This article reports the results of a study of consumer attitudes to brand loyalty. An empirical investigation is based on the sample of 872 individuals aged from sixteen years and located in the cities with upper and lower ten thousands inhabitants in sports shoes market. First, the creation of brand loyalty is defined, followed by an overview of theoretical works in the field. Finally, the study itself is presented. The study concludes that there is a significant dependence on the degree of loyalty determined by the environment in which consumers live and expenses connected with a specific sport. It also reveals the dimensions of brand selection that is influenced by a reflection of self-image of consumer in spite of the increase of price.

Keywords: brand loyalty, brand trust, brand personality, consumer relationship, consumer behavior, product involvement, analysis of variance, principal factor analysis.

More than a million of brands appear daily within the European economic area. Several tens of thousands are being offered by large shopping centres. More and more brands active in the Slovak sports shoes market is reaching the maturity stage of the life cycle whilst the number of consumers in the market is not increasing as quickly as the supply of the products in the market. For this reason the brand loyalty becomes an important instrument of enterprise strategic marketing because it has an impact on the enterprise profit, accelerates the spreading of the brand in the market and manages the strategies of market penetration. The aim of this article is to characterize the theoretical approaches to the brand loyalty and the results of the survey of attitudes to the brand.

Loyalty as the part of consumer-brand relation

The term brand loyalty is very complex. As far as the enterprise is concerned, the analysis of approaches to the brand calls for a question concerning the consumer-brand relation and how this relation influences the process of creating the loyalty. If the loyalty is created by means of relation to the brand, it is necessary to consider this problem within the perspective of consumer habits. In this context the consumer behaviour is being increasingly considered from several aspects which indicates that the term brand loyalty is very difficult to define. From theoretical point of view it is defined mainly on the basis of an individual’s relation to the brand. From this point of view the definition is very simple: a loyal customer is the individual who shows a long-term inclination to the brand and prefers it to other brands on the basis of its unique character. But it is necessary to stress that an individual keeps this relation supposing he has never been disappointed, resp. it is really a rare case when his need has not been satisfied. The definition given in spite of its simplicity has two problems (Lewi – Lacoqueille, 2007: p. 399):

- in the first case the loyalty is not guaranteed by uniqueness which conditions some instability in the brand loyalty as far as the consumer is concerned, mainly if there is a wide supply of goods;
- in the second case it presumes that the brand loyalty includes two aspects, i.e. a subjective one – the attitude to the brand, and the objective one – the behaviour characterising the consumer relation to the brand in the course of time. It results in the brand loyalty not being considered a characteristic of a consumer and therefore it should rather be considered a mark of some permanent attitude of a consumer and his experience.

The term brand loyalty lies in maintaining the recent consumers. The brand loyalty leads a consumer to:

a) getting used the brand and its contents,

b) requirements concerning the brand as far as the transparent information is concerned.

Each difference between the promise and reality is considered to be breaking the trust. The consumer’s dissatisfaction in the brand corresponds to the degree of his loyalty. Such an approach to the brand as far as the product and consumer are concerned underlines the complexity of the tasks which the brand may have in the marketing approach.

Approaches of searching the brand loyalty on the basis of selected variables influencing the consumer – brand relation

Increasing the share of loyal consumers is becoming the main aim of marketing policy of enterprise. Therefore building the consumer – brand relation is encouraging many theoretical approaches searching this relation on the basis of e.g. consumer behaviour and unique character of the brand.

a) A Brand loyalty based on consumer behaviour.

