

Identifying Brand Loyalty Requirements by Generations for Organizational Success and Renewability

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ABSTRACT

Consumer markets are rapidly being replaced by newer and younger generations, requiring tourism businesses to identify what specific strategies appeal to the various generations to more effectively encourage brand loyalty. The last few decades have shown massive innovations in technology and a change in the most prominent generation that affects loyalty strategies. This article identifies the requirements of brand loyalty through a detailed analysis of each generational stereotype and corresponding brand loyalty efforts. Compiled findings provide businesses insights into best practices of brand loyalty to use as a mechanism to evaluate or adjust their existing strategies. To appeal to younger consumers, businesses may have to adopt a more dynamic approach for long-term sustainability.

Keywords

Brand, loyalty, generation, tourism, hospitality, marketing

INTRODUCTION

Brand loyalty has been a focal point in marketing and overall business growth strategy, allowing businesses to foster repeat and new customers. Traditional loyalty tactics have been effective with older generations (generation X and beyond) in the realm of tourism, yet these consumer markets are rapidly being replaced by newer and younger generations (millennials and generation Z). The push for brand loyalty has become even more necessary with millennials (born 1981-1996) and generation Z (born 1997-2012) becoming the current target market for tourism businesses across the world. More traditional marketing tactics emphasized convenience, quality and overall exceptional customer service, which excelled for generation X (born 1965-1980) and baby boomers (born 1946-1964). Yet those core values do not resonate as strongly for millennials and generation Z as they view a personal, more extravagant product as more valuable. While it is essential that businesses adapt to changing societal desires, older consumer generations should not be ignored. According to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, millennials and generation X make up 59% of the U.S. population. This leaves a large portion of other populations for businesses to focus on, especially as a large majority have expendable funds that are commonly used for extravagant ventures like travel and exploration. This research sought to identify the requirements of brand loyalty for older vs. newer generation consumer markets. Stereotypes of each generational consumer market were explored to gain insight into the most appropriate strategies that influence their consumer behavior. Accordingly, this industry commentary article provides businesses with best practices of brand loyalty to evaluate or adjust their strategies as necessary.

INDUSTRY CONTEXT

The fierce competition within the tourism industry has many organizations directing their focus to brand loyalty strategies to maintain their competitive advantage and to promote brand growth, and continual new and repeat consumers (Phan & Ting-Yueh, 2022). Brand loyalty is the emotional attachment consumers feel toward a business with faith in the quality and service versus a competitor (Gordon, 2021). This is not a money-based drive but rather a perception-based one that can encourage sales, regardless of price, leading to larger profit margins. Well-established brand loyalty manifests itself as a source of repeat purchases by consumers, which can lead to higher revenue and referrals from regular customers (Gordon, 2021). As the tourism industry continues to focus on growth and expansion and as the industry must focus to meet the needs of millennials and generation X, it is essential for tourism businesses to identify the most relevant tactics to generate consumer loyalty. Traditional loyalty tactics have been effective with prior generational consumer markets, yet these consumers are rapidly being replaced. Prior generations have been more responsive to traditional marketing tactics and value a more face-to-face experience rather than online advertising, while younger generations are incredibly responsive to online tactics and unresponsive to traditional marketing methods (Lister, 2022).

Millennials and generation Z make up approximately 43% of the U.S. population (Duffin, 2022). This generation is unique compared to consumers of the past as they are known for “placing a high emphasis on being unique, and a major part of that is growing their identity through culturally rich experiences and exploration of the unknown” (Fromm, 2017). This focus on adventure and customization is also seen in academic research. A recent study by Junaid, et al (2020) identified that managers can “win love for their brands” by providing exciting, stimulating, and meaningful experiences. This has translated into business strategy with the constant need to reinvigorate offerings and to avoid erosion of product and service value (Junaid, et al, 2020). Furthermore, Phan and Ting-Yueh (2022) identified three factors that drive brand loyalty that also support the desires of younger generations, including marketing campaigns that target the sensory, affective, and behavioral. Additionally, these factors are influenced by technology, and businesses need to be able to meet and exceed the needs of consumers from the very start of their tourism experience, which begins with their booking experience. In one study that researched online platforms and their role in developing brand loyalty, it was found that younger consumers “develop a sense of curiosity and want to learn more about the brand’s novelty and differentiation. Consequently, this stimulates action-oriented interactions between creative brands and customers” (Phan & Ting-Yueh, 2022).

