ANTECEDENTS OF BRAND LOYALTY OF SPORTSWEAR BRANDS AMONG YOUNG CONSUMERS IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The current intense competition in the industry where sportswear products are available is a great challenge to organizations to build long term relationships with their customers. Therefore it is important for the key market players to identify and evaluate the degree of brand loyalty in sportswear and the antecedents of being brand loyal to such brands in order to face the fierce competition. In fact young consumers all over the globe are more attracted to sports brands in the world. Thus, the aim of the research is to examine the Antecedents of brand loyalty of sportswear brands among the young consumers in Sri Lanka. The survey method is used with 251 structured questionnaires collected from young consumers in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. The respondents are selected through the judgmental sampling technique. Both descriptive and inferential statistics are used for the analysis. Findings revealed that there is a high brand loyalty for sport brands among young consumers in Sri Lanka and brand name, product quality, style, price, promotion, habit and store environment are the antecedents for brand loyalty. Companies in the fashion and shoes industry can invest on sports brands as there is a high tendency for the same from the young generation in Sri Lanka. Further, companies in the fashion industry should place more focus on brand, quality, style, price, promotion, store environment and inculcate the habit of purchasing the sports brands in their business and marketing strategies.

Key words: Brand Loyalty, Sportswearbrands, Sri Lanka, Young Generation.

Introduction

Nowadays people do not only wear sportswear for sports, but wear sportswear on common, everyday occasions (Cotton Incorporated 2012: Womens Wear Daily, 2012) and this includes a range of sportswear such as Jackets, T-shirts, Shirts, Vests (inner sleeves), Pants, Shorts, Skirts, Bras Leggings, and Shoes.

According to Euromonitor International (2018), the global sportswear industry increased and generated an additional $55 billion in new sales by 2017. Further it disclosed that sportswear consumption has been increasing by an average of 4% since 2010, with 2017 showing an increase of 6 %. It can be seen that there are number of new entrants to the already crowded sportswear market and brands such as Under Armour and Athletica are some new sportswear players that have grown rapidly due to their focus on niche markets, such as performance apparel and yoga inspired sportswear (Euromonitor International (2018).

Euromonitor International (2018) stated further that an increase in sportswear consumption could be attributed to factors such as the consumer's need for fitness, health consciousness, competition among brands, the market and an increase of more sports inspired stylish designs. Athletic wear has become part of the consumers lifestyle, with more than nine out of ten (approximately 93%) wearing their athletic apparel for activities other than exercising; with 85% wearing them around the house, 65% running errands in them, 42% wearing them while shopping and 20% wearing them when going out to eat (Cotton Incorporated, 2012). Therefore, it can be said that sportswear apparel has become a part of a consumers' day to day life.

Further, when it comes to sportswear specifically, consumers use sportswear products for both casual and sporting events (Cotton Incorporated, 2012). This factor may have led to increased sportswear consumption among young people. Consumers form relationships with brands they love (Fournier, 1998) leading to brand loyalty. Nowadays most companies, especially those in the sportswear industry try to enhance brand loyalty among their customers.

Scholars claim that sportswear consumption varied across the general population though none of the scholars have paid attention to the Asian context. For instance, Dawes (2009) revealed that consumers in the UK sportswear market were not loyal to a particular brand and consumers switched from one brand to another. On the other hand MacCarthy and Jayarathne (2010, 2011) and Jayarathne (2018) discussed the significance of the fashion industry in Asia and the significance of the fashion including clothes and shoes among the young consumers in Sri Lanka.

Boom in the sportswear for non-sport activities consequently could influence the fashion industry, especially among the young generation and also the level of significance of the fashion industry in Asia, yet the nature of sport brand loyalty and the antecedents of the same in the Asian Context have not been investigated by any researcher. Addressing such requirements, the current paper aims at examining the antecedents of the brand loyalty for sports brands among the Young Generation in Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

Sportswear

Sportswear can be defined as clothes, shoes, and accessories which are specifically designed for sports and exercise purposes. Sportswear includes shirts, shorts, track kits, wet suits, headwears, sport shoes etc. Nike, Adidas, Speedo, Fila, Reebok, Puma and Umbra are the main sportswear brands and they are currently dominating the sportswear industry.

