

Research Article

The Role of Sales Personnel in Customer Involvement & Loyalty: The mediating role of Customer Engagement in Apparel Store

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ABSTRACT

The research focuses on the impact of customer engagement on overall sales and efficiency via the role of sales personnel which act as a variable in the study. The overall efficiency of stores and vendors in the apparel industry is mostly impacted by their consumer's loyalty and their brand image. The research presents multiple initial hypotheses which firstly include whether the actions of sales personnel have an impact on customer loyalty and customer involvement via customer engagement. Secondly, overall business sales are positively influenced by customer loyalty. And third, customer engagement has a dependent relation on customer involvement and customer participation. The methodology of the undertaken study is based on on-site surveys which include individuals from the industry including both vendors and the consumers through a questionnaire based on general information and opinionated queries regarding the experience of consumers and the impact vendors feel. The obtained results were filtered for processable entries and processed through SPSS to obtain a statistical end-result which determined the validity of the studied hypotheses.

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern era where there is persistent growth in industrialization, Pakistan comes into the category of developing nations of the world, where a huge number of stakeholders look forward to investing in industries like IT, FMCG, Hospitality & Tourism

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and Fashion Industry. On the basis of demand and cultural aspects, a huge majority Favors investing in cloth industry considering it as a source of good fortune. The firms have traditionally kept a keen focus on the transactional conduct of the consumers (repetitive purchase, product loyalty, cross marketing etc). But due to the boom in the competitiveness of the fashion industry, non-transactional approaches have come into practice, which consist dominantly of service elements in the industry. Therefore, customer engagement has emerged as a revived concept, exercised with vitality on behalf of the sales personnel in this regard. Customer Engagement involves a continuous interaction between the firms and both the customers and consumers, on the basis

of transactional as well as non-transactional aspects. According to (Raza et al 2021), a relation between customer engagement and brand authenticity and via transitive property Brand Authenticity and Brand Love were positively connected showing a transitive relation between Customer Engagement and Brand Love. This research ultimately portrays the fact that customer engagement has a certain impact and/or contribution towards the promotion of a certain brand and its overall sales. This research is bound to investigate the impacts levied on by customer engagement on a certain business either the impact be in the area of customer loyalty, resulting in increased sales, customer involvement and various other factors.

In the context of the following research, the background of this study connects with the fundamental roots of marketing around which this research is oriented. The prior aim of this study is to look into the impacts of customer engagement on apparel business. This relates with the field of direct marketing which is oriented around the company/brand using their resources to promote their product directly to the consumer. In this case, the customer engagement is discussed in sector of sales personnel's communication with the general consumer and how and if their interaction leads to any changes within the brand's image, sales and all arbitrary and non-arbitrary sectors.

The connection between the factor of customer engagement is often studied in context of its impact on brand image (Cambra-Fierro et. al, 2014) and how there is a transitive relation between customer engagement and brand love/customer loyalty (Raza et al., 2021) although there is a gap in the direct study of customer loyalty through the scope of customer engagement, researchers have identified the impact of customer engagement on customer loyalty through indirect relation but a lack of proper research does exist on the direct connection of these two pertinent variables. Customer engagement deals with a very broad spectrum of impacts on various different variables each having its own field and scope, the main setback occurs when there is a lack of proper research that deals with the direct relation between customer engagement executed by the sales personnel and customer loyalty, having an overall impact on sales of the business.

The undertaken research will be oriented around the identification of impact of customer engagement as implemented by the sales personnel on the factors of overall customer loyalty and customer involvement. Customer engagement here is a

mediating variable to briefly investigate its impact on the factors of customer loyalty and customer involvement with the brand. The undertaken research is triggered by a certain lack of research that directly tails these two factors and their dependency on the factor of customer engagement through sales personnel. Transitive research is available yet very less and copious amount of research is available on the pertinent topic, especially in terms of considering the audience in Pakistan.

