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The Effects of Sporting Goods Brand Experience on Consumer-Brand Relationship and Relationship Retention

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: The purpose of this study is to identify the correlation among the sporting goods brand experiences, consumer brand relationship and the relationship retention. Methods/Statistical Analysis: Participants were 479 undergraduate students at five universities in South Korea. PASW Ver. 18.0 was used to conduct a frequency analysis, reliability analysis and correlation analysis. Also, a confirmatory factor analysis and a structural equation modeling analysis were performed through AMOS 18.0. Findings: First, in terms of the relationship between the 'brand experience and consumer-brand relationship', the experience had significant effects on the consumer-brand relationship. Second, in terms of the correlation between 'consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention', the relationship had significant effects on the relationship retention. Findings concluded that when a consumer-brand relationship is formed, the brand experience has significant effects on the relationship. Also, the consumer-brand relationship has significant effects on the relationship retention. Applications/Improvements: Based on the findings, the scope of consumer-brand relationship studies and their applicability could be expanded. Also, the findings could help brand production and sales companies to establish marketing strategies for managing their consumer experience in a comprehensive manner.

Keywords: Brand Experience, Consumer-Brand Relationship, Marketing Strategies, Relationship Retention, Sporting Goods

1. Introduction

1.1 Necessity and Purpose

Influenced by sports fashion trend, many people wear sports training outfits, running shoes and walking shoes in their everyday lives. It has increased the sporting goods brand demand and supply. In recent years, however, the sporting goods industry has faced the following challenge. As the product quality is equalized across different brands, the commoditization of products has accelerated. It refers to the phenomenon where the brand differentiation becomes increasingly weak. As a result, stressing the product excellence is not enough for appealing to consumers amid the rising market competition. It is because the consumers value 'functional benefits' as well when they select a product. Also, there is a rising tendency to

focus on the symbolic meaning linked to a brand or a brand relationship when buying a product.

Brands play an important role in the lives of consumers by offering critical tools for interacting with other people and sharing one's ideas¹. It is done through self-expression and involvement in a brand community. If a consumer believes that using a particular brand will bring greater benefits and values, the brand will have an opportunity to form a consumer relationship. Also, the consumer will experience the brand through diverse contact points. Such experience leads the consumer to form a brand relationship through corporate marketing and communication activities.

Meanwhile, when consumers use a particular brand as a self-expression tool, the meaning of consumption is expanded as a highly important activity in the lives

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of consumers. It is because consumers use the brand as a non-verbal communication tool and boost their own values and satisfy their need for self-expression through consumption.

Particularly, consumers may engage in multiple experiences with a particular brand simultaneously and briefly without a careful evaluation. However, a long-remembered brand experience affects their satisfaction, loyalty and attitudes towards the brand^{2,3}. Thus, a 'consumerbrand relationship' is developed through shared events and experience⁴.

The consumer-brand relationship largely depends on the following elements of brand meanings perceived by consumers: Brand personality; brand combination; brand attitude; brand image. Such elements are directly formed through consumer experience⁵. Thus, a consumer-brand relationship is the key content of brand management allowing corporations to gain the consumer trust. The relationship is a useful tool for establishing a solid brand asset⁶. A good consumer-brand relationship offers various benefits such as the following: Marketing cost reduction; easier access; securing new consumers; retaining consumers; brand asset7.

According to communication scholars who developed theories on the relationship retention, it is a critical process for interpersonal and social relationships. It is because relationship retention refers to the process of steadily maintaining a relationship without destroying it⁸. Also, the retention refers to keeping the relationship stable, satisfying and sustainable9.

The recent strategies and corporate activities for forming and keeping consumer-brand relationships stress that retaining existing customers is the key success factor. Also, the focus of corporate transactions has shifted to retaining the relationship with existing customers, rather than attracting new customers. Thus, the relationship between a brand and consumers is perceived as highly important. Therefore, this study aims to identify the correlation between the factors of sporting goods brand experience and the relationship retention. Also, this study intends to identify the roles of a consumer-brand relationship.

1.2 Hypothesis and Research Model

1.2.1 Correlation between Brand Experience and Consumer-Brand Relationship

In terms of brand experience and consumer-brand relationship, the experience factors based on the internet has positive effects on the quality of consumer-brand relationship¹⁰. Also, a consumer experience and consumer-brand relationship study finds that the shared experience has significant effects on the relationship⁵. The findings of the preceding studies indicate that brand experience can affect the consumer-brand relationship.

Thus, this study established the following hypotheses to explain the correlation between brand experience and the consumer-brand relationship.

H1: Brand experience will have significant effects on the consumer-brand relationship.

H1-1: Emotional experience will have significant effects on the emotional dimension.

H1-2: Emotional experience will have significant effects on the faith dimension.

