

Impact of Supply Chain Management on Customer Loyalty to the 'Aarong' Fashion House Brand

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Abstract- Achieving and retaining Customer loyalty is important objective for any business. Supply Chain Management synchronizes the efforts of all parties-particularly suppliers, manufacturers, retailers, dealers, customers-involved in achieving customer's needs. Customer satisfaction, retention rates, and the customer loyalty positively influence the performance of the business and assist to achieve competitive gain. Fashion house brands in Bangladesh are growing with developing some exclusive brands. Aarong is one of the prestigious and recognized brands in apparel industry of Bangladesh. The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that determine customer loyalty towards Aarong. In this research, 'loyalty' means customer perception about the brand and repurchase intention from Aarong. Independent Variables (factors) were chosen after interviewing customers with buying experience from Aarong, and previous studies on fashion industry. A non-probability judgmental sampling methodology was followed for primary data collection and 301 completed sample responses were collected. Descriptive statistics were conducted to describe the demographic information of the respondents; twelve factors were tested to find out their influence on customer loyalty toward Aarong. Principal Component Factor analysis was used to reduce the less significant factors and find the high significant factors. After data analysis it is found that three major factors labeled as customer perception about the brand, customers' economic benefits and shopping environment. From these factors, the first factor which is customer perception about the brand found most significant factor to explain customer loyalty toward Aarong. These result might help Aarong to better segment the market and to create more effective marketing program. It may also give a guideline to other brands in the same industry and might be important literature for future researchers in apparel sector.

Keywords; Fashion house, Aarong, Non-probability Judgmental sampling, Principal Component Factor Analysis, supply chain management

1. Introduction

Customer Loyalty and Supply Chain Management is the result of years of work by the authors on different projects concerning the overlapping areas of supply chains, logistics and marketing, drawing a connection between the literature to provide a holistic picture of the

customer loyalty framework [1-6]. Customer preference is changing frequently towards fashion products and services particularly in apparel sector. Therefore marketing managers in fashion house brands must take into consideration this fashion changing trends. In addition, marketing planners of fashion house brands must have clear understanding of customer shopping behavior and should design contemporary marketing mix strategy to create superior brand value [7]. Customer buying decision is changing as customers are developing different perceptions and attitudes towards various apparel product brands. Apparel is a fashion product type, which expresses consumer's personal characteristics. Broadly, clothing and apparel products are the basic pointer of cultural, social, personal and psychological factors that ultimately affect customers' buying behavior. Currently, Bangladeshi customers now prefer to buy branded apparel products from Bangladeshi fashion houses. Customer loyalty toward specific brand represents one of the key assets of any enterprise and it is very important in to retain loyal customers in competitive and uncertain market.

This article aims to investigate the influence of certain factors on brand loyalty those are most reliable in the context of Bangladeshi market such as customers' perception about the brand, customers' economic benefits and shopping time factors. Reasons for loyalty toward fashion house brands are not yet clearly understood in the context of Bangladesh. There is increased value in studying how these factors jointly or individually influence customers' loyalty.

This research paper is organized by presenting relevant literature, research gap, possible contribution and the hypotheses development, outlining the research methodology with a focus on primary data collection and measurement issues, interpretation of the results, and discussing the findings, explaining managerial implications, and pointing out research orientations for future research.

2. Research Background

Aarong is considered as one of the most popular lifestyle retail chain in Bangladesh. This brand was created in 1978 as with a view to empowering rural handicrafts workers, specially women. This brand is a

concern of BRAC (Building Resources Across Communities) which is the world's largest development organization [8]. The core objective of brand Aarong is to reduce poverty of rural Bangladeshi women.

The brand Aarong produces a wide variety of goods, such as clothing, jewelry, fabrics, leather goods, non-textile crafts, footwear and housewares. All of the products of Aarong are made in traditional Bangladeshi style by women from different villages of Bangladesh.