Brand Loyalty

In broad-spectrum, brand loyalty can be defined as the strength of preference for a specific brand when compared with other similar brands available. Over the years numerous researchers have defined brand loyalty in many different ways. Oliver (1997) defined loyalty as "…a deeply held commitment to repurchase or re-patronize a preferred

product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behavior".

It is important to have a strong brand loyal customer base in order for a brand to become strong and exist in the market. Before 1980, companies mainly focused on how to attract and grab more customers from their competitors and increase their customer base. At that time companies didn't pay much attention to retain their existing customers. Customer loyalty to specific brands has been a crucial point of strategic marketing planning over the last years (Kotler and Armstrong 2010). Along with this fact their focus shifted towards keeping already existing customers. This has become more and more important strategy since now in the times of countless offers, buyers tend to jump from one brand to another (Kapferer, 1992).

Loyalty towards the brand is crucial for any company. According to Giddens and Hofmann (2002) there are three important outcomes which are generated as a result of having a strong brand loyalty. The first outcome is a higher level of sales volume. The second reason for the importance of brand loyalty is the ability to charge premium prices from products. The third reason for the significance of brand loyalty is that they started a product search. Customers who are loyal to a certain brand are ready to search for that brand and are less sensitive to competitor brands and their products. This will cause low cost in terms of advertising, marketing, and distribution. It will cost 5 times more to attract a new customer as it does to retain an already existing one.

Among the above three points, Aaker (1991) especially supports the third point, which indicates that the customer loyalty can reduce the vulnerability of getting caught to competitive actions. As long as customers pay no interest to competitor's products, the latter may become discouraged because the money and time they spend to attract already satisfied customers is a waste. Yet another positive effect of brand loyalty is that loyal customers often provide more feedback to companies, allowing them to enhance their products and services according to the consumers' wishes (Wong et al., 2009).

Despite the significance of brand loyalty, attention has seldom been paid to investing inbrand loyalty for the sportswear brands in the Asian context. Further, young consumers in Sri Lanka are cosmopolitan and fashion conscious (Jayarathne 2018); thus investigating a tendency to wear more sportswear brands is important, though it has not been investigated yet. Addressing such gaps, the current paper derives the first research objective as (1) to assess the degree of brand loyalty in sportswear brands in young consumers in Sri Lanka. The corresponding hypothesis is derived as there is a high degree of brand loyalty for the sportswear brands in young consumers in Sri Lanka.

Antecedents of Brand Loyalty

The studies conducted by various researchers regarding the brand loyalty of sportswearthey have identified eight factors that influence consumers' brand loyalty towards certain sportswear brands. Those factors can be determined as: brand name (Keller (2003), Cadogan and Foster, (2000), Calbourne(1996) and Kohli and Thakor (1997) , habit (Sproles& Kendall, 1986) price (Cadogan and Foster (2000) and Bucklin (1998),

promotion(Rowley (1998), product quality , style, store environment, and service quality (Lau *etal* (2006). Since those eight factors and their influence on sportswear brands have not been studied in the Sri Lankan context, they will be investigated throughout this paper.

- **Brand Name**

Brand image refers to consumers' perceptions of a brand as consumers remember the brand (Keller, 2003). According to Kohli and Thakor (1997), brand name is the creation of an image or the development of a brand identity and is an expensive and time consuming process. Brand name has a strong impact on customer loyalty because consumers' perceptions are linked to brand names and as a result emphasis on brand names is heightened. Yee and Sidek (2008) identified a significant positive relationship between brand name and brand loyalty. Strong brand names can lead to brand loyalty (Selnes, 1993). Further, Dawes (2009), Kinuthia and Keren (2012) and Yee, et al (2008) found that the most influencing factor to the brand loyalty is brand name.

- **Product Quality**

Product Quality contains the features and characteristics of a product or service that bears an ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. In other words, product quality is defined as "fitness for use" or 'conformance to requirement" (Russell and Taylor, 2006).