H1-3: Emotional experience will have significant effects on the behavioral dimension.

H1-4: Behavioral experience will have significant effects on the emotional dimension.

H1-5: Behavioral experience will have significant effects on the faith dimension.

H1-6: Behavioral experience will have significant effects on the behavioral dimension.

H1-7: Intellectual experience will have significant effects on the emotional dimension.

H1-8: Intellectual experience will have significant effects on the faith dimension.

H1-9: Intellectual experience will have significant effects on the behavioral dimension.

1.2.2 Correlation between Consumer-Brand Relationship and Relationship Retention

The correlation between consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention was identified as follows through preceding studies. Consumers form and maintain a brand relationship by adding personality to the brand, which is similar to the interpersonal relationship in their daily lives¹¹. Also, brand affection - a passionate, emotional attachment to a brand - has positive effects on the relationship retention. It is associated with brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth intention¹². Such findings indicate that consumer-brand relationship can affect the relationship retention.

Thus, this study established the following hypotheses to explain the correlation between consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention.

H2: Consumer-brand relationship will have significant effects on the relationship retention.

H2-1: Emotional dimension will have significant effects on the relationship retention.

H2-2: Faith dimension will have significant effects on the relationship retention.

H2-3: Behavioral dimension will have significant effects on the relationship retention.

Based on the hypotheses above, a research model was established as show in Figure 1.

2. Research Method

2.1 Subjects and Sampling Method

This study is aimed at identifying the correlation among the sporting goods brand experience, consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention. To that end, college students who had purchased sporting goods in 2015 were selected through a convenience sampling method. A total of 500 students in five universities located across the country (Gangwon-do, Gyeonggi-do, Seoul, Jeolla-do, Chungcheong-do) were selected. After a survey, 479 copies were used as the valid sample, excluding 21 with single numbers, multiple survey responses and insincere responses.

The study was conducted as follows. First, a group of college students were asked to have a discussion on sporting goods brands. Second, the sporting goods brands recognized by them were identified and categorized. Third, the purpose and objectives of this study were explained to the students. Fourth, they were asked to complete a survey through a self-administration method.

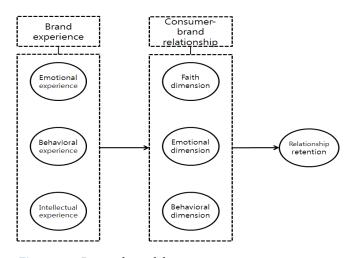


Figure 1. Research model..

The demographic characteristics of the subjects are as follows. In terms of gender, there were 206 men (43%) and 273 women (57%). As for the university standing, there were 147 freshmen (30.7%), 140 sophomores (29.2%), 111 juniors (23.2%) and 81 seniors (16.9%). As for the region, there were 106 people from Gangwon-do (22.1%), 105 people from Gyeonggi-do (21.9%), 91 people from Seoul (19%), 89 people from Jeolla-do (18.6%) and 88 people from Chungcheong-do (18.4%). The detailed demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

2.2 Research Tools

2.2.1 Brand Experience

'Brand experience' can be defined as the subjective and behavioral reactions of consumers sparked by the brand design, identity, communication and stimulation¹³. The survey questionnaire of this study consists of 6 questions on 'emotional experience', 3 questions on 'behavioral experience' and 3 questions on 'intellectual experience'. The questions were created after revising the survey questions developed by¹³ and utilized by Lee¹⁴ in line with this study.

2.2.2 Consumer-Brand Relationship

'Consumer-brand relationship' can be defined as the interactions between the consumer attitudes towards a brand and the brand attitudes towards consumers¹¹. The questionnaire of this study has 4 questions on 'emotional dimension,' 5 questions on 'faith dimension' and 4

Table 1. Subject demographics

	7 01	frequency	percent	
	male	206	43.0	
sex	female	273	57.0	
	total	479	100.0	
	freshman	147	30.7	
	sophomore	140	29.2	
grade	junior	111	23.2	
	senior	81	16.9	
	total	479	100.0	
region	Gangwon-do	106	22.1	
	Gyeonggi-do	105	21.9	
	Seoul-si	91	19.0	
	Jeolla-do	89	18.6	
	Chungcheong-do	88	18.4	
	total	479	100.0	

questions on 'behavioral dimension'. The questions were developed after revising the items used by Park¹⁵ with focus on BRQ (Brand Relationship Quality) index developed by Fournier¹⁶. The questions were revised in line with the subjects and situations of this study.

2.2.3 Relationship Retention

'Relationship retention' is achieved through the purchase intention of consumers seeking a particular service provider after being satisfied with the service¹⁷. The survey of this study has 4 related questions utilized by¹⁸, which are based on the results developed by¹⁹,²⁰.