3. Research Gap and intended contribution

At present days, the customers have become more brand conscious and apparel brands are growing rapidly in Bangladesh. The objective of this research is to analyze the factors that influence brand loyalty to fashion industry. Previous researchers focused mainly on demographic and psychographic variables for find out reason for loyalty towards fashion house brands. But in this research, along with customers demographic and psychographic variables, the study cover other relevant variables such as factors which characterize brand perception, consumer perceived economic benefits and real time shopping benefits. The outcome of this research will not only improve the understanding of the different factors determining brand loyalty toward a particular brand, but also assist in market segmentation and formulate suitable customer retention policies and more cost-effective marketing programs than others. In this research variables were selected both from previous researches and face to face customer interaction during shopping time in Aarong outlets. Variables like Cultural reflection in Clothing, apparel product return and change policy, shopping time safety particularly for female shoppers and membership benefit for apparel industry were not addressed properly in previous researches which are considered more influential factors to create brand loyalty towards apparel industry in the context of Bangladesh. This study fills the gap in this research area by showing how some relevant factors particularly applicable for Bangladeshi customers' behavior influence brand loyalty to reputed apparel brand 'Aarong'. Therefore, this study has chosen following variables for testing their influence on customer loyalty to Aarong. The basis for selecting variable was identifying common needs and easy to understand so that it can reveal Bangladeshi customers' actual shopping behavior.

X_1 = Brand attractiveness

X_2 = Superior social image

X_3 = Price Fairness

X_4 = Reflecting Bangladeshi culture in product design

X_5 = Co-cooperativeness of the sales personnel

X_6 = Product return and change policy

X_7 = Shop Atmosphere

X_8 = Ensuring safety for shoppers

X_9 = Promotional Offers

X_{10} = Flexible payment methods

X_{11} = Membership card benefits

X_{12} = Reward points

4. Literature review

Previous literatures recognized a number of magnitudes and determinants of customer loyalty. Loyalty dimensions in the previous literatures include positive word of mouth, resistance to switch brand and a preference for a particular product or service provider. According to [8, 9] there are four factors of B2B loyalty: first is service quality, second is commitment, third is trust, and fourth is satisfaction.

In [10] revealed that commitment requires customers to try maintaining a relationship with seller. Moreover, these two researchers sated that; trust could be identified as functional reliability, since it provides customers in the form of security. Trust between customers and sellers plays an important role in building loyalty.

A good number of researches were conducted on finding relationship among loyalty, repurchase intention, and satisfaction. However, those findings differ in terms of the strength of relationship. Although various researchers stated that satisfaction often leads to loyalty, other researchers described that customer satisfaction has a weak correlation with loyalty or repurchase intentions. According to [11] the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty differs in different industries and the strength of relationship can be influenced by so many factors such as commitment, trust even the level of customer involvement.

4.1 Brand Loyalty

In [12] argued that in competitive business world, loyalty toward brand is essential for business success. Brand loyalty is considered as the one of the key paradigms of consumer brand equity.

In [13] also described the importance of loyalty as "as the brand's percentage of loyal customers goes up, market share increases and the brand becomes more profitable"

In [14] in their research used the behavioral learning theories to examine how the various incentives influence brand loyalty. This article also stated that price incentive is less attractive than the benefits of a brand provides. The brand loyalty has more correlation with other advantages of the brand than the price incentives provided by the brand.

4.2 Brand Attractiveness

According to [15], brand value congruence and customer to customer similarity drives customer brand

identification directly and indirectly through attractiveness of the brand, which in turn creates more sustainable relationships with brands. In addition, brand attractiveness plays a positive facilitating role to create a link between value congruence and customer to customer similarity. Brand attractiveness is a key predictor of both brand loyalty and resilience to adverse information about the brand. These results show that customers' positive perception about the brand play a crucial role in deriving in role and extra role customer behaviors. Brand attractiveness, through the fulfillment of customers' key self-definitional needs, increases customers' positive behavior toward the brand.