Functional attributes in sportswear include quick-dry, breathable, waterproof, odor-resistant, lightweight, and antimicrobial and, durability which is known as the use life of garments. For instance, some consumers wear their sportswear for heavy work and some for leisure and sports, as they need a lot of movement, while durability is an important consideration in purchasing sportswear (Gronroos 1990). According to a study by Swinker and Hines (2007), the quality is important in clothing purchase and in consumer loyalty thus companies need to provide goods with the best possible quality.

- **Price**

Kotler and Amstrong (2010) define price as, "The amount of money charged for a product or service". According to Cadogan and Foster (2000), price is probably the most important consideration for the average consumer. Consumers with high brand loyalty are willing to pay a premium price for their favorite brand. So it can be said that if consumers are brand loyal, buying interest could not easily be influenced by price.

Furthermore, customers have a strong belief in the price and value of their favorite brands so much so that they would compare and evaluate prices with alternative brands (Evans *et al.*, 1996; Keller, 2003). Consumers' satisfaction can also be built by comparing price with perceived costs and values. It is observed that consumers will purchase the product if the perceived values of the product are greater than the cost. It is important to note that loyal customers are willing to pay even more if the price increases because they would prefer to pay a higher price to avoid any perceived risks (Yoon and Kim, 2000).

Normally, long-term loyalty and the services offered to loyal customers increase the tolerance of the customers towards higher prices. Price becomes a primary key in consumer judgment about the value of the product and their assessment of the value of the goods at retail shops. Price becomes a focal point in consumer judgment about the value of the

product and their assessment of the value of the goods at retail shops (De Ruyter&Bloemer, 1999).

Loyal consumers may be willing to pay more for a brand (Lau et al., 2006). Yee and Sidek (2008) found a positive relation between brand loyalty and price and also they stated that consumers with high brand loyalty are less price sensitive.

- **Style**

Style is the visual appearance, which includes line, silhouette and details affecting consumer perception towards a brand (Frings, 2005). According to a research conducted by Duff (1999) who investigated a niche market in women's sportswear. Here the results showed that sportswear shoppers were becoming more fashion conscious and were demanding products with more style; moreover, consumers have a tendency to wear different attires for different occasions while being loyal to the brands.

- **Store Environment**

According to Omar (1999) "the store environment was the single most important factor in retail marketing success and store longevity." Further he said that positive attributes of the store, which comprises store location, store layout, and in-store stimuli, affect brand loyalty to some extent. It can be said that the store location and number of outlets are critical in altering consumer shopping and purchasing patterns. "If consumers find the store to be highly accessible during their shopping trip and are satisfied with the store's assortment and services, these consumers may become loyal afterwards "(Evans *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, a store's atmosphere is one of the crucial factors that could influence the consumers' decision making.

"The stimuli in the store, such as the characteristic of other shoppers and sales people, store layout, noises, smells, temperature, shelf space and displays, signs, colours, and merchandise, affect consumers and serve as elements of apparel attributes" (Abraham and Littrell, 1995), which may sequentially, affect consumer decision making and satisfaction with the brand (Evans *et al.*, 1996). Milliman (1982) said that the background music played in the stores affects attitudes and behavior. Further the slow-beat musical selection leads to higher sales volume as consumers spend more time and money in a calm environment.

- **Promotion**

Promotion, especially through advertising, is important in differentiating brands in a particular product category as well as establishing ideas or perceptions in the consumers' minds. Advertising is a non-personal presentation of information in mass media about a product, brand, company or store. So good advertising can attract fickle consumers and consumers to become brand loyal (Czemiawski and Maloney, 1999). As per Yee et al (2008), it is an important influencer for the brand loyalty of sportswear. In 2010 and in 2011 the study of Mohommad and Mohammadreza and the study of Khraim found the same results.

- **Service Quality**

According to Gronroos, (1990)"service quality is that the service should correspond to the customers' expectations and satisfy their needs and requirements". Further, Service quality is a kind of personal selling, and involves direct interactions between sales people

and potential buyers. Also he said that "Consumers like to shop at specific stores because they like the services provided and are assured of certain service privileges."

