

Revisiting the Commitment-Loyalty Distinction in a Cruising Context

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Abstract

This paper attempts to revisit the commitment-loyalty relationship by conceptually and empirically examining the differences (and similarities) between the two constructs. A review of the extant literature suggests that the key issue regarding this relationship is whether we can equate commitment with the attitudinal dimension of loyalty. In a cruise travelers' study, the relationships of the two constructs were examined in terms of their loading pattern, correlation, discriminant validity, and their predictive power related to loyalty outcomes. Results revealed that attitudinal loyalty and commitment are essentially identical constructs. Some preliminary insights on how to unify the related terminology and definitions, and the implications to future research are provided.

KEYWORDS: Loyalty, Attitudinal Loyalty, Behavioral Loyalty, Commitment, Marketing

Introduction

The bonding mechanisms between individuals and different objects (e.g., other individuals, political figures, organizations, places, products and brands, and so on) have drawn multi-disciplinary interests for years (Figure 1). For instance, marketing scholars have long been interested in customers' bonds to products (i.e., involvement) (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1986) or brands (i.e., loyalty) (Copeland, 1923; Day, 1969; Oliver, 1999). Psychologists and sociologists

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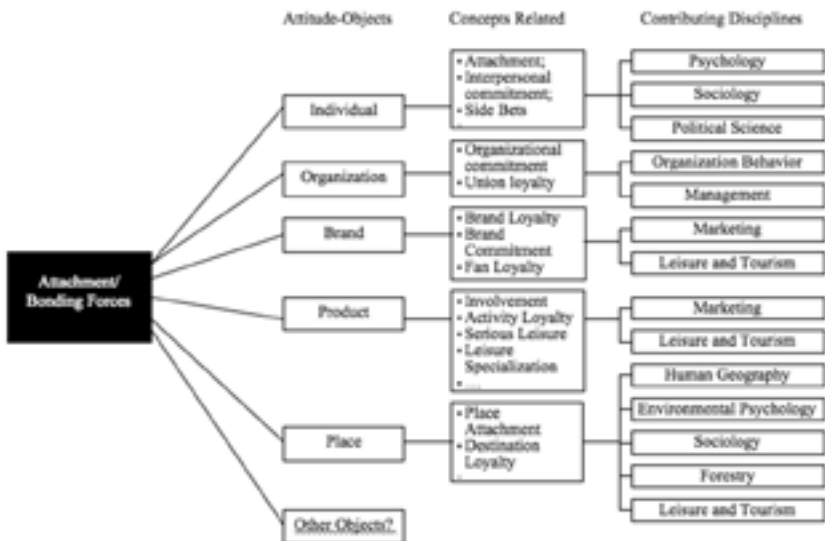
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have studied the bond between human beings in terms of attachment (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1980), interpersonal commitment (Johnson, 1973; Levinger, 1965; Rusbult, 1980a), and side bets (Becker, 1960). In the fields of organizational behavior and management, employees' commitment to organizations has been a central research focus for decades (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Fullagar & Barling, 1989; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Payne & Huffman, 2005). Human geographers and environmental psychologists (Low & Altman, 1992; Tuan, 1974; 1977) are also interested in people's bonding with places (i.e., place attachment). Sports marketing researchers (Funk, 1998; Heere & Dickson, 2008) have focused on the concept of fan or team loyalty, whereas leisure and tourism researchers have studied a variety of issues from destination loyalty (Kozak, Huan, & Beaman, 2002; Niininen & Riley, 2003; Oppermann, 2000) to recreationists' commitment to public agencies (Kyle & Mowen, 2005).

Due to substantial differences in research objects and disciplinary barriers, no consensus has been reached on how to term these bonding forces (hence a "black box" in the figure), not to mention how these mechanisms work. Nevertheless, it seems make intuitive sense that these constructs could belong to the same nomological network (Dimanche & Havitz, 1994; Morais, 2000; Pritchard et al., 1992). One might further postulate that, beyond differences in terminology and research methods, there might be some generic theoretical principles working across different contexts, and investigating the commonality and differences of these constructs may provide researchers new theoretical ground and refreshing perspectives. The present paper attempts to decipher one small piece of this jigsaw puzzle by examining the nature of the relationship between customer loyalty and commitment.