4.3 Superior social image

In [16] mentioned that customers' individual luxury brand perception develops based on economic, functional and social considerations. In addition, consumers' brand perception is significantly connected to the cognitive, affective as well as conative components of luxury brand. Customers use brands as a symbol to create a favorable social image. The social perception about luxury brands has positive effect on the overall brand loyalty.

4.4 Price Fairness

In [17] examined the effect of customers' price fairness perception on brand loyalty. In his research, it is found that customers' perceived fairness about a brand's action can affect customer retention. Since customers who are loyal to particular brand have a desire to keep their relationship with the brand and they are more positive to the retailer's any minor negative action (e.g., little price increase) than are non-loyal customers. Hence, loyal customers are more expected to accept minor price increases as normal and reasonable than non-loyal customers.

4.5 Cultural reflection in Clothing

In [18] in one research stated that brand culture and brand characteristics of the product have a very high consistency, it is advantageous to the recognition of the similarity product, thus forming a kind of consumer's choice of brand loyalty.

4.6 Co-cooperativeness of the sales personnel

In [19] examined customers may seek interaction with salespersons during shopping time and how this interaction may create salesperson loyalty and eventually store loyalty. This research is important as it can direct salespersons to better meet customer's psychological needs in the context of a selling situation; finally contribute to their salesperson loyalty and loyalty to the brand.

4.7 Shop (mall) atmosphere

According to [20], mall atmosphere is an effective message creating medium for shopping mall managers through which they can effectively deliver information to their customers that would influence their attitude toward the shopping mall. Indeed, consistent with previous researches, mall atmosphere provides information to shopping mall customers about self- congruity directly for teenagers and indirectly for adults through functional congruity. Mall atmosphere also delivers information about functional congruity which in sequence influences their shopping mall evaluation. However, adult and teenage consumers do not use mall atmospheric cues in the same way. How the mall atmosphere impact shopping mall evaluation varies depending on whether the shoppers are adult or teenagers.

4.8 Promotional offers

In [21] argued that both monetary and nonmonetary promotions can enhance brand loyalty, in contrast to findings of previous researches. He stated that preference for nonmonetary promotions have more strong effect on brand loyalty particularly for high involvement products. In another research, [22] showed that promotion activities have indirect effect customer satisfaction, which sequentially has direct effect on brand. In a past research that focused on promotions for cosmetics and toiletry retailers in Hong Kong, monetary rewards such as price discount and premiums considered 'instant-reward' technique, was preferable to the 'delayed reward' techniques. In this case, societal norms were cited as a possible influence.

4.9 Flexible Payment methods

In [16] did one research on customer payment instrument choice. Findings of the research highlighted the importance of the two sided nature of retail payment methods and provide key insight on consumer and merchant behavior. Since the development of payment card system, various researchers have been predicting a cashless retail system. The propagation of merchant card acceptance has coincided pricing incentives for customers who pay with cards. This has led to a decline in the use of cash relative to electronic payments in many economies. Payment flexibility to secure customer loyalty has been used by marketers for many years. For example, credit cards such as those issued by American Express and the banks who have offered regular customers a range of attractive benefits.

4.10 Reward Points

In [17], in one research revealed that effect of reward compatibility; tangibility and reward timing on preferences are shaped by customers' personal involvement. During high personal involvement, compatibility has the maximum effect on preferences of the loyalty program. Well-matched rewards are perceived to be more appreciated than in compatible rewards. These transaction utility benefits have been shown to have long lasting effect on brand loyalty.

5. Objectives of the Study

5.1 Broad Objective

'Aarong' is one of the famous fashion house brand in Bangladesh. They are doing their business since last forty years with tremendous reputation. To remain in the top priority list of customer, it is necessary for Aarong to have proper understating about the reasons for the current demand of Aarong products specially the factors which are determining brand loyalty among customers. Therefore the research paper highlights the factors that influence customers' loyalty in the form of repeat purchase and positive attitude toward the brand. The research problem is to identify and analyze various factors which build up customers' loyalty toward Aarong and expecting to suggest some direction for other fashion house brands in Bangladesh.