It can be said that the impact of sales people-consumer relationships will generally result in long term alignment of consumers towards the store or brand. Trust in sales people appears to relate to overall perceptions of the store's service quality, and results in the consumer being totally satisfied with the stores at the end of the day. Furthermore, according to Leung and To (2001) personalization (i.e. reliability, responsiveness, personalization and tangibles) significantly influence consumers' experience and evaluation of service, and in turn, affects the brand loyalty of consumers.

- **Habit**

A habit can be defined as a learned mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary. A consumer usually either consistently sticks with the same brand of product or the same store (Sproles and Kendall, 1986). Consumers who have favorite brands and stores have formed habits in choosing these repetitively. Store attractiveness keeps many consumers coming back to the same store. According to Baker et al (1994)) how consumers view store image has long been considered an important part of consumer decision-making. The image influences the consumer's perceptions of goods and services purchased (Kunkel and Berry, 1968). This is because of the consumers' views and feeling toward the store might create a habit to shop at the given store repetitively or make them loyalty to that store.

Even though the above factors influence brand loyalty either directly or indirectly they hardly examined their influence on brand loyalty of sportswear brands and in the Sri Lanka context with special reference to young consumers who are highly motivated to wear sportswear for day-to-day activities as well. Thus, addressing such a gap in the literature, the current study derives the second objective as (2) to examine the antecedents of the brand loyalty of sportswear brands among young consumers in Sri Lanka. The hypothesis is derived as the above discussed eight factors could significantly influence the brand loyalty of sportswear brands in Sri Lanka.

Conceptual Framework
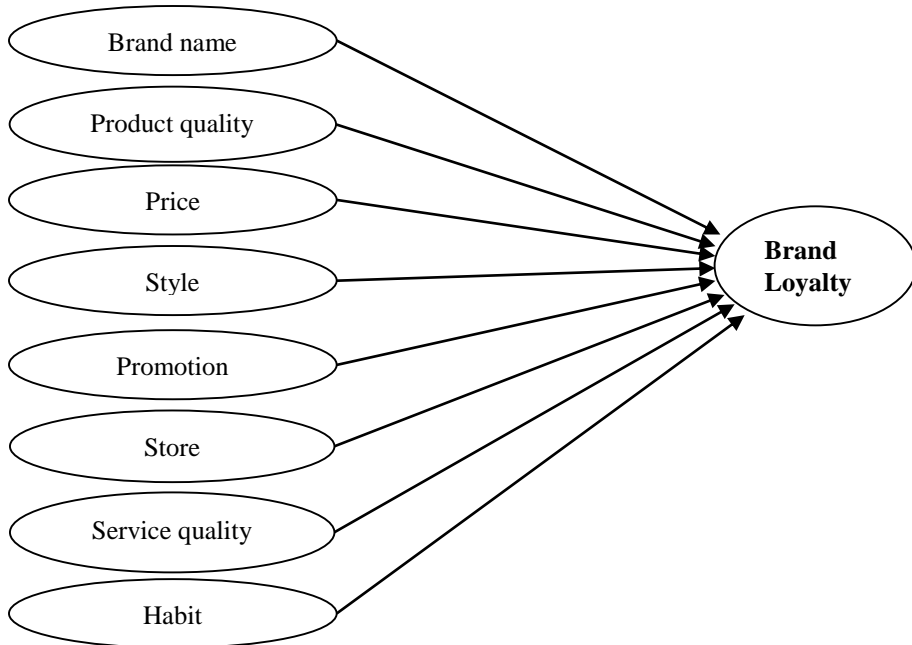The Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework derived from the review of the literature.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The justification for selection of the methodology for a research study is comprehensively discussed by Dewasiri et al. (2018a,b) and Dewasiri et al. (2017). Accordingly, this study is based on two quantitatively driven research questions 1). What is the degree of brand loyalty of sportswear brands in Sri Lanka? and

2). What are the antecedents of sportswear brand loyalty in the same context?.