Figure 1. A Speculated Nomological Network



Customer loyalty is one of the most important concepts in the field of marketing (Dimanche & Havitz, 1994; Oliver, 1999; Sheth & Sisodia, 1999; Shugan, 2005). In the leisure and tourism field, the increasing attention on revisitation/repurchase has also given rise to a growing body of literature on recreationists' and tourists' loyalty (Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Oppermann, 2000; Pritchard & Howard, 1997). With the advent of the so-called "relationship marketing paradigm" (Gronroos, 1994; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995), loyalty seems to have drawn even more research attention in recent years.

Despite its popularity as a research topic, over the years, loyalty research has suffered from "definitional inconsistencies and inadequate operationalization" (Knox & Walker, 2001, p. 112), as well as difficulties in its conceptualization (Jones & Taylor, 2007; Oliver, 1999). Researchers have used the term "loyalty" to refer to a variety of things. Thus, it comes as no surprise that, after a review of the history of "brand loyalty," Hofmeyr and Rice (2000, p. 87) complained that, "There is so much confusion because we do not have any consistent way of referring to all these different types of consumer," and asked "Wouldn't it help if we could develop a common language, once and for all?"

One concept frequently used as synonymous to loyalty is commitment (Lee, 2003). The conceptual proximity of loyalty and commitment could make it tempting to equate the two constructs as the same (Pritchard, Howard, & Havitz, 1992), although many researchers have argued that commitment and loyalty are distinct constructs (Dick & Basu, 1994; Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Kyle et al., 2004; Lee, 2003; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999).

Despite some efforts in clarifying the relationship between the two constructs (Chen, 2001; Pritchard et al., 1999), conflicting results have been reported and confusion related to the two constructs remains. As Heere and Dickson stated (2008, p. 227), "Current marketing research on attitudinal constructs such as commitment and loyalty is characterized by conceptual confusion and overlap." Thus, the purpose of this paper is to conceptually and empirically investigate the relationship between commitment and loyalty. This paper also attempts to provide preliminary insights on how to unify related terminology and definitions, and the implications to future research. This discussion is particularly relevant to leisure service providers, whose work is characterized by frequent relational encounters with customer or business partners. For public leisure services marketing, where the fundamental principals and premises might be different from those of private, for-profit businesses (Novatorov & Crompton, 2001), this discussion may also improve our understanding on how to build service provider-user relationship (Kyle & Mowen, 2005).

Literature Review

In this section, the authors will review extant conceptualizations on brand loyalty and commitment in the marketing and leisure literature, and then synthesize three schools of thoughts regarding the relationships of these two constructs. It is noteworthy that researchers have held different views of what loyalty and commitment are, and have coined a variety of terms (e.g., attitudinal loyalty, be-

havioral loyalty, composite loyalty, psychological commitment) to describe different components or variations of loyalty and commitment. For the purpose of this review, and to be true to what has been used, the authors will follow the original authors' nomenclature whenever appropriate.

Brand Loyalty

Oliver (1999) defines (brand) loyalty as "A deeply held psychological commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (p. 34). Current conceptualizations of loyalty have, for the most part, adopted one of three approaches (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Morais, 2000; Rundle-Thiele, 2005). It has been suggested that loyalty may refer to customers' behavioral consistency (the behavioral approach), attitudinal predisposition toward purchase a brand (the attitudinal approach), or a combination of the two approaches (the composite approach).

The majority of early loyalty studies took a behavioral approach, and interpreted loyalty as synonymous with repeat purchase. Research into behavioral loyalty typically relies on data from either the actual purchasing behaviors of the consumer (such as scanner panel data) or the customer's self-reported purchasing behavior (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). "The focus is on people's observed behavior, not their needs, motivations, personalities, or their attitude to a brand" (Dowling & Uncles, 1997, p. 73). A major criticism of the behavioral loyalty approach is that it neglects the importance of understanding customers' decision making processes underlying their purchase behaviors (Back, 2001).