2.3 Data Processing Method

After excluding the survey responses deemed to be insincere, the remaining data was processed as follows as the valid sample.

First, to explain the characteristics of the subjects and survey questions (reliability and validity), PASW Ver. 18.0

was used to conduct a frequency analysis, reliability analysis, and a correlation analysis.

Second, to test the research model and hypotheses of this study, AMOS 18.0 was used to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis and a structural equation modeling analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Evaluation of Measurement Scales

3.1.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

To verify the convergent validity and discriminant validity of all the scales, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted through a maximum likelihood method with multivariate normality. The results are shown in Table 2. After that, the goodness of fit was evaluated to verify whether the construct and variables are optimally organized. Although the X^2 values didn't satisfy the stan-

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Cronbach's α
	Emotional experience	E. E. 5	1.000				
		E. E. 4	1.108	.072	15.309	***	
		E. E. 3	1.111	.068	16.429	***	.860
		E. E. 2	1.014	.071	14.345	***	
		E. E. 1	.933	.063	14.806	***	
Brand	D 1 · 1	B. E. 3	1.000				
experience	Behavioral	B. E. 2	1.372	.097	14.183	***	.824
	experience	B. E. 1	1.228	.087	14.149	***	
	T 4 11 4 1	N. E. 3	1.000				
	Intellectual	N. E. 2	.987	.052	18.943	***	.847
	experience	N. E. 1	1.056	.055	19.097	***	
		F. D. 1	1.000				
	Faith dimension	F. D. 2	1.204	.081	14.930	***	
Consumer- brand relationship		F. D. 3	1.302	.080	16.197	***	.885
		F. D. 4	1.301	.077	16.921	***	
		F. D. 5	1.085	.075	14.414	***	
	Emotional	E. D. 1	1.000				722
	dimension	E. D. 2	.990	.062	16.046	***	.733
	Behavioral dimension	B. D. 1	1.000				
		B. D. 2	1.229	.088	13.950	***	.867
		B. D. 3	1.431	.098	14.668	***	
Relationship retention		R. R. 1	1.000				
		R. R. 2	1.112	.042	26.597	***	007
		R. R. 3	1.074	.041	26.042	***	.907
		R. R. 4	.913	.049	18.764	***	

dards, the goodness of fit was evaluated through other standards based on the following theory: The goodness of fit indicators in a structural equation model can be integrated with other indicators for evaluation as relative indicators, rather than absolute ones²¹.

In the process, the goodness of fit was verified through the following values: TLI and CFI (based on .9 or below) introduced by 22 ; X^2 /df value (based on 3 or below) introduced by 23 ; RMSEA (based on .08 or below). The results are as follows: X^2 /df = 2.632; TLI = .930; CFI = .940; RMSEA = .058. The values satisfy the goodness of fit relatively well.

After a confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach's a test that measures the internal consistency reliability by factor was conducted. As shown in Table 2 all the factor values stood above .7 suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein²⁴, indicating a high level of reliability.

3.1.2 Correlation Analysis

In this study, the relationship between each factor indicates the direction established by the hypothesis. It is shown in Table 3. Also, in the 95% confidence interval, the correlation between each construct is not 1. Thus, the discriminant validity is at a decent level²⁵. In other words, the research units that can establish a measurement model by factor are valid in this study.

3.2 Goodness of Fit of Research Model

Table 4 shows the results of testing the hypothesis of this study. The goodness of fit results was as follows: $X^2/df = 2.814$; TLI = .922; CFI = .932; RMSEA = .062. The values all satisfy the goodness of fit. Therefore, the hypotheses and research model of this study can explain the empirical data relatively well.

Table 3. Correlation analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Emotional experience	1						
Behavioral experience	.516**	1					
Intellectual experience	.587**	.470**	1				
Faith dimension	.503**	.387**	.446**	1			
Emotional dimension	.522**	.487**	.536**	.662**	1		
Behavioral dimension	.395**	.296**	.356**	.379**	.376**	1	
Relationship Retention	.233**	.216**	.286**	.163**	.199**	.357**	1

^{**}p< 0.01

Table 4. Hypothesis verification result

			Estimate	S. E.	C. R.	p	Result
Emotional experience	\rightarrow	Faith dimension	.371	.071	5.201	.000	Adoption
	\rightarrow	Emotional dimension	.284	.078	3.621	.000	Adoption
	\rightarrow	Behavioral dimension	.281	.076	3.681	.000	Adoption
Behavioral experience	\rightarrow	Faith dimension	.039	.059	.657	.511	Dismissed
	\rightarrow	Emotional dimension	.049	.066	.749	.454	Dismissed
	\rightarrow	Behavioral dimension	.278	.072	3.877	.000	Adoption
Intellectual experience	\rightarrow	Faith dimension	.188	.057	3.288	.001	Adoption
	\rightarrow	Emotional dimension	.375	.068	5.494	.000	Adoption
	\rightarrow	Behavioral dimension	.174	.064	2.734	.006	Adoption
Faith dimension	\rightarrow	Relationship retention	.088	.075	1.180	.238	Dismissed
Emotional dimension	\rightarrow	Relationship retention	.192	.072	2.673	.008	Adoption
Behavioral dimension	\rightarrow	Relationship retention	.487	.075	6.530	.000	Adoption