5.2 Specific Objectives

1. To identify the demographic characteristics of consumers who buy apparel products from Fashion house brand: 'Aarong'
2. To find out the factors that influence consumers loyalty to 'Aarong'
3. To make some suggestions for the decision makers of brand 'Aarong'

6. Research Methodologies

This article used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research to find out and analyze twelve variables (factors) which determining customers' loyalty toward fashion house brand Aarong. At first the qualitative study is conducted to identify independent variables which customers consider important at the time of buying products from Aarong and relevant to the research purpose. Then quantitative research was conducted to collect, analyze the data and test the hypothesis. The survey was conducted on 325 respondents relevant to the research purpose and received 301 completed survey data. Descriptive research including frequencies was used to describe demographic variables of the respondents. For assessing factors, this research used Likert Scale and the statistical tool was used is Principal Component Factor Analysis. The instrument

(questionnaire) of this study comprised of two main parts: the first part of the questionnaire covered demographic information of the respondents such as gender, age, occupation and marital status. In second part, twelve variables were selected for this study in order to test their influence on customers' loyalty towards Aarong. The respondents were given a series of statements that measured their degree of agreement towards these variables. An online self-administrated questionnaire was developed and the items were calculated on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 representing low score (Strongly disagree) and 5 representing a high score (Strongly agree).

6.1 Research Questions

RQ1: Does *Brand attractiveness* have influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ2: Does *superior social image of the brand* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ3: Does *Price Fairness* have influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ4: Does *reflecting Bangladeshi culture in product design* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ5: Does *co-cooperativeness of the sales personnel* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ6: Does *product return and change policy* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ7: Does *Shop atmosphere* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ8: Does *ensuring safety for shoppers* have influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ9: Does *promotional offers* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ10: Does *flexible payment methods* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ11: Does *membership card benefits* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

RQ12: Does *reward points* has influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong?

6.2 Hypothesis Development

H1: *Brand attractiveness* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H2: *Superior social image of the brand* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H3: *Price Fairness* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H4: *Reflecting Bangladeshi culture in product design* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H5: *Co-cooperativeness of the sales personnel* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H6: *Product return and change policy* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H7: *Shop atmosphere* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H8: *Ensuring safety for shoppers* has positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H9: *Promotional offers* have positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H10: *Flexible payment methods* have positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H11: *Membership card benefits* have positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

H12: *Reward points* have positive influence on consumers' loyalty to fashion house brand Aarong.

6.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Profile

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	147	48.8	48.8	48.8
	Male	154	51.2	51.2	100.0
	Total	301	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 portrays a balance in gender ratio among respondents, where majority of the respondents are male that is 51.2% out of a total of 301 respondents whereas 48.8% respondents are female.

Table 2. Age Group

Age Group					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18 to 28	227	75.4	75.4	75.4
	29 to 39	56	18.6	18.6	94.0
	40 to 50	14	4.7	4.7	98.7
	51 and Above	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	301	100.0	100.0	

With regard to the age group in table 2, more than 75.0% (75.4%) of the respondents are aged 18 to 28 years old; followed by aged 29 to 39 years old (18.6%). In addition, about around 5.0% (4.7%) of the respondents are

aged between 40 to 50 years old and 1.3% of the respondents are aged 51 years old and above.

Table 3. Occupation

Occupation					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	155	51.5	51.5	51.5
	Service Holder	82	27.2	27.2	78.7
	Business	29	9.6	9.6	88.4
	Housewife	27	9.0	9.0	97.3
	Other	8	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	301	100.0	100.0	

In the occupation category it can be highlighted that 51.5% of the sample are student, 27.2% are in the service category, almost 10 % (9.6%) are doing their own business and 9% are housewives.