Hence, this quantitative study is carried out under the correlation approach. The study gathered data, from a survey of young consumers who used sportswear in the recent past or use them currently. This is a single cross sectional study where the data were collected during March 2018. As the majority of young population lives in the Western Province (i.e. more than 28 % of the total population with the highest annual growth rate of 1.5% - Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka 2017, www.statistics.gov.lk) and being the commercial area in Sri Lanka the sample is selected from the Western Province to represent the country. Thus, the judgmental sampling is used. Structured questionnaire is the data collection instrument and 251 respondents participated. All the latent variables are measured on priory basis using Five point Likert Scale (1 – strongly agree, 5 – strongly disagree). Brand Name, Product quality, Style, Price, and Habit are measured using the scales of Bae et al (2009). Promotion, Store Environment, Service Quality, and Brand

Loyalty are measured through the scale of Chou et al (2013), Barker et al (1994), OlgunKitapci et al (2013), and Zehir et al (2011).

Analysis and Findings

Validation of the measurements

Unidimentionality is ensured for all the measurements of the latent variables through Exploratory Factor Analysis. The convergent validity was ensured through the KMO, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, Average Variance Extracted, and Composite Reliability (Hair et al., 2012). The results are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of the Convergent Validity

Variable	KMO	BTS-Sig	CR	AVE
Standard Value	.5 <	.05 <	.7 <	.5 <
Brand Name	0.724	0.000	0.856	0.599
Product Quality	0.874	0.000	0.957	0.788
Style	0.762	0.000	0.866	0.620
Price	0.608	0.000	0.770	0.529
Habit	0.624	0.000	0.806	0.582
Promotion	0.714	0.000	0.843	0.575
Store Environment	0.749	0.000	0.935	0.675
Service Quality	0.895	0.000	0.961	0.693
Brand Loyalty	0.804	0.000	0.858	0.549

Source: Survey Data,2018

Cronbach's Alpha values obtained for all the latent variables are greater than 0.7 ensuring the inter-item reliability (Hair et al., 2012). The results are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha values

Variable	No of items	Cronbach's alpha Standard size 0.7<
Brand Name	4	0.772
Product Quality	6	0.945
Style	4	0.789
Price	3	0.552
Habit	3	0.637
Promotion	4	0.745
Service Environment	7	0.918
Service Quality	11	0.939
Brand Loyalty	5	0.792

Source: Survey Data,2018

The discriminant validity is ensured as the AVE values of the respective constructs exceed the square of the correlation values of the respective rows and columns (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

Table 3: Values for Discriminant Validity

	BN	PQ	ST	Px	HB	PR	SE	SQ
BN	0.599							
PQ	0.389	0.788						
ST	0.226	0.186	0.620					
Px	0.011	0.440	0.006	0.529				
HB	0.265	0.350	0.173	0.037	0.582			
PR	0.302	0.360	0.073	0.001	0.326	0.575		
SE	0.459	0.345	0.257	0.547	0.408	0.369	0.675	
SQ	0.336	0.269	0.338	0.001	0.331	0.323	0.591	0.693

Source: Survey Data,2018

Degree of Brand Loyalty in Sportswear Brands in Sri Lanka

According to the first hypothesis the level of Brand Loyalty is assessed for Sportswear Brands among the young consumers in Sri Lanka through one-sample T-test. The results in Table 4 (a) and (b) show that brand loyalty for sportswear brands is at a high level and it is statistically significant.

Table 4 (a): Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BL_MEAN	251	2.40	4.60	4.4000	.50604
Valid N (listwise)	251				

Table 4 (b) One-Sample Test

	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
BL_MEAN	5.589	199	.000	.20000	.1294	.2706

Antecedents of Brand Loyalty in Sportswear Brands in Sri Lanka

In achieving the second objective of the study the second hypothesis is tested through a multiple regression. The results are given in Table 5 (a) and (b).

Table 5 (a) : Model Summaryᵇ

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.763ᵃ	.727	.724	.13976

a. Predictors: (Constant), SQ_MEAN, P_MEAN, PRO_MEAN, S_MEAN, BN_MEAN, H_MEAN, PQ_MEAN, SE_MEAN

b. Dependent Variable: BL_MEAN

According to the model summary (Table 5 a) the adjusted R squared value is 0.724 and it indicates that 72.4% of brand loyalty is explained by the antecedents such as brand name, product quality, style, price, promotion, habit, store environment, and service quality.