Customer engagement is a broad factor in the determination of the impacts on the business through its sales personnel, businesses usually boom due to some intrinsic and extrinsic factors which include brand name, customer loyalty and reputation. And previously, it was discovered in research that brand name and brand love is transitively dependent on customer engagement. (Zebal & Zebal, 2020) in their research have identified that brand love and its reputation has proven to be a point of pivot in customer loyalty in bangladeshi apparel market, a similar evaluation is also valid for Pakistan's market and previous research indicates that there is an in-direct relation between customer loyalty and customer engagement by sales personnel, another factor that also arises is the impact of CE on overall Sales of the business. Hence, this research has a certain significance in the sector of impacts from customer engagement on business.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to further evaluate the existing literature on the studied variables, an empirical review for those dependent and independent variables will be conducted to identify the available and pertinent research on the selected variables.

Impact of Sales Personnel

According to Soujanya and Daniel (2020), in their empirical research shows the pertinent impact of sales personnel on the overall loyalty of a consumer, the authors through a survey based on the questionnaire came to a conclusion that consumer loyalty was directly influenced by the behavior of the sales personnel, if it was negative the consumer was less likely to promote the brand or refer the brand to another colleague or friend, hence, driving down the overall business efficiency and in the same manner a reverse positive relation was also found. A similar study that was conducted in the sector of restaurants was selected to present a divergence and the broader spectrum of the impact of sales personnel on business flow. (Hussain et. al., 2011) conducted a survey of 6

restaurants and a positive relation between consumer satisfaction and sales personnel was found. “Moreover, extrinsic product cues and quality customer services were found to have a positive impact on the image of the restaurant.”.

Consumer Engagement

A lot of potential academic work is present on the topic of consumer/customer engagement which is visible through the works of (Harmeling et. al., 2017) where they describe a relation between the customer engagement and the factors of business boom, customer satisfaction and monetary benefit through consumer marketing. Nammir et. al., (2012) presents a conducted research in which a relation between the consumer engagement and consumer satisfaction is set-up which is then further reinforced by additional factors. Counter research pertinent to our studied topic is not relevant to the apparel industry in Pakistan and hence cannot be applied to the undertaken study.

Consumer Loyalty

Consumer loyalty is a defining factor in identifying the impact on businesses through customer engagement as the base of marketing is through the consumers, the consumer acts as marketing device for the business and consumer loyalty is used as a magnet to attract consumers and consumer loyalty is enriched through consumer engagement which is done through sales personnel. Although there is an imperative amount of research available on consumer loyalty and its impact and similarly (Lie at. al., 2019) conducted an empirical research whose aim was to depict the relation between consumer trust/loyalty and customer satisfaction. The authors suggest that service quality has a positive and insignificant influence on consumer loyalty. Then, price and consumer trust have a positive and significant influence on consumer loyalty.

This presents as a counter-research in the undertaken study, whereas other research do show direct relation between consumer loyalty and satisfaction. (Ali, 2011) conducted a research where he describes that the number of studies have examined the predictors of consumer loyalty and majority of them have pointed out consumers satisfaction as the basic component of consumer loyalty.

Consumer Involvement

Customer involvement management (CIM) can be described as the degree to which the customer involves oneself in the creating value for particular

product or service and delivery process. It is denoted as the interaction or collaboration between customers and users (channel members) and company personnel during the course of development of a product in order to actualize a commercial product Ernst (2004). Customer involvement is an approach that takes customer orientation one step ahead of customer relationship management. It can be considered as the probability to involve customers in the business and product development process, such as design, marketing, sales, customer service, etc. (Rohrbeck et al., 2010).

Rohrbeck et al., (2010) perceived customer involvement as an apparatus from which innovation can be sourced through associating, reporting and consequently, the attainment of greater competitiveness and enhanced customer satisfaction and retention can be achieved. Relationship marketing theory suggests that customer involvement derived from certain aspects of cooperative relationships that characterize successful relational exchanges. It is also suggested that numerous factors influence involvement success. However, two antecedents consistently identified as important are market orientation (Iruka & Ateke, 2014), and customer relationship management (Lam, et al., 2013). It is also averred that successful customer involvement efforts improve customer retention and firm performance through stronger relational bonds (De Wulf et al., 2001).