Building the consumer’s relation to the brand requires much endeavour and many financial means by an enterprise because it is influenced by numerous factors:

- on the basis of searching the dependence of loyalty on demographic factors, in many theoretical works an important influence has not been seen,
- there have been different results in searching the dependence between the age and brand loyalty. In his work G. Day (1969: p. 29–35.) proved that elderly people were more brand loyal than young consumers.
- the influence of price as a factor influencing the relation to the brand was characterized by R. East (1955). According to this author there are more possibilities, e.g. the buyers who are much interested in the price are less loyal, with increasing income the brand loyalty is increasing and it is higher than with the buyers with low income. Then, by means of repeating regressions, he proved the relation between the income and age, i.e. the older the consumer is, the more brand loyal he is. According to the above mentioned researches, people of the age from 25 years to 44 years are inclined to the brand but the lack of money makes them seek cheaper goods in sales out. On the basis of the mentioned results of these researches it is demanding to say if younger consumers are less loyal than the elderly ones and vice versa, which regards to the situational factors as e.g. income, consumer’s age, environment, etc.
- the loyalty may be different with regard to the importance of the product category for a consumer. S. Rudle-Thiele and R. Bennett (2001: p. 25.) have proved that the market with short-term consumer goods is characterized by purchase of different brands, while in the market with long-term consumer goods the consumers do not switch to another brand so often.
- Other authors have proved that in their purchase decisions consumers are influenced by the members of their social group. V. Miller (1975: p. 93–101.) and E. Moore-Shay and R. Lutz (1988: p. 461–467.) identified the influence of parents and family members as an important factor influencing the brand loyalty. Other authors consider the endeavour of a consumer to save time as a factor, which, to great extent, influences the purchase behaviour and may lead to some degree of inertia. According to Mitchell (1999: p. 165–195.) consumers may prefer brand loyalty to maximizing the effect of the purchase to avoid disappointment.

b) The consumer’s brand loyalty resulting from its uniqueness

It is generally assumed that the brand uniqueness changes the consumer behaviour in his relation to it. In the consumer’s perception the brand uniqueness is formed on the basis of additional characteristics, which contribute to increasing the product value (Konšták, 2006: p. 29.). In this context, brand uniqueness can be used to strengthen the relation with consumers which the enterprise wishes to create or maintain.

J. Aaker gives the brand human characteristics. It means that the consumer takes the brand for human being with certain characteristics. Next definition emphasizes the connection between the consumer’s own image and the image of the brand.

The uniqueness of the brand should increase its preference and utility for the consumer and according to some authors at the same time evoke emotions to increase the level of consumer’s loyalty to the enterprise through the brand.

c) Brand loyalty

As far as the consumer is concerned, brand loyalty is a psychological variable defined according to the authors as a position of persuasion (Gurviez – Korchia, 2002: p. 41–46.) who emphasizes a double access, namely a cognitive one and affective one. According
to these authors the trust in the brand can be seen in the consumer thought his persuassion, i.e. he understands the brand as a personalized entity which through an expected ability to react to the consumers with his expectations, keeps his positive attitude for a long time. They have elaborated a range of brand loyalty which is formed in a three-dimensional space "reliability," "honesty" and "altruism." Consumer believes in brand as he perceives the given space as something reliable, harmless and good. It must be explained what each individual dimension represents. The first dimension "reliability" represents evaluation of the brand from the point of expertness and competence as far as its ability to satisfy the expectations of the consumer is concerned. The second precondition "honesty" represents the commitment to keep promises. The third dimension "altruism" represents the commitment of the brand to take into consideration long-term interest of consumer.

In the literature there is no consensus of opinions on the number of dimensions which create brand loyalty.

R. Larzelere and T. Huston (1980: p. 595–604.) say that dimensions of altruism and honesty seem to be too closely connected and they are difficult to separate. In the latest works they separate the individual dimensions "honesty" and "altruism" on the basis of data analysis (Gauteron, p. 55.). From this point of view, P. Gurviez (2000: p. 41–61.) differentiates only the dimensions reliability and loyalty: reliability is connected with the trust in the brand abilities, loyalty covers either the meaning of honesty and altruism which conform to good intentions of the brand.