Younger generations have vast reserves of curiosity that businesses need to harness to remain relevant and competitive, and this fight for consumer attention has only become more desperate, as described by Fedunik-Hofman (2019). “It’s common knowledge that consumer attention spans are dwindling,” according to Forbes (Patel, 2017), with younger generations only willing to focus on a single subject for approximately 10 seconds until they are distracted by the next visual stimuli. This may very well be more reason why sensory, affective, and behavioral experiences are prominent brand loyalty driving factors for younger consumers. Business innovations such as new colors, material or physical structures embody the impression a brand may leave on a consumer, stimulating the need for a sensory experience. As mentioned above, Fromm (2017) stated younger generations consider experiences and exploration of the unknown important to their core values, which is evident in their response to affective experiences. An entertaining and exciting reaction is generated by consumers when organizations innovate and introduce new aspects into their business for consumers to explore, leading to a lasting favorable association effect in their minds. The behavioral experience of a young consumer also is highly motivated by innovations from a business. These types of experiences have “been recognized as a valuable controller of customer behaviors” due to their “result in stereotypes about excitement” (Phan & Ting-Yueh, 2022).

Baby Boomers

Organizations have marketed to specific groups of people for as long as they have existed with the purpose of providing a service in exchange for funds with the goal of generating revenue (Ellering, 2022). To achieve this goal, however, organizations must tailor their marketing strategies specifically to whatever group they are targeting; even more so if they are to market to different generations. The marketing tactics used for the baby boomer generation, 22% of the U.S. population, are different than those that should be used on younger generations as baby boomers have the most expendable funds and want to use their time to do all that they dreamed (Duffin, 2022; Tama-Rutigliano, 2017). Although baby boomers may prefer a face-to-face interaction, marketing through digital media is still viable as most of them have incorporated phones into their daily lives, according to Shvarts (2019). One of the only caveats may be that advertisements will need to be customized to the style boomers are more accustomed to, which is a small price for capitalizing on an extremely profitable group. This shift away from more physical and traditional methods of advertising has created a disconnect for consumers from the baby boomer generation, as “only 33% of baby boomers approved branding activities on social media,” leading to the concept that conducts “social media for baby boomers as a unique marketing segment” (Zhong, 2021).

A study by Zhong (2021) aimed to analyze the relationship between baby boomers and online brand-initiated mechanisms for brand loyalty and customer behaviors. The study identified four factors for this relationship that aided to describe the effect of such mechanisms on target consumer groups: utilitarian, hedonic, perceived interactivity, and openness. While baby boomers may not use social media and other forms of technology as much as younger consumers, Zhong (2021) goes on to explain that Facebook remains one of the more used social networking sites for baby boomers, which is supported by data from Statista reporting that 68% of baby boomers use Facebook (Dixon, 2022). There is a focus on this group as they remain a prominent opportunity for businesses to direct funds and resources for a positive return on investment. Zhong (2021) reinforces the financial importance of baby boomers by identifying them as the wealthiest generation in the USA until 2030 at least.

There is strong evidence that online brand engagement drove brand loyalty due to Zhong’s (2021) study. The benefits and brand practices that performed well with the baby boomer generation are the hedonic and utilitarian benefits as they placed a higher importance on those rather than the interactivity and openness benefits. The utilitarian benefits are those that are “derived from the utility of the product” while also referring to the quality and convenience as they increase utility (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). Hedonic benefits are those that are “derived from the use and enjoyment of the product” while also referring to the pleasure experienced from the entertainment and value of the product (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). During the study, however, it was discovered that there was a lack of connection with baby boomers for the interactivity and openness benefits. Perceived interactivity is the perception of the brand by consumers, indicating their attitude while doing so via a combination of three further aspects, perceived control, responsiveness, and two-way communication, according to Zhong (2021). Openness benefits as described by Zhong (2021) include the connection between a consumer and an organization to the degree that a brand reveals personal connections and intimate information. The benefits disliked by the baby boomer generation are essentially the parallel opposites of those they held as important. Interactivity and openness benefits focus more on the personal connection of a consumer with the digital presentation of a brand whereas utilitarian and hedonic benefits are more based on practical value and quality, which baby boomers tend to value more over personalization aspects.