Research Framework

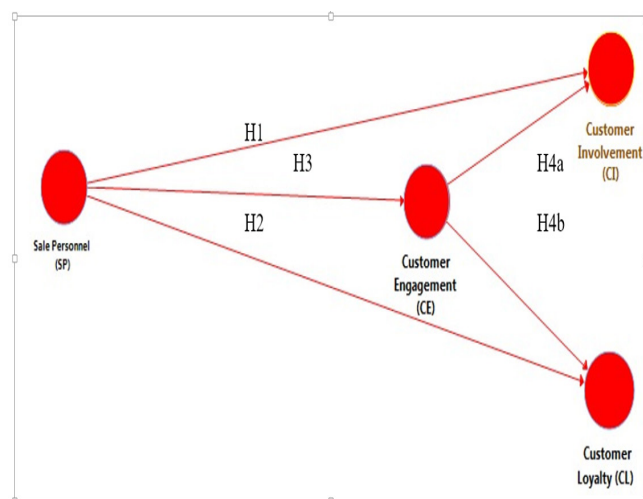


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

Conceptual Model

Here the independent variable is Sales Personnel (SP), Customer Engagement (CE) is the mediating variable and both Customer Involvement (CI) & Customer Loyalty (CL) are dependent variable.

Hypothesis

Following are the hypotheses that are obtained through the previous research on the topic, further evaluation will be determined by the actual research, given are the hypotheses drawn from the conducted research up till this point.

- Hypotheses 1: The participation of sales personnel has an impact on customer involvement using customer engagement as a mediator.
- Hypotheses 2: The participation of sales personnel has an impact on customer loyalty using customer engagement as a mediator.
- Hypotheses 3: Sales personnel has an impact on Customer Engagement.
- Hypotheses 4a: Customer Involvement is significant impacted by Customer Engagement.
- Hypotheses 4b: Customer Engagement has a significant relation with customer Loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The undertaken study was mainly constructed as an explanatory study as the studied variables and topic are not unknown to an extent that requires an exploratory approach to tackle the topic and hence, explanatory research on the basis on conducted research was undertaken and a conclusion determining the results of the hypotheses were drawn from the research. The main target of this survey is the apparel market of Pakistan, mainly the larger dealers such as popular companies which employ multiple sales representatives, the main target of the sampling were the consumers and how their interactions have affected their brand loyalty to a specific apparel brand. The sample size included 150 participants. For this research, Convenience sampling was used as the sampling technique. Questionnaires best portray the requirement of the research as the opinions of the public are mostly required to act as the medium of research. The items of Customer Engagement were taken from Bowen and Chen (2001), Customer Involvement from Cambra-Fierro et al. (2014), Sales Personnel from Mansouri et al., (2022) and Customer Loyalty from (Randhawa & Comm, 2018) and Jost Auf Der Stroth et al., (2017). The questionnaire having a Likert Scale of 1 -5 (Strongly Disagree – Strongly

Agree) were distributed among the consumers at several apparel outlets which have a significant dependency on sales representatives in Karachi. The data was collected about the personal behavior and the orientation of the public towards a certain and how consumer engagement helps increase consumer loyalty which in turn drives the sale, the main target of this questionnaire were the general consumers.

DATA ANALYSIS

Mediation analysis was used among the various variables of Customer Engagement, Customer Loyalty, Customer Involvement and sales personnel. The above variables will be tested and compared in a linear regression analysis conducted in SPSS software mainly due to its accurate nature and reliable engine which can provide accurate validity, correlation and regression values to properly determine the relation between the afore-mentioned variables.

Descriptive Profile of the Data

The respondents comprised of approximately equal proportions with females being 78 (52%) more than 72 males (48%) with total respondents being altogether as 150. The age of the participants consisted of 16 (10.7%) people below the age of 21 years old. Majority of the respondents were aged between (21 – 30) years old, making up 92 (61.3%) of the respondents. Whereas 31 participants (20.7%) were between the age of (31 – 40), while the minority of 11 participants (7.3%) consists of age between (41 – 50) from a total of 150 participants.