6.4 Reliability Statistics

Table 4. Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.671	12

For the purpose of checking internal consistency of the independent variables selected, *Cronbach alpha* test was performed, and the alpha value was found for 12 items, 0.671, which is considerably reliable. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test allows researcher to test the reliability of the research instruments (variables). According to [6], coefficient alpha also referred as Cronbach's Alpha is shown as a number between 0 and 1. According to [7], an alpha value greater than 0.60 is considered reliable. In other word, based on the result of Cronbach's alpha, the variables have good internal consistency. It also means that all the 12 independent variables selected are reliable and valid to measure the loyalty of consumers to 'Aarong'.

6.5 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is used to reveal the inter-relationships among variables and concentrate those inter-correlated variables into few factors. Thus, researchers use factor analysis to find out whether several variables are correlated with each other or not. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is a statistical tool used to test the suitability of factor analysis. In result, high score indicates factor analysis is more appropriate and low value implies that factor analysis may not be appropriate.

However, any value more than 0.60 is considered adequate [9].

There is no rule of thumb to justify how many cases are needed for running factor analysis. In [6] said in a research that usually over 300 cases for sampling analysis is probably adequate. There is universal agreement that factor analysis is inappropriate when sample size is below 50. In this research, 301 samples are taken for continuing the research methodologies.

Table 5.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.778
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	734.736
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

For KMO and Bartlett's Test, [7] recommended 0.5 as minimum (barely accepted), values between 0.7-0.8 as acceptable, and values above 0.9 are superb. In table 5, the KMO measure is 0.778 which is considered reasonably satisfactory for factor analysis to continue.

In Bartlett's test, this research needs to reject the null hypothesis for uncorrelated variable or non-identity matrix. A significant level less than 0.05 specify that the variables in this analysis have considerable relationship between each other. From the above table, we can observe that the **Bartlett's test** of sphere-city is perfectly significant as it is 0.000 which means that correlation matrix is not an identity matrix. This result is good enough to reject the null hypothesis and suggest proceeding with a factor analysis.

6.6 Total Variance Explained

Table 6. Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.396	28.302	28.302	3.396	28.302	28.302
2	1.606	13.380	41.682	1.606	13.380	41.682
3	1.319	10.994	52.676	1.319	10.994	52.676
4	.945	7.874	60.550			
5	.848	7.067	67.617			
6	.706	5.885	73.502			
7	.647	5.392	78.894			
8	.617	5.138	84.032			
9	.575	4.794	88.826			
10	.479	3.989	92.815			
11	.449	3.741	96.556			
12	.413	3.444	100.000			

Table 6 indicates all the factors extractable from the analysis in connection with their eigenvalues, the

percentage of variance attributable to each factor, and the cumulative variance of the factors with the previous factors. It can be highlighted that the factor 1 accounts for 28.302% of the total variance while the factor 2 is explaining 13.380% of the total variance and the third one 10.994%. All the remaining factors are not significant.

6.7 Scree Plot

The scree plot is a graph of the eigenvalues against all the factors. The graph is helpful for assessing how many factors to retain. The point of interest is where the curve starts to flatten. It can be observed that the curve begins to flatten between factors 3 and 4. It can be noted that factor 4 has an eigenvalue of less than 1, therefore only three factors was retained.