General methodology of research

The mentioned works illustrate a number of attitudes to research of the consumer-brand relation. On their basis the following hypotheses, verified in the research made by 872 respondents, have been formulated:

- hypothesis 1: dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the territory in which the respondent lives.
- hypothesis 2: dependence of expenditures on the sports shoes on the kind of sports for which the shoes have been designed.
- hypothesis 3: consumer will do his best to be satisfied on the basis of brand qualities.

With regard to the fact that the brand loyalty is a complex and multidimensional factor in the analysis of the chosen hypotheses, different statistical methods have been used:

- analysis of variance which analyses the differentiation of means of the dependent variable between the groups which are determined by one categorical independent variable (or factor). It investigates if the groups formed by this classification factor are similar or if individual means forms some identifiable compounds.
- factor analysis which enables a simple interpretation in the way avoiding the substantial loss of information included in the original variables. Factor analysis seeks a simpler structure in a set of variables and the original variables are expressed as linear combinations of the factors.

The sample was made on the basis of a quota selection of households which are characterized by the following:

- minimum age from 16 years,
- differentiation of habitat form 10,000 and over 10,000.

Including too young respondents in the research is due to the fact that the Slovak teenagers, in spite of limited income, accept the brand products very positively and even influence the purchases of their parents and household expenses to great extent (Collective, 2008: p. 34.). The aim of dividing the respondents according to the size of the habitat is to reveal the differences in purchasing behaviour of inhabitants living in towns and in the country.

Hypothesis 1: dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the administrative area of the respondent

The analysis of variance has been used to search the dependence of the variable researched, i.e. the expenditures on sports shoes on the administrative area in which the consumers live. The fact if the groups formed by this classifying factor are similar or if individual mean figures form some indistinguishable clusters are being researched.

Table 1 contains a total division of variability of expenditures on sports shoes into variability which is caused by the influence of the factor of administrative area of the respondent (Between groups) and the remaining variability (Within groups), which is not influenced by the factor mentioned above or the unexplained variability. F-test has proved the influence of the factor of administrative area on expenditures on sports shoes at any significant level higher than 0.0031. Table 2 characterizes the total influence of the factor of administrative area of the respondent on expenditures on sports shoes which is statistically significant but represents only 2.45% of the expenditure variability.

Use of parametric analysis of variance requires meeting several conditions whilst one of them, the condition of normal distribution of individual categories, has not been kept Therefore to confirm the results reached, a more non-parametric analysis of variance has been used, which proved the preceding conclusion of statistically significant dependence of mean expenditures on sports shoes on the administrative area. To verify the condition of variance equality in different administrative areas of Slovakia, the Bartlett’s test has been used (Table 3).

On the basis of p-value 0.1435 we can claim that the mentioned condition has been met. The last condition of independence has been kept with regard to the fact that in each administrative area a different group of residents has been addressed.

Another analysis of individual pairs of mean expenditures on sports shoes has been made using the Scheffé’s method. Table 4 shows that the largest differences between average expenditures on sports shoes are between the Trenčín and Banská Bystrica administrative areas (Table 4).

In the Table 5 are given the average expenditures on sports shoes and their standard deviations according to the administrative area in which the respondent lives. The average expenditures on sports shoes are from SKK 2,068 to SKK 2,806 depending on the administrative area. The variability of expenditures, which is shown in the Table 5 absolutely by means of a variation coefficient, i.e. the portion of average expenditures and standard variation in a specific area of study.
They have been designed in the Prešov county (Table 5).

Hypothesis 2: dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the kinds of sports for which they have been designed

Similarly to the verifying of the first hypothesis, the analysis of variance, in which the dependence of expenditures on sports shoes on the kind of sports for which they have been designed, has been searched. Table 6 contains a total variability dispersion of the sports shoes, which is caused by means of the factor of the kind of sports. F-test has shown the influence of the kind of sports factor on the expenditures on sports shoes at any significant level higher than 0.0001 (Table 6).

The total influence of the kind of sports, for which the sports shoes have been designed, is statistically significant but it represents only 8.4%. The conditions of the use of analysis of variance have been verified in a similar way as in the case before. The interesting results are shown in the following Table 7, which contains average expenditures and standard deviations on sports shoes with regard to the sports for which they have been designed (Table 7).