Generation X

Generation X was the first group to be exposed to the effect of technology and vast amounts of information being readily available, according to McKenna (n.d.), being dubbed the “middle child” generation. Nonetheless, they still make up about a fifth of the U.S. population, as described by Duffin

(2022), meaning they are a demographic and consumer section that should not be ignored. A study by Amin, Ryu, Cobanoglu, Rezaei, & Wulan (2021) explored “tourist shopping satisfaction and behavioral intentions” of consumers from various generations, one such being generation X consumers. The study analyzed behaviors like repeat purchase intentions, loyalty, and longer stays for consumers. These specific attributes were explored as they helped indicate the customer experience in a quantifiable and trackable manner as explained from the results of the study. During the study, various other aspects of a customer’s experience were measured, from the atmosphere of the business to its accessibility. Environmental factors were found to have the largest impact on consumers from generation X whereas staff personnel affected other consumers more. The environmental factors rated highly by generation X consumers are the opening hours of the business, its level of cleanliness, and the amount of security provided, according to Amin, et al (2021). Furthermore, staff personnel are categorized by the responsiveness and helpfulness of employees.

Higher levels of consumer satisfaction were found when these attributes were available. One such finding was an increase in consumer loyalty and longer stays at businesses. Amin, et al (2021) defined loyalty as the consumer’s positive attitude toward the product and/or service provided and longer stays as the consumer’s desire to spend more of their time at one establishment over another. The group that represented the results for loyalty and longer stays were the generation X participants, indicating that when certain environmental factors are met, this generation will experience more satisfaction than others. The significance of this study is the method discovered for organizations that builds a sense of loyalty between consumers and themselves. Furthermore, to capitalize on loyal consumers, the ability to retain customers on location can often lead to an “increase in conversion rate, average number of units per transaction and average transaction value” (Studholme, 2019).

The study goes on to elaborate the driving forces for generation X and what motivates them to visit an establishment. Amin, et al (2021) describes the main reason for generation X to visit a business to be social interaction and leisure. This differs from other generations, like millennials, who focus on the materialistic perspective for the immediate consumption of products. This drive is supported by the findings of the study as the environmental factors most favored by generation X allow for the fruition of their true desire, social interactions and leisure. While interactions between the consumer and employees may be more agreeable to other generations, the socializing of a generation X consumer’s own group can be more favorable, culminating in an overall more enjoyable experience from the business.

Millennials

Millennials comprise approximately 35% of the U.S. labor force, according to Fry (2018), and are now gaining large amounts of expendable funds making, the development of their brand loyalty a top priority for businesses. They are the first of the younger consumers that businesses need to refocus on to ensure renewed and lasting longevity. To appeal to this younger consumer, business methods must shift from the straightforward quality of service provided to the overall experience created with every service. One core reason for this change is the advantage millennials possess. They grew up surrounded by groundbreaking technology, with one revolutionary breakthrough after the next, as described by Donnelly (n.d.). Due to this natural affinity for the internet, millennials have the ability to process standard websites more efficiently than other generations. Furthermore, this generation is more focused on those features that create the experience, such as images, compelling videos, and social websites, as described by Chivandi, Samuel and Muchie (2020). In fact, they go on to say that for marketers it is important for businesses to understand this consumer’s expectations and their responses to online marketing efforts and modify websites accordingly.

Chivandi, Samuel and Muchie (2020) have conducted a study that found that the fundamental necessity for millennials to establish brand loyalty is for the consumer to notice value from the brand. The study

goes on to describe millennials as being price conscious while holding emotional value at a higher level of importance. This value that drives millennial brand loyalty can be further explored by virtue of consumer value theory, where it is stated that brand loyalty is composed of three value factors, functional, emotional, and social, as defined by Chivandi, Samuel and Muchie (2020). Functional, which is the capability of the product or service offered to the consumers to create their preference and loyalty to the brand. Emotional, which when in high levels can motivate a consumer into repeated purchases, a willingness to pay regardless of price, and to spread positive information about the brand. Social, which when reinforced compels consumers to give only positive comments about the brand to their peers and eases the acceptance of premium prices. They go on to explain that the product or service provided to the consumer has the direct capability to create a consumer's preference and loyalty to a brand. When there is a high level of emotional value from a consumer, there is evidence of brand loyalty, which is discerned from their intention to repurchase a product, a willingness to pay regardless of price and a positive spread of word of mouth. Furthermore, consumers are willing to spread positive comments and information about businesses with an easier acceptance of premium prices when social values are reinforced (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020). Once an emotional and more personal connection is established between the young consumer and the business, brand loyalty is set in their minds, albeit not as definitively as older generations. However, this bond may not ensure repeat sales and motivate the consumer to choose one organization other than their competitors as seen in typical brand loyalty from baby boomers and generation X.