Depending upon type of sampling majority of our respondents were graduates comprising of 83 (55.3%) out of a total 150 respondents. There were 34 (22.7%) undergraduates, intermediate or A' level qualified being 20 (13.3%), 10 (6.7%) of the participants being doctorates and the least of 3 participants (2.0%) being Matric or O'levels qualified. The occupation of the respondents with 112 (74.7%) being employees in different firms, 25 (16.7%) of the respondents being students while the rest 13 (8.7%) participants having their own business or being self-employed. The table above shows that majority, 75 respondents (50%) shop only once a month, with 52 respondents (34.7%) shopping twice a month, and the remaining 19 respondents (12.7%) shop 3 to 5 times a month while the least 4 (2.7%) respondents shop for more than 5 times a month.

Descriptive Statistics & Validation

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SP	150	2.20	5.00	3.8600	.57029
CE	150	2.20	5.00	3.9013	.55406
CI	150	2.20	5.00	3.8047	.54148
CL	150	1.80	5.00	3.8947	.57775
Valid N (listwise)	150				

Descriptive analysis shows that majority of the participants were close to agree point in their response. The mean of Sales Personnel is 3.86 (S.D.= .57), Customer Engagement is 3.90 (S.D.= .55), Customer Involvement is 3.80 (S.D.= .54) and Customer Loyalty is 3.89 (S.D.= .57).

Table 2

Reliability Analysis

Var.	Variable Name	N	Cronbach's Alpha
SP	Sales Personnel	150	.722
CE	Customer Engagement	150	.634
CI	Customer Involvement	150	.662
CL	Customer Loyalty	150	.732

Here in the table above, the average covariance among the variables is portraying a positive value. It is also shown that the variables are reliable through the Cronbach's Alpha value. Here the reliability measured refers to how much closely a particular group of items in a set are related to each other (UCLA, n.d.) The reliability of every variable was calculated individually and in order to determine the internal consistency, reliability was also tested collectively as shown in Table#..... The overall reliability of the instruments was found to be .747 which indicates that the selected tools were reliable for the analysis, whereas the reliability of individual variables was found to be .7 indicating the instruments as individually reliable for the test.

Hypotheses Testing

In order to test the validity of the hypotheses we have conducted a linear regression analysis along with mediation analysis. Considering the hypothesis, the following regressions have been obtained for the tests.

Table 3

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.414a	.172	.166	.49451

a. Predictors: (Constant), SP

Table 4

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	7.495	1	7.495	30.650	.000 ^b
	Residual	36.192	148	.245		
	Total	43.687	149			

a. Dependent Variable: CI
b. Predictors: (Constant), SP

Table 5

Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.287	.277		8.250	.000
	SP	.393	.071	.414	5.536	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CI

The above summary shows that the F value is 30.650 while the p-value is below .05 (i.e. .000). Hence proved;

- Hypotheses 1: The participation of sales personnel can have an impact on customer involvement (using customer engagement as a mediator.)

Now similarly testing the second hypothesis for the relation between Sales Personnel and Customer Loyalty.

Table 6

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.276a	.076	.070	.55719

a. Predictors: (Constant), SP

Table 7

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	3.788	1	3.788	12.200	.001 ^b
	Residual	45.948	148	.310		
	Total	49.736	149			

a. Dependent Variable: CL
b. Predictors: (Constant), SP

Table 8

Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.816	.312		9.016	.000
	SP	.280	.080	.276	3.493	.001

a. Dependent Variable: CL

Similarly, for in terms of Customer Loyalty, the F value is 12.200 while the p-value is .001, which is below .05. This deems the model as significant and fit and, therefore, proves;

- Hypotheses 2: The participation of sales personnel can have an impact on customer loyalty using customer engagement as a mediator.