### Table 5
Average expenditures on sports shoes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative area where the respondent lives</th>
<th>Expenditures on purchase of sports shoes in (SKK)</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bratislava county</td>
<td>2419.67302</td>
<td>1293.93594</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trenčín county</td>
<td>2773.81294</td>
<td>1372.84019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Žilina county</td>
<td>2277.2333</td>
<td>1245.57750</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitra county</td>
<td>2437.04977</td>
<td>1288.29644</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prešov county</td>
<td>2523.43030</td>
<td>1099.37174</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Košice county</td>
<td>2765.07246</td>
<td>1563.48446</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6
Total division of variability on expenditures on sports shoes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variability</th>
<th>Degrees of freedom</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>F-value p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>117845956</td>
<td>10713269</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>1347417722</td>
<td>1566765</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total variability</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>1465263678</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 3: dependence between the Endeavour of Consumer to reach satisfaction on the basis of the characteristics of the brand

The results of method rotation of the factor analysis are transparently shown in the Table 8 whilst the weights of individual factors are arranged according to the size. The group of variables with very significant factor loadings represents the best indicators of the factor in the created model. It means that their variability is most influenced by the changes of the specific factor.
According to the factor loadings the individual principal factors can be interpreted as the following hidden dimensions:

1. factor – personality and style of the buyer,
2. factor – I will change the brand to be satisfied,
3. factor – price is not important,
4. factor – I hesitate with the switch of the brand because I prefer loyalty to the brand.

The blackened factor loadings show the dependence of the specific factor and the specific variable. The factor weights, the value of which is higher than [0.5%] are considered to be significant ones. Majority of the highlighted factor loadings are positive, only with the second and fourth factors we can encounter a positive as well as negative value of weight. These factors then show two different orientations, e.g. with the factor four the positive orientation represents the brand loyalty and the negative orientation represents absence of loyalty to sports shoes. The respondents perceive both orientations in a similar way (a bit higher weight is put on negative orientation), but they prefer either one or the other.

Conclusion

In the assortment structure of the Slovak retail trade the role of brand products is increasing. The research results show that he relation consumer – brand is connected with some behaviour dimensions and unique character or brand loyalty. The better knowledge of a specific category of products is, the stronger the connection is.

### References


### Model of factor analysis after rotation Equamax

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>Factor 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>People with a lifestyle similar to mine wear the specific brand</td>
<td>0.18191</td>
<td>0.05787</td>
<td>0.15109</td>
<td>0.14417</td>
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<td>The type of a person, who wears the specific brand is most similar to me</td>
<td>0.82060</td>
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<td>Wearing the brand of sports shoes is important for my image</td>
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<td>0.28042</td>
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### CASE STUDY

Research of consumer’s brand loyalty in such a limited conceptual frame leads to the conclusion that the searched dependence in all three hypotheses is significant. At present the purchasing behaviour of the Slovak consumer in the market of sports shoes is influenced especially by the environment. The dependence shown in the second hypothesis supports the third hypothesis as far as the expenditures on the sports shoes are concerned. Such a behaviour signalizes that when buying the Slovak consumer does not mind the price. It results in the fact that the conformity of the consumer’s imagination of the brand is connected with his loyalty. The stronger the conformity between his self-image and the brand image the more loyal he is in the of the price increase.

The above mentioned characteristics of the Slovak consumer in the sports shoes market results in the knowledge that the enterprise should pay higher attention to the perception of the brand unique character with the aim of strengthening the relation consumer – brand. It would create a suitable indicator for evaluating the ability for an enterprise to reach the stated qualitative goals as far as the relation of a consumer to the consumer is concerned. It would also be possible to create or modify the present market brand position on the basis of expected goals of enterprise in the relation with customer. Thus the relation consumer – brand based on a brand unique character contributes to its strengthening and long-term relation.

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