic concerning degrees of freedom (df) can be used. If the X^2/df value is less than 3, the model is considered a good fit. The chi-square (X^2) was 265.825 with 94 degrees of freedom at $p < 0.01$ ($X^2/df = 2.83$). Because the chi-square is sensitive to sample size, we also assessed additional fit indices: (1) normed fit index (NFI), (2) incremental fit index (IFI), (3) Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI) and (4) comparative fit index (CFI). All of these fit indices are higher than 0.9 (NFI=0.96, IFI=0.97, TLI=0.96 and CFI=0.97). Because fit indices can be improved by allowing more terms to be freely estimated, we also assessed the RMSEA, which is 0.088.

CFA enables the performance of tests regarding the convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability of the study constructs. A commonly used method for estimating convergent validity examines the factor loadings of the measured variables (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Factor loadings greater than 0.5 are considered very significant (Hair et al., 2014). Also, we used the AVE to contrast convergent validity. Adequately convergent valid measures should contain less than 50% error variance (AVE should be 0.5 or above) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity was achieved in this study because all the factor loadings exceeded 0.5 and all AVEs were greater than 0.5. Next, CFA was used to assess discriminant validity. If the AVE is larger than the squared correlation between any two constructs, the discriminant validity of the constructs is supported (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This test demonstrated that discriminant validity is present in this study. To assess reliability, the composite reliability (CR) for each construct was generated from the CFA. The CR of each scale must exceed the 0.7 thresholds (Bagozzi, 1981). As Table 1

shows, the composite reliability coefficients of all the constructs are excellent, being larger than 0.9. Cronbach's alpha indicator was also used to assess the initial reliability of the scales, considering a minimum value of 0.7 (Cronbach, 1970; Nunnally, 1978). In Table 1, coefficient alpha values are all over 0.9, exhibiting high reliability. Table 1 also shows the AVE for each construct and a correlation matrix of constructs. In Table 2, is observed the standardized loadings and t-value of all scale items.

Table 1- Factor Correlation, Cronbach's alpha, AVE and CR

Construct	CR	AVE	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅
Brand Experience (X ₁)	.90	.74	$\alpha=.89$				
Brand Awareness (X ₂)	.95	.85	.80	$\alpha=.94$			
Brand Engagement (X ₃)	.97	.93	.86	.92	$\alpha=.98$		
Brand Satisfaction (X ₄)	.98	.93	.72	.84	.84	$\alpha=.98$	
Brand Loyalty (X ₅)	.97	.91	.75	.86	.85	.88	$\alpha=.97$

Note: CR= Composite Reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted; α =Cronbach's alpha in the diagonal.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Table 2. Standardized parameter estimates results and measurement model t values

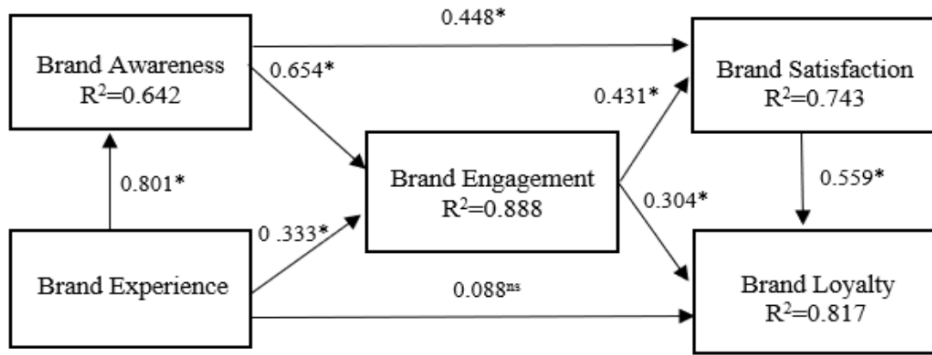
Measures	Standardized Loadings	t-Value
<i>Brand Experience</i>		
I have strong emotions for this brand (EXP1)	0.931	18.444
This brand is an emotional brand (EXP2)	0.864	16.332
This brand stimulates my curiosity and my ability to solve problems (EXP3)	0.783	14.039
<i>Brand Awareness</i>		
I recognise the brand's features (AWAR1)	0.899	17.704
I can easily describe this brand to a friend (AWAR2)	0.947	19.390
I feel familiar with its products (AWAR3)	0.922	18.493
<i>Brand Engagement</i>		
I am proud to use this brand (ENGA13)	0.951	19.633
I am enthusiastic about this brand (ENGA14)	0.973	20.521
I am very interested in this brand (ENGA15)	0.964	20.165
<i>Brand Satisfaction</i>		
I am satisfied with the decision to buy my preferred brand (SATI1)	0.977	20.680
My choice to buy my preferred brand was wise (SATI2)	0.970	20.396
I think I made the right decision when I decided to buy my favourite brand (SATI3)	0.962	20.081
If I had to do it all over again, the feelings would be the same when buying my favourite brand (SATI4)	0.943	19.367
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>		
When I need to buy this product, this brand is my first choice. (LOYA1)	0.928	18.753
My intention is to continue using this brand in the future. (LOYA2)	0.969	20.311
I consider myself loyal to this brand. (LOYA3)	0.960	19.952

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

4.2. Structural Model

The structural model, depicted in Figure 2, fits the data well ($X^2=275.185$, $df=96$, $p < 0.01$ ($X^2 / df=2.87$); $NFI=0.96$, $IFI=0.97$, $TLI=0.96$, $CFI=0.97$; $RMSEA=0.089$).