Taking the mediating variable (Customer Engagement) into account specifically with the independent variable, we have the following results with having Customer Involvement as the dependent variable first;

Table 9

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.414a	.172	.166	.49451
2	.573b	.328	.319	.44682

a. Predictors: (Constant), SP
b. Predictors: (Constant), SP, CE

In the above table, R Square shows .172 for first model and .328 for second, identifying the model to have 17.2% and 32.8% of variances respectively

Table 10

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	7.495	1	7.495	30.650	.000 ^b
	Residual	36.192	148	.245		
	Total	43.687	149			
2	Regression	14.338	2	7.169	35.908	.000 ^c
	Residual	29.349	147	.200		
	Total	43.687	149			

a. Dependent Variable: CI
b. Predictors: (Constant), SP
c. Predictors: (Constant), SP, CE

Table 11

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.287	.277	8.250	.000	
	SP	.393	.071	.414	5.536	.000
2	(Constant)	1.353	.297	4.557	.000	
	SP	.191	.073	.201	2.625	.010
	CE	.439	.075	.449	5.855	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CI

Here the mediating role of Customer Engagement between SP and CI has been classified as significant since the p value is less than the threshold 0.05 (i.e.

0.000 and 0.000) for both the items of the model. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

- Hypotheses 3: Customer Engagement is impacted by the Sales personnel
- Hypotheses 4a: Customer Involvement is impacted by Customer Engagement

Lastly, we define the same mediating relationship in the case of having Customer Loyalty as the dependent variable and the rest being the same.

Table 12

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.276a	.076	.070	.55719
2	.447b	.200	.189	.52034

a. Predictors: (Constant), SP
b. Predictors: (Constant), SP, CE

In the above table, R Square shows .076 for the first model and .200 for the second, identifying the model to have 7.6% and 20.0% of variances respectively.

Table 13

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	3.788	1	3.788	12.200	.001 ^b
	Residual	45.948	148	.310		
	Total	49.736	149			
2	Regression	9.935	2	4.967	18.346	.000 ^c
	Residual	39.801	147	.271		
	Total	49.736	149			

a. Dependent Variable: CL
b. Predictors: (Constant), SP
c. Predictors: (Constant), SP, CE

Table 14

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.816	.312	9.016	.000	
	SP	.280	.080	.276	3.493	.001
2	(Constant)	1.931	.346	5.584	.000	
	SP	.088	.085	.087	1.039	.301
	CE	.416	.087	.399	4.765	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CL

Lastly, the mediating role of Customer Engagement between SP and CL has been classified as significant since the p value is less than the threshold .05 (i.e .001 and .000) for both the items of the model. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

- Hypotheses 3: Customer Engagement is influenced

by the Sales person

- Hypotheses 4b: Customer Engagement has a positive influence on customer Loyalty.
- Hypotheses Assessment Summaries

From the analysis shown in the tables in section 4.3, it is indicated that the regression has been conducted in order to find the model fit, level of significance and impact of the independent variable. The relationship between Sales Personnel and Customer Involvement was positive with $t = 5.536$ and p -value (Sig.) = 0.000, showing that the Sales Personnel has a significant influence on Customer Involvement. The salesperson changes the impact on Customer Involvement in direct proportions with the coefficient of .393. This shows that 1% change in the Sales Person will bring a 39.3% change in Customer Involvement.

The relationship between Sales Personnel and Customer Loyalty was also observed to be positive with $t = 3.493$ and p -value (Sig.) = 0.001, showing that the Sales Personnel has quite some significant influence on the Customer Loyalty as well. The Sales Person has its influence changed on Customer Loyalty in direct proportions with the coefficient of .280. This shows that 1% change in the Sales Person will bring 28.0% change in the Customer Loyalty.

As for the mediating roles of Customer Engagement are concerned, the relationship between Sales Personnel and Customer Involvement was observed to be positive with $t = 5.855$ and p value (Sig.) = 0.000, showing that the Sales Personnel has quite some significant influence on the Customer Involvement as well. The Sales Person has its influence changed on Customer Involvement in indirect proportions with coefficient of .439. This shows that 1% change in the Sales Person will bring 43.9% change in the Customer Involvement.