Table 5 (b) : Coefficientsᵃ

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.374	.080		4.649	.000
	BN_MEAN	.229	.027	.307	8.459	.000
	PQ_MEAN	.154	.016	.284	9.467	.000
	S_MEAN	.110	.016	.171	6.703	.000
	P_MEAN	.127	.016	.169	7.842	.000
	H_MEAN	.080	.020	.112	3.930	.000
	PRO_MEAN	.144	.022	.191	6.547	.000
	SE_MEAN	.089	.019	.138	4.708	.000
	SQ_MEAN	.014	.027	.017	.501	.617

a. Dependent Variable: BL_MEAN

According to the coefficient values (Table 5b) all the antecedents of brand loyalty of sportswear brands are significant except service quality. The highest contribution to the brand loyalty is given by the brand name. Product quality, price, promotion, style, habit, and sales environment are respectively contributing to sportswear brand loyalty in Sri Lanka. It discloses that the brand name is the most important factor that influences the brand loyalty in sportswear brands in Sri Lanka.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study is conducted under the main purpose of examining the antecedents of the brand loyalty of sportswear brands in Sri Lanka. Two specific objectives drive the paper. They are first to assess the degree of brand loyalty of sportswear brands in Sri Lanka.; the second is to examine the antecedents of sportswear brand loyalty while identifying the salient factor for the brand loyalty.

The current study discloses that there is a higher degree of brand loyalty for the sportswear brands in Sri Lanka among the young generation. It reflects the same trend found out in another Asian country, i.e. Malaysia in the study conducted by Yee and Sidek (2008). Equally, Lydia et al (2012) also found that there is a high tendency towards brand loyalty in sportswear brands.

Further, the results of the study disclose that brand name, product quality, style, price, habit, promotion, store environment influencing brand loyalty in sportswear except the service quality in the Sri Lankan context. This finding mostly supports the knowledge contributed by the other similar studies but in different context. In particular, Yee, and Sidek, (2008), claim that brand name, product quality, style, price, promotion, service quality and store environment influence the brand loyalty of sportswear. The research results of Mohommad and Mohammadreza (2010) and Khraim (2011) are equal to the same they identified as factors in their studies on brand loyalty on sportswearand cosmetics. However, the current study paves the way towards habit as it has not been directly discussed in the literature. Further, service quality in the stores where sportswear brands sell is not significant in the Sri Lankan context as per the findings of the current study.

The current study also discloses that brand name is the salient antecedent in brand loyalty for sportswear. This finding agrees with the literature review. For instance, the studies conducted by Dawes, (2009), Kinuthia and Keren (2012) and Yee and Sidek (2008), the most influencing factor to the brand loyalty is brand name. Mohommad and Mohammadreza (2010) found product quality as the most influencing factor followed by brand name.

However, as the current study focuses only on young consumers addressing such limitation a researcher can investigate the same among other generations as well in the future. Further, this study can be extended by covering the entire country since the current version judgmentally selects the sample. Further another researcher can investigate the diversity of brand loyalty in sportswear with the demographic features of the consumers.

Managerial Implications

The study discloses that there is a high brand loyalty in sportswear among the young consumers in Sri Lanka. This is an important insight for the companies that operate in the fashion designing, manufacturing and retailing sectors in Sri Lanka. They should design, manufacture and make available more sportswear brands and should encourage the current sportswear customers to retain in such brands while attracting prospective customers.

Further, the study found that the brand name, product quality, style, price, promotion, habit and store environment are influencing the brand loyalty of sportswear brands of the young consumers in the Western Province in Sri Lanka. Thus, companies that operate in fashion and footwear industry should pay more attention to make high quality stylish products under sports brands for a suitable price while productively promoting the same. Simultaneously, they should inculcate the habit of purchasing and being loyal to sportswear brands among the young generation in Sri Lanka. Retailers of clothing or shoes should allocate more space for sportswear brands and should design and maintain the store environment more cleanly and pleasantly by playing pleasant music, decoration with attractive decor, convenient layout all with more visibility and elegant arrangements in order to encourage customer visits and revisits which create long term relationships with them.

As it is also found that the brand name is salient for brand loyalty in sportswear among the young consumers in Sri Lanka, the corporates should make use of all possible marketing and promotions strategies to make the current and potential target markets aware that they offer a range of products under sportswear brands.

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