Millennials and generations that follow require even more incentive once their core values are met. For a business to have repeat sales and an overall positive return on investment, additional services must be provided as this generation is “motivated by incentives and they want their loyalty to be reciprocated,” furthering the connection already established (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020). “Loyalty programs that may collaborate with entities such as airlines and restaurants to establish additional value for the guests” can retain and stimulate customer loyalty (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020). Accordingly, there is a positive relationship between consumers, millennials, and businesses when more personal and emotional values were met along with incentives for further value (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020). Findings suggest consumers are attitudinally loyal and will be responsive to brand loyalty programs that include discounts and incentives of value while encouraging technological methods for millennials to support brand loyalty (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020).

Generation Z

Generation Z is the youngest generation in the world, excluding anyone younger than 18 years old, and has just recently entered the work force and gained access to excess funds. As described by Kwok (2020), generation Z views traveling to new destinations as a priority, succeeded only by having a family. To capitalize on the touristic endeavors of young consumers, businesses must pivot and adjust their tactics to appeal to this new tourist consumer market. Similar to the generation before them, generation Z travels to experience new destinations and what different regions have to offer. However, one study “identified the important roles of destination cognitive food image in strengthening destination brand image and enhancing tourists' revisit intentions” as food is a major reason for young consumer to travel (Ding, Jiang & Qu, 2022). The study explored the perception of young consumers and how businesses can go about improving their image and encouraging repeated revisits. Ding, Jiang & Qu (2022) go on to say that 85% of generation Z have taken 1 to 3 trips between 2017 and 2018, with only 58% of millennials doing the same. This majority of the demographic emphasizes the importance of this study with it also concluding that the main factor for their travels was the desire to explore new food and beverage landscapes of different regions.

There are distinct characteristics for this generation that set it apart from others. They not only marked the dawn of the new century, but they also grew up surrounded by the internet, smartphones, and digital

media their entire lives, creating a dissonance for their trust in reality, which has been tainted from their perception by the internet, as described by Ding, Jiang & Qu (2022). This not only marks a key difference between this generation and those of their elders but also offers a viewing glass into how businesses can best appeal to them. It can be determined that straightforward quality will no longer function, and the best course of action would be one that focuses on image and innovation to support the desires and expectations of consumers. The importance of a new course of action for businesses is emphasized by generation Z being labeled with a profound distrust and anxiety in their personalities caused by their complex social-economic environment, as detailed by Ding, Jiang & Qu (2022). In following through with the new direction, their study “proposed and examined the relationships between [generation z consumers’] perceived restaurant innovativeness and destination cognitive food image,” which identified how crucial perception is as it strengthens brand image and makes tourists’ intentions to revisit more likely (Ding, Jiang & Qu, 2022). There is such a focus on the food and beverage aspect of tourism as it may best fit the physiological and psychological realms of generation Z travelers, as described by Ding, Jiang & Qu (2022).

Generation Z tourists differ from other generations but also from each other as they can be separated into their own categories due to the heavy influence of digital technologies and the internet (Carufel, 2020). To be better received overall by this generation, a focus was placed on their attitudes and responses to corporate social responsibility, processing of information, social media, and smart technology acceptance (Ding, Jiang & Qu, 2022). This is the starting point to understand what values generation Z holds dear, which will enable organizations to develop brand loyalty among the young consumers to take advantage of their patronage. Chinese businesses have even begun to move forward with this information by renovating and adjusting to the desires of their young clientele.

Collected findings demonstrate “tourists’ perceived restaurant menu innovativeness, technology-based service innovativeness, and experiential innovativeness have significant impacts,” building a destination perception allowing the creation of a bond between the consumer and the business (Ding, Jiang & Qu, 2022). The collected works from Ding, Jiang & Qu (2022) explain the necessary steps organizations must take to understand the preferences of generation Z tourists, which encompass their need for innovated technology like menus and advertised images. Such innovations demonstrate business’ efforts to adjust for consumer desires such as specific health demands and healthy, locally sourced foods. These efforts signal to tourists that businesses intensively prioritize their needs and expectations and make continuous investments in innovation, allowing businesses to connect further with the new generation and renew the brand loyalty that differed from older generations (Ding, Jiang & Qu, 2022).

DISCUSSION

Brand loyalty is the emotional attachment toward an organization the consumer feels with faith in the brand’s quality and service over a competitor (Gordon, 2021). Although it may be a source of competition among competitors, brand loyalty can encourage sales with large profit margins regardless of price. Brand loyalty can generate a source of repeated purchases from loyal consumers, which leads to higher revenue for the business with the added benefit of the spread of customer referrals from regular loyal consumers (Gordon, 2021). The method to achieve this level of brand loyalty is dependent on the generation a business is targeting. Lister (2022) explained how prior generations respond better to traditional marketing methods whereas the younger generations are more accepting of online tactics. There are three core drivers of brand loyalty: sensory, affective, and behavioral. Sensory, business innovations such as new colors or physical structures that embody the impression a brand may leave on a consumer; affective, experiences and exploration of the unknown of a business; behavioral, an organization’s innovation and introduction of new aspects of their business for consumers to explore for a lasting effect in their minds (Phan & Ting-Yueh, 2022).