Lastly, keeping Customer Engagement as a mediator, the relationship between Sales Personnel and Customer Loyalty was observed to be positive with $t = 4.765$ and p -value (Sig.) = 0.000, showing that the Sales Personnel has a quite some significant influence on the Customer Loyalty. The Sales Person has its influence changed on Customer Loyalty in indirect proportions with coefficient of .416. This shows that 1% change in the Sales Person will bring 41.6% change in the Customer Loyalty.

Discussion

Our Research conducted explains the role of Sales Personnel impacts the Customer Involvement & Loyalty with a particular brand. The study has indicated the significant relationship among the give

variables in accordance with our reference model. It has been derived that the relationship between Sale Personnel and the two dependent variables, i.e. Customer Involvement and Customer Loyalty is positively related ($\beta = .393, p < .000$ and $\beta = .280, p < .001$). Whereas, taking their customer engagement skills into account the indirect positive relationship between Sales Personnel and Customer Involvement has been observed ($\beta = .439, p < .000$), and similarly for Customer Loyalty ($\beta = .416, p < .000$). Previously, same research was conducted, in which (Nammir et al 2012) using the social exchange theory as the foundation of their propositions provided a cognizance of the relation between customer engagement and their impact on the relationship quality with the consumers of the business. This pertinent research however does not include the factor of monetary benefit to the business through consumer engagement but does play its role as a reinforcement agent for the undertaken research as it shows a perceived relation between customer engagement and business efficiency through consumer loyalty. As far as customer involvement is concerned, a previous research conducted by derived that customer involvement, just as other relatable constructs (e.g. commitment and trust) in service relationships (Aurier & N'Goala, 2010), also behaves as a mediator in the rapport-satisfaction link. This enhances the significance of customer involvement in the banking industry in a developing economy (Kayeres Fatima & Abdur Razzaque, 2013). In the specific case of our study, it has been determined that through customer engagement techniques, sales person can actually be the factors contributing to strengthen customer involvement and customer loyalty with a particular brand. Majority sometimes buy apparels just because they are provided proper response from the sales person at service, however there might be other factors associated that might also be responsible in building the customer loyalty and customer involvement, which might include the price, quality and the reputation of the retailers (Zebal & Zebal, 2020). As result it is concluded that Sales Personnel play a significant role in building customer loyalty and customer involvement through their customer engagement skills, which is coherent with the present literature referring to the role of frontline employees in customer engagements (Clement Addo, et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This chapter explains the results achieved from the interpretations and the derivations from the data collected from the respondents followed by the

research's implications, it's limitations and the future recommendations. According to the findings, it has been proved that there is a positive role of the Sales Person in influencing Customer Involvement and Customer loyalty of the individuals with particular brands. In our case we have taken favourite apparel store into recommendation as for particular scenario. From among the many aspects which could cause the following effects, we have taken Customer Engagement skills as the mediating factor in the research.

Implications

The study which has been conducted in order to prove whether the sales person can build customer involvement and loyalty has been proved positive. This research will assist brands having a valid logic in providing customer engagement trainings to their frontline employees and sales representatives. This would include communication skills, special approaches and negotiation techniques in order to keep the customer satisfied. Nonetheless, the importance of having an enthusiastic sales staff has become evident despite the type of industry it is, as long as it involves direct interaction with the customer in making a purchase decision.

Limitations

Although we have conducted the research to find how customer engagement of the sales person plays a vital role in building customer loyalty and customer involvement, yet there might be other aspects that might contribute to the following dependent variables. These might be the appearance of the sales person, their response rate to customers, attitude whether its negative or positive, age of the sales person and the level of education. Nonetheless, convenience sampling has been used in this study and cross-sectional methodology has been adopted for the research, which does not provide us the valid cause and effect relation. Lastly the special case of favourite apparel store has been considered, whereas the results might differ from industry to industry.

Recommendations

This particular research highlights the prospective directions for research to be explored. In this research where customer engagement has been considered as a mediator, other mediating aspects might be considered to know the positive impact on customer involvement and loyalty. Where we have used Sales Personnel as an independent variable, it has

the tendency to be replaced by any other element impacting directly on the provided dependent variables.

Competing Interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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