The results in Table 3 involve the analyses of the causal paths hypothesized in the structural model. The models support all the hypotheses. It is very important to analyze the effects of total effects (direct and indirect effects) because an examination of only the direct effects could be misleading (Bollen, 1989). The analysis of indirect effects highlights the importance of mediating variables in explaining the Sony PlayStation loyalty. Thus, in Table 4, we can observe the standardized direct, indirect and totals effects.



Note: * $p < 0.001$; ns=not-significant; R²=Squared Multiple Correlations

Figure 2- Structural model

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Table 3- Estimation results of the structural model

Paths	Standardized Loadings	t-Value	Hypotheses
Brand Experience → Brand Awareness	0.801*	13.525	H1 (+): S
Brand Experience → Brand Engagement	0.333*	6.101	H2 (+): S
Brand Experience → Brand Loyalty	0.088	1.238	H3 (+): S
Brand Awareness → Brand Satisfaction	0.448*	4.012	H4 (+): S
Brand Awareness → Brand Engagement	0.654*	11.479	H5 (+): S
Brand Engagement → Brand Satisfaction	0.431*	3.913	H6 (+): S
Brand Engagement → Brand Loyalty	0.304*	3.461	H7 (+): S
Brand Satisfaction → Brand Loyalty	0.559*	8.931	H8 (+): NS

Note: * $p < 0.001$.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

We used the bootstrapping technique with a sample of 2.000 random observations generated from the original sample, and a confidence interval of 95% was also used in the estimation of the proposed model. This is because the analysis of total and indirect effects is only possible with the use of this method of estimation.

Table 4- Standardized direct, indirect, and total effects

Paths	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Brand Experience → Brand Awareness	0.801*	-	0.801*
Brand Experience → Brand Engagement	0.333**	0.524*	0.857*
Brand Experience → Brand Satisfaction	-	0.729*	0.729*
Brand Experience → Brand Loyalty	0.088 ^{ns}	0.668*	0.756*
Brand Awareness → Brand Engagement	0.654*	-	0.654*
Brand Awareness → Brand Satisfaction	0.448***	0.282***	0.730**
Brand Awareness → Brand Loyalty	-	0.607**	0.607*
Brand Engagement → Brand Satisfaction	0.431***	-	0.431*
Brand Engagement → Brand Loyalty	0.304***	0.241***	0.545**
Brand Satisfaction → Brand Loyalty	0.559*	-	0.559*

Note: * $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.05$; ns=not significant.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In gaming, the brand experience manifested a strong impact on brand awareness, as was the case in the studies of Jeon & Yoo (2021) and Beig & Nika (2022). Thus, the result in our research supports hypothesis 1. As for the effect on brand engagement, brand awareness had a stronger influence than brand experience. Therefore, the results in our research support hypotheses 2 and 5. As for brand satisfaction, brand awareness (Imiru, 2022) and brand engagement (Susanti, Rafika, & Melinda, 2021; Shankar, 2022) are fundamental. Consequently, the results support hypotheses 4 and 6. Brand satisfaction is the variable that has the strongest influence on loyalty, followed by brand engagement. Thus, the results in our research support hypotheses 7 and 8. However, brand experience did not have a significant effect on brand loyalty, contrary to the studies of Fang, Li, & Bhatti (2021) and Salam & Bajaba (2022), which demonstrated a significant relationship between these two variables. Consequently, the result in our research doesn't support hypothesis 3, because brand experience hasn't influence on brand loyalty.

However, we must look at both direct and indirect effects because the consideration of the total effects (direct and indirect) will give us a more rigorous assessment of the relationships between the variables under analysis. When we analyze the total effects, brand awareness (Imiru, 2022) and brand experience (Iglesias, Markovic, & Rialp, 2019; Liang, 2022) are the fundamental variables that influence on satisfaction. Brand engagement is also important to foster brand satisfaction (Shankar, 2022), although weaker. As for loyalty, brand experience is the variable with the strongest impact, followed by brand awareness, while brand engagement and brand satisfaction have a significant but weaker influence on loyalty. As far as brand engagement is concerned, brand experience is the variable that has the strongest impact. Brand awareness has also a strong influence on brand engagement (Schivinski, 2021), although weaker. The brand experience has also a strong direct impact on brand awareness, as was the case in the studies of Eslami (2020), Jeon & Yoo (2021), and Beig & Nika (2022).

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