Baby boomers were found to be the most lucrative generation, according to Tama-Rutigliano (2017), making them a target market that is still worth putting business resources toward. Resources such as digital media are critical as Shvarts (2019) explains a vast majority of this demographic have incorporated a phone into their daily routine. As such, four factors were discovered that best describe the relationship consumers of the baby boomer generation have with mechanisms employed by businesses to attract their attention. Chandon, Wansink & Laurent (2000) and Zhong (2021) identified the factors as utilitarian, hedonic, perceived interactivity, and openness benefits. Utilitarian benefits include the utility of a product while hedonic benefits are those coming from the enjoyment of using a product. Perceived interactivity is the consumer's perception of a brand, indicated by their attitude, and lastly, openness benefits are the connection of the business and its consumers to where the business reveals personal connections and intimate information. It was discovered that out of the four driving factors, baby boomers value utilitarian and hedonic benefits over openness or perceived interactivity as they hold the practical value and quality as more important.

Generation X is a crucial demographic. Certain factors from the environment of business were found to have the largest impact with the highest rated factors being the opening hours of the business, its level of cleanliness and the amount of security provided (Amin, et al., 2021). Inversely, staff personnel, which is categorized as the responsiveness and helpfulness of employees, had a larger impact on consumers from other generations. The impacts of the more acceptable environmental factors resulted in higher levels of consumer satisfaction, which also led to an increase in customer loyalty and length of stay. Furthermore, those who choose to spend more time at a business tend to increase their number of transactions and price of each transaction, thus increasing revenue. Also, it was discovered that the main purpose of a member from generation X to visit a business was for the social interaction and leisure aspect of their trip.

Millennials, one of the younger generations, grew up with a natural savviness for technology, allowing them to process websites and information with greater ease than prior generations. This generation focuses on features that create an experience like images, videos, and websites that demonstrate a perceived value of the brand as well as high emotional value (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020). The value that millennials seek from organizations is composed of three factors, functional, emotional, and social, which can generate brand loyalty. However, once all the criteria are met, the millennial consumer will require further incentive from the brand to repeatedly purchase product and to have an overall positive opinion of the organization. This in fact further develops the loyalty already established as they wish to feel their loyalty reciprocated by the business (Chivandi, Samuel & Muchie, 2020). A driving force for millennials is the personal and emotional values offered as they build positive relationships between the consumer and business.

Generation Z travels to different regions to experience new destinations and explore what the destinations have. The imagery of businesses influences generation Z and influences whether a consumer would repurchase product (Ding, Jiang & Qu, 2022). Ding, Jiang & Qu (2022) found this demographic has created a disconnect between themselves and their trust as they grew up surrounded by technology. Their perception of the world has been tainted by the influences of the internet. Their dissonance determines that straightforward quality of service or product would not create a bond with a business, rather a focus on image and innovation that supports the desires and expectations of the generation Z consumer would allow for brand loyalty to manifest. Generation Z has a profound distrust and anxiety caused by their complex social-economic environment, requiring businesses to take extra steps to build rapport with a timid target market such as this.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to identify the requirements of brand loyalty for each generation. Stereotypes of each generation were explored to gain insight into the most appropriate strategies that influence their consumer

behavior. Traditional marketing methods operated primarily in a time without the expansive technological advancements we have today. As the modern world has changed, so should the tactics of businesses to remain relevant for prolonged longevity. The research revealed older generations as a section that should not be ignored less they risk the loss of a healthy source of revenue. They have the largest amounts of expendable funds and are the relatively easier sector to market to as they favor immediate quality and service whereas younger generations favor the emotional aspect generated by businesses. While appealing to younger consumers may require a more dynamic approach, their patronage is just as necessary to the sustainability of any organization.

A business can function well when it uses modern technology and methods that can be better accepted by the new generations. Regardless of the stereotypes surrounding today's youth, this article discusses the core values they hold dear and how a business can operate to make themselves more favorable in the market. Their acceptance by consumers is that much more vital as most of the labor force are the younger generations. This article illuminates what each major generation at the time desires from a brand with explanations of what must be offered and created for a consumer to have a lasting relationship with a business. This brand loyalty is a mutualistic relationship between a business and the consumer that enriches all parties involved and can be formed by implementing what is discussed in the article.

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