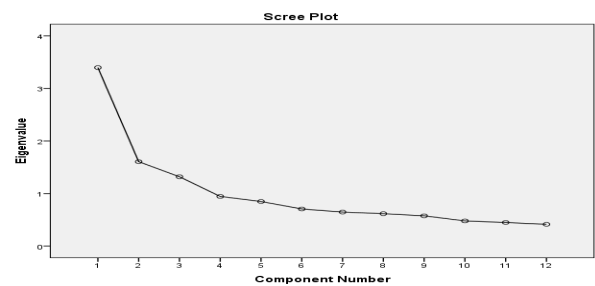


Figure 1. eigenvalues of the results of the supply chain and brand

6.8 Rotated Component (Factor) Matrix

The idea of rotation is to lessen the number of factors on which the variables under examination have high loadings. Rotation does not really change anything but make the interpretation of the analysis easier. In the table below, we can find that *more attractive brand, superior social image, Price Fairness* and *reflecting Bangladeshi culture in product design* are substantially loaded on factor (component) 1 while *return and change policy, promotional offers, flexible payment methods, membership card benefits* and *reward points* are substantially loaded on factor 2. All the three remaining variables; *cooperativeness of the sales personnel, Shop atmosphere* and *safety for shoppers* are substantially loaded on Factor 1. These factors can be used as variables for further research.

Table 7. Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix			
	Component		
	1	2	3
More Attractive Brand	.659		
Superior Social image	.761		
Price Fairness	.545		
Reflecting Bangladeshi Culture in product design	.701		
Cooperativeness of the Sales Personnel			.786
Return and Change policy		.552	
Shop atmosphere			.759
Safety for shoppers		-.460	.492
Promotional Offers	.461	.568	
Flexible Payment Methods		.726	
Membership card benefits		.703	
Reward Points		.660	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.			

6.9 Key Findings

From demographic profile, it is found that majority of the respondents of the study belongs to the age group 18 to 29 years (75.4%), which provides a clue about the most loyal segment of consumers of brand 'Aarong'. Therefore Aarong should go for different marketing strategic plan for this segment. In occupation segmentation, student segment (51.5%) is the most in number among other occupational groups and seeking most attention from Aarong marketing planners.

As digital commerce grows, every touch point throughout the supply chain is becoming an opportunity to build loyalty. This study acknowledged three factors or components that influence consumers' loyalty towards fashion house brand 'Aarong'. Among them Research result found that factor 1 which has been labeled as 'Customer perception about the brand' influence most for shaping loyalty towards 'Aarong' with variance of 28.302%. Factor 1 can be explained by four items:

1. Brand Attractiveness
2. Superior Social Image
3. Price Fairness
4. Reflecting Bangladeshi Culture in product design

The Factor-2 'Customers' Economic benefits' is explained by five items:

1. Return and change policy

2. Promotional offers
3. Flexible payment methods
4. Membership card benefits
5. Reward points

The above five items which is categorized as Customers' Economic benefits (factor-2) also influence consumers loyalty toward Aarong with variance of 13.380%

3rd Factor 'Shopping environment' is explained by three items:

1. Cooperativeness of the sales personnel
2. Shop atmosphere
3. Safety for shoppers

These variables facilitate shopping convenience of the shoppers during shopping in outlets of the Aarong which influence least in determining loyalty to Aarong with variance of 10.994%.

7. Conclusion

These market leaders, the same early achievers of supply chain benefits, are now entering the highest level of supply chain maturation, enterprise-to-enterprise. As the customers have become more demanding, the fashion designers are working hard to ensure that customer will not only buy products but also they will buy a story, lifestyle, and emotions with surprises. Result of this research demonstrate how brand loyalty of a renowned fashion house brand is tied up with some important factors. The results of the principal component analysis in the key findings part of the paper show that the reasons for the loyalty toward a certain brand are related to three factors; customer perception about the brand, customers' Economic benefits and shopping environment. Among these factors, the first one which is customer perception about the brand found most important factor to explain customer loyalty. This result constitute significant guidelines for fashion house brands in Bangladesh to create a superior brand image comparison with other brands through offering better pricing, unique selling proposition like reflecting national culture along with attractive product assortments. Fashion house brands also should create enjoyable shopping environment through providing beautiful decoration of the outlets, smart and co-operative sales executives and safe environment specifically for female customers. Finally, flexible payment methods such as, mobile banking, online banking, debit card and credit card payment should be available in the outlets of apparel brands. This also encourage certain group of shoppers to repeat purchase from the particular brand.

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