By contrast, another group of researchers have proposed measuring loyalty as an attitude (Guest, 1944; Jain, Pinson, & Malhotra, 1987; Jarvis & Wilcox, 1976). Nevertheless, attitudinal measures of loyalty have suffered even more conceptual controversy than behavioral approaches. Different researchers have linked or equated attitudinal loyalty with different concepts, such as (relative) attitude toward the brand or brand providers (Dick & Basu, 1994; Morais, Dorsch, & Backman, 2004), attachment (Backman, 1991), commitment (Kyle et al., 2004; Park, 1996; Pritchard, 1991), and involvement (McIntyre, 1989). However, it has been found that simply defining loyalty as an attitude—without any consideration on customer behavior, fails to describe the entire phenomenon sufficiently (Morais, 2000). From a practical perspective, marketers cannot afford to lose those customers who are behaviorally loyal, regardless of their attitude (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000).

Day (1969) first articulated the composite loyalty approach, arguing that genuine loyalty is consistent purchase behavior rooted in positive attitudes toward the brand. This two-dimensional (i.e., attitudinal and behavioral) conceptualization of loyalty suggested a simultaneous consideration of attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty, and has profoundly influenced the direction of subsequent loyalty studies (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Knox & Walker, 2001). A number of researchers have operationalized loyalty using this approach (Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Dick & Basu, 1994; Morais et al., 2004; Petrick, 2004; Pritchard et al., 1999; Selin, Howard, Udd, & Cable, 1988; Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). In lei-

sure literature, Backman and Crompton (1991a) proposed a 4-category typology of loyalty (low loyalty, latent loyalty, spurious loyalty, and high loyalty) based on respondents' scores on both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. This classification has found extensive empirical support (Backman & Veldkamp, 1995; Selin et al., 1988). Not coincidentally, a parallel classification of loyalty also emerged in mainstream marketing studies (Dick & Basu, 1994; Griffin, 1995; Heiens & Pleshko, 1996). It seems that the majority of marketing and leisure researchers have adopted the composite loyalty approach.

More recently, some researchers have proposed multi-dimensional models of loyalty. One of the most influential conceptualizations was voiced by Oliver (1997; 1999). Oliver suggested that loyalty formation is more likely to be an attitudinal development process. Specifically, he posited that the loyalty-building process starts from some cognitive beliefs (cognitive loyalty), followed by a favorable attitude (affective loyalty), to a desire to intend an action (conative loyalty), and finally actual purchase behaviors (action loyalty). This is a further development of Dick and Basu's (1994) view, which suggests attitudinal loyalty (relative attitude) was driven by a series of cognitive (e.g., clarity of attitudes), affective (e.g., emotion) and connotative (e.g., switching costs) antecedents, and that a truly loyal attitude would not exist unless consumer beliefs, affect, and intention all point to a focal preference toward the brand or service provider.

Based on the tripartite model of attitude structure (Bagozzi, 1978; Breckler, 1984), Back (2001) argued that the cognitive, affective, and conative phases of loyalty may not necessarily be a sequential process, as suggested by Oliver (1997, 1999). To Back, the three aspects are more likely to be independent factors attributing to unique variance of attitudinal loyalty. His study revealed that both affective and conative loyalty were positively associated with behavioral loyalty, while cognitive loyalty was not (Back 2001; Back and Parks 2003). Nevertheless, Jones and Taylor's (2007) and Li and Petrick's (2008a) recent tests of the multi-dimensional conceptualization of loyalty concluded that the traditional composite (two-dimensional) view still holds valid, although attitudinal loyalty is indeed comprised of multiple components. Overall, it could be argued that recent conceptual developments have broadened, rather than invalidated the traditional composite (two-dimensional) view.

Commitment

Whereas brand loyalty is a phenomenon mainly studied by marketing researchers, commitment appears to have been examined across disciplines. In the past 40 years, substantial multi-disciplinary research has been conducted regarding commitment. Mainline conceptualization of commitment started in the sociology and psychology disciplines (Kyle et al., 2004; Pritchard et al., 1999; Yair, 1990). Sociological studies on commitment, following Becker's (1960) notion of "side bets," have focused on the social factors and structural conditions that tie individuals to a consistent line of activity (Buchanan, 1985; Kanter, 1968; Scott & Godbey, 1994). Psychological studies, on the other hand, have stressed personal choices or cognitions that bind one to a behavioral disposition (Festinger, 1957; Shamir, 1988; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Recent work in the fields of organizational

behavior, leisure, and marketing (Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Kim, Scott, & Crompton, 1997; Kyle et al., 2004; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982) has attempted to approach the issue from both perspectives and integrate the notion into a socio-psychological framework.

The definition of commitment is somewhat controversial. Gustafsson *et al.* (2005) mentioned that, "marketing scholars have variously defined commitment as a desire to maintain a relationship..., a pledge of continuity between parties..., the sacrifice or potential for sacrifice if a relationship ends..., and the absence of competitive offerings..." (p. 211). To date, at least three types of definitions of commitment have emerged in the literature: (1) commitment as consistent behavior (e.g., Yair's 1990, p. 214-215; "a behavior that continues over a long period of time and involves the giving up of other alternatives, whether willingly or otherwise"), (2) commitment as psychological attachment (e.g., Beatty and Kahle 1988, p. 4; who viewed commitment as the "emotional or psychological attachment to a brand"), and (3) commitment as a socio-psychological binding mechanism (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 1997, p. 323; who suggested that commitment is "those personal and behavioral mechanisms that bind individuals to consistent patterns of leisure behavior"). Although the differences between (2) and (3) remain debatable, it seems the majority of researchers have agreed today that commitment is "about what is in the mind rather than about what we do" (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000, p. 21).

Owing to its conceptual importance, commitment has been associated with several discipline-specific concepts, such as involvement (Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Kim et al., 1997; Pritchard, 1991; Shamir, 1988), recreation specialization (Bryan, 1977; Buchanan, 1985; Scott & Godbey, 1994; Scott & Shafer, 2001), and place attachment (Kaltenborn, 1997; Kyle et al., 2004; Lee, 2003). However, none of these concepts seem to be as conceptually close to (or overlapped with) commitment as loyalty is (Chen, 2001). Day (1969) was arguably the first to introduce the concept of commitment to marketing loyalty studies. He asserted that exhibiting commitment to the brand is necessary in determining the existence of loyalty. Jacoby and Kyner (1973) maintained that "the notion of commitment provides an essential basis for distinguishing between brand loyalty and other forms of repeat purchasing behavior and holds promise for assessing the relative degrees of brand loyalty" (p. 3).

The Relationship between Brand Loyalty and Commitment

For marketing and leisure scholars, it appears that underlying both commitment and loyalty are probably the same kind of attitudinal biases (Pritchard et al., 1999). This could have caused some conceptual confusion between the two terms. Historically, there are at least three schools of thought on the relationship between commitment and loyalty in the leisure and marketing literatures (Chen, 2001; Lee, 2003; Pritchard et al., 1999) (Table 1):

View 1: Commitment and loyalty are synonymous (Assael, 1987; Buchanan, 1985; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973), and may be used interchangeably.

View 2: Commitment is synonymous with attitudinal loyalty (Backman, 1991; Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Day, 1969; Jacoby & Chestnut,

1978; Kyle et al., 2004; Park, 1996; Pritchard, 1991), or commitment is affective plus conative loyalty (Chen, 2001).

View 3: Commitment is an antecedent of loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliva, Oliver, & MacMillan, 1992), with commitment leading to loyalty (Lee, 2003; Pritchard et al., 1999), or behavioral loyalty (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1988; Gustafsson et al., 2005; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998; 2004).

Table 1. A Summary of Alternative Conceptualizations on Commitment and Loyalty Relationship

	Relationship	Studies
View 1: Commitment = Loyalty	Commitment and loyalty are synonymous	Assael (1987); Buchanan (1985); Jacoby and Kyner (1973)
View 2: Commitment & Loyalty	Commitment and attitudinal loyalty are synonymous	(Backman, 1991; Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Day, 1969; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Kyle et al., 2004; Park, 1996; Pritchard, 1991)
	Commitment is synonymous with affective plus conative loyalty	Chen (2001)
View3: Commitment → Loyalty	Commitment leads to loyalty	(Dick & Basu, 1994; Lee, 2003; Oliva et al., 1992; Pritchard et al., 1999)
	Commitment leads to behavioral loyalty	(Beatty et al., 1988; Gustafsson et al., 2005; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998; 2004)

Even the same author may hold different views of the commitment-loyalty relationship over time. For example, it seems Pritchard's understanding of the relationship evolved from "psychological commitment as attitudinal loyalty" (Pritchard, 1991, p. 23), to "commitment as a component of attitudinal loyalty" (Pritchard et al., 1992, p. 160), to commitment leads to loyalty (Pritchard et al., 1999).

Most researchers (other than those who view commitment in a behavioral sense) would probably argue that commitment and loyalty are related, but distinct constructs, with commitment as the psychological attachment, attitude, or binding mechanism, while loyalty is repeat behavior following favorable attitudes (Chen, 2001; Lee, 2003). Thus, there is an increasing consensus that loyalty is broader than commitment, in that it includes a behavioral component. For purpose of clarification, some authors hence propose to use the term "psychological commitment" or "attitudinal commitment" to avoid any behavioral connotation

(Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Gilliland & Bello, 2002; Heere & Dickson, 2008; Morais, 2000; Pritchard, 1991). For these reasons, the present study chooses not to follow View 1 (i.e., loyalty and commitment are synonymous).

What remains controversial is whether commitment is a subsection of loyalty (View 2), or a separate construct from loyalty (View 3). Most researchers (Backman, 1991; Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Day, 1969; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Kyle et al., 2004; Park, 1996; Pritchard, 1991) seem to agree with the former (View 2). Conceptually, as consensus has been reached that loyalty encompasses attitudinal components, while psychological commitment refers to a psychological tendency or socio-psychological binding mechanism, it is logical to equate the attitudinal dimension of loyalty with commitment (Lee, 2003). However, Dick and Basu (1994) indicated that relative attitude (i.e., attitudinal loyalty) is predicted by the strength of psychological antecedents. They implied that commitment influences, rather than equates to attitudinal loyalty. Pritchard *et al.* (1999) also distinguished commitment and loyalty. They showed that the tendency to resist changing preference (as evidence of commitment) is a key precursor to loyalty, and mediates the three formative processes of commitment and loyalty. Chen (2001) argued that “regarding commitment as a part of loyalty rather than as a distinct construct, however, contributes to the definitional problems between commitment and loyalty” (p. 3). Some authors have therefore been very cautious when describing the relationship between attitudinal loyalty and psychological commitment. For example, Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) stated that “attitudinal loyalty is *reflected in the components of* [emphasis added] psychological commitment” (p. 50).

Since most researchers have agreed that loyalty is comprised of an attitudinal dimension (attitudinal loyalty) and a behavioral dimension (behavioral loyalty) (Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Dick & Basu, 1994; Morais et al., 2004; Petrick, 2004; Pritchard et al., 1999; Selin et al., 1988; Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999), and the attitudinal loyalty → behavioral loyalty link has been substantially evidenced (Ajzen, 1991; Albarracin, Johnson, Fishbein, & Muellerleile, 2001; Dick & Basu, 1994), it seems the debates over loyalty and commitment can be deduced to one key issue: Are attitudinal loyalty and commitment the same thing? If so, then View 2 would be supported. Also supported is the subgroup of researchers holding View 3 who additionally argued that commitment is an antecedent of the behavioral subsection of loyalty. Nevertheless, if researchers manage to distinguish commitment and attitudinal loyalty, then one may argue there should exist a commitment → attitudinal loyalty → behavioral loyalty link. Although several researchers have examined the relationships between loyalty and commitment, it appears that a direct examination of the relationship between attitudinal loyalty and commitment is still lacking.

Methods

To test the conceptual distinction of attitudinal loyalty and commitment, a sample of customers who recently took cruise vacations were surveyed. This study is part of a larger project on cruise passengers' brand perceptions. The study utilized an online panel survey, which has been shown as a valid and efficient research approach (Dennis, 2001; Deutskens, de Jong, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2006;

Duffy, Smith, Terhanian, & Bremer, 2005). Online survey panels “are made up of individuals who are pre-recruited to participate on a more or less predictable basis in surveys over a period of time” (Dennis, 2001, p. 34). Most such panels (including the one used) are professionally managed by survey companies, and pre-grouped into different panels based on consumption attributes. To conduct online panel surveys, researchers need to specify characteristics of the people they want to study to the survey company. The survey company then selects people from their panels, and invites them to participate.

Following the same procedures utilized in Cruise Lines International Association’s (CLIA) (2005) annual general customer survey, participants of this study were cruise travelers who cruised at least once in the past 12 months, who were over 25 years old and had a household income of \$25,000 or more, and volunteered to complete the survey. Moreover, a 50-50 gender distribution was desired. For survey design purposes, only responses from those who cruised with CLIA’s member lines (CLIA, 2006b) were collected. The 19 lines represents more than 95 percent of the North American cruise market (CLIA, 2006a).

In this study, the authors followed the classic view, and defined attitudinal loyalty as a customer’s attitudinal tendency towards a brand, which is a function of psychological processes (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). As for commitment, while some researchers suggest there exist multiple types or dimensions of commitment, the authors took a rather narrow view, and conceptualized commitment as a single-dimensional construct. Specifically, following De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, and Iacobucci (2001) and other marketing scholars (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), commitment in this paper was defined as one’s enduring desire to continue a *relationship* with a specific entity as well as the *individual’s* willingness to make efforts at maintaining it. De Wulf et al. (2001, p. 37) added that this definition of commitment “implies the presence and consistency over time of both the desire to continue a *relationship* and the willingness to make efforts directed at sustaining this *relationship*.” This definition is similar to the third type of commitment definitions reported in the Literature Review, and is conceptually akin to some social psychologists’ view of commitment, who see interpersonal commitment as characterized by “an intention to remain in relationship, a psychological attachment to a partner, and a long-term orientation toward the partnership” (Le & Agnew, 2003, p. 38).

As indicated, there has been a wealth of measures of attitudinal loyalty and commitment in the literature (see Tables 2 and 3 for examples). In this study, both attitudinal loyalty and commitment were measured with 7-point Likert-scales, anchored by “1” (Strongly disagree) and “7” (Strongly agree). Based on the authors’ operational definition, and considering the context of this study (i.e., a leisure service), attitudinal loyalty was initially measured with a 4-item scale (Pritchard et al., 1999), based on two scales developed by Muncy (1983) and Selin and colleagues (1988). However, one item was found to have reliability issues and was hence deleted from the scale, after a pilot test among three undergraduate classes (leisure and tourism classes at the sophomore, junior, and senior level, N=114). De Wulf et al. (2001)’s 3-item scale was chosen to measure commitment in this study, as the scale was designed to incorporate both one’s desire for continuity and

Table 2. Selected Attitudinal Loyalty Measures

Type Implied	Sample Items	Origin in the Literature
Intention / Probability of Repurchase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the near future I intend to use more of the services offered by my bank. 	(Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How likely or unlikely is it that you would choose Bank X the next time you are in need of bank services? 	(Olsen & Johnson, 2003)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would return to this hotel. 	(Bowen & Chen, 2001)
Word of Mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would highly recommend my bank/dealer/brand to family and friends. 	(Beerli, Martin, & Quintana, 2004; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I say positive things about this restaurant to other people. 	(Bloemer, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 1999)
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel a sense of personal commitment to this car mechanic. 	(Mittal & Lassar, 1998)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I consider myself to be loyal to this brand. 	(Beerli et al., 2004; Taylor, Celuch, & Goodwin, 2004)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allen and Meyer's (1990) organizational commitment scale 	(Park, 1996)
Preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think of this café as "my" café. 	(Butcher, Sparks, & O'Callaghan, 2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This brand is clearly the best on the market. 	(Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I try to cruise with <name> because it is the best choice for me. 	(Muncy, 1983)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you were to fly between the same two cities and all airlines had the same departure and arrival times, which airline would you select as your first choice? 	(Ostrowski, O'Brien, & Gordon, 1993)
Brand Attitude / General Feeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please indicate how you feel about COMPANY X (e.g., not interesting--interesting, attractive--repelling) 	(Backman, 1991; Morais, Dorsch, & Backman, 2004)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I had to do it over again, I would choose another brand. 	(Selin, Howard, Udd, & Cable, 1988)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Destination cognitive and affective image 	(Baloglu, 2001)

Part of this table is adapted from (Rundle-Thiele, 2005, p. 49)

Table 3. Selected Commitment Measures

Type Implied	Sample Items	Origin in the Literature
Interpersonal Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner. 	(Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel very attached to our relationship-very strongly linked to my partner. 	
Organizational Commitment/ Commitment to Service Providers	<i>Affective commitment:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization. 	(Allen & Meyer, 1990; Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004; Meyer & Allen, 1991; 1997)
	<i>Continuance commitment:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would be very hard for me leave my organization right now, even if I want to. 	
	<i>Normative commitment:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization. 	
Resistance to Change (and