3.3 Hypothesis Testing and Discussion

The goodness of fit of the research model based on the hypotheses of this study was proved to be adequate. The hypothesis testing results are shown in Table 4. The detailed findings are as follows:

First, in terms of the relationship between the 'brand experience and consumer-brand relationship', the experience had significant effects on the consumer-brand relationship. As for the sub-factors of brand experience, the 'emotional experience' and 'intellectual experience' had significant effects on the sub-factors of consumer-brand relationship; the sub-factors are as follows: Faith dimension; emotional dimension; behavioral dimension. However, the 'behavioral experience' had no effects on the faith dimension and emotional dimension, although it affected the behavioral dimension.

According to a study, the brand experience remembered by consumers for a long time affects their evaluation and attitudes towards the brand linked to their brand satisfaction and loyalty². The consumer-brand relationship is formed through direct experience with a particular brand on the part of consumers. In other words, it is formed through their experience and interactions with the brand. The consumer-brand relationship mostly depends on the personality, attitude, satisfaction and confidence of consumers towards a brand. If the quality of relationship is enhanced through consumer satisfaction and trust based on the brand experience, a positive relationship will be formed between consumers and the brand naturally.

Second, in terms of the correlation between 'consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention', the relationship had significant effects on the relationship retention. As for sub-factors of consumer-brand relationship, 'emotional dimension' and 'behavioral dimension' had significant effects on the relationship retention. However, 'faith dimension' had no effects on the relationship retention.

According to a study, consumers form and maintain relationships with a brand by establishing the brand personality. It is similar to the way they form and maintain relationships with other people in their daily lives¹¹. A positive consumer-brand relationship based on the brand experience can serve as a key preceding factor in the brand loyalty and purchase behavior formation of consumers. If the brand loyalty and purchase behaviors are perceived positively by consumers, they will be inspired to maintain their brand relationship steadily. Thus, sporting goods companies should strive to boost the consumer intention

to maintain the brand relationship through various measures. It can be achieved by bolstering the relationship between their brands and consumers.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

4.1 Conclusion

In this study, 'brand experience' was established as the preceding variable in the formation of consumer-brand relationship. Also, the 'relationship retention' was established as the resulting variable. The purpose was to identify the theoretical correlation among the brand experience, consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention. To accomplish the purpose, university students were selected as the subjects. The collected data in the valid sample was processed through PASW Ver. 18.0 and AMOS 18.0, which lead to the following results.

First, in terms of the relationship between the 'brand experience and consumer-brand relationship', the experience had significant effects on the consumer-brand relationship. As for the sub-factors of brand experience, the 'emotional experience' and 'intellectual experience' had significant effects on the sub-factors of consumer-brand relationship; the sub-factors are as follows: Faith dimension; emotional dimension; behavioral dimension. However, the 'behavioral experience' had no effects on the faith dimension and emotional dimension, although it affected the behavioral dimension.

Second, in terms of the correlation between 'consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention,' the relationship had significant effects on the relationship retention. As for sub-factors of consumer-brand relationship, 'emotional dimension' and 'behavioral dimension' had significant effects on the relationship retention. However, 'faith dimension' had no effects on the relationship retention.

In the consumer-brand relationship formation, the brand experience has significant effects on the relationship. Likewise, the relationship has significant effects on the relationship retention. Based on the findings, the scope of consumer-brand relationship studies and their applicability could be expanded. Also, the findings could help brand production and sales companies to establish marketing strategies for managing their consumer experience in a comprehensive manner. They could explore strategic measures for effectively managing their consumer-brand relationship and forming and maintaining long-term relationships with consumers.

4.2 Suggestions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, it has identified the relationship among each variable. However, there are still limitations and are suggested as follows:

First, this study focuses on sporting goods consumers to identify the relationship among their brand experience, consumer-brand relationship and the relationship retention. Specifically, this study targets university students who have experience with sporting goods brands. In the future, it will be meaningful to change the subjects by targeting the industry insiders such as the brand officials and employees.

Second, this is a cross-sectional study that investigated the subjects only once. It is not a longitudinal study that steadily examines the experience and changes in university students. Thus, the findings may be limited and require interpretations. Therefore, it will be meaningful to target more diverse subjects and expand the research time through follow-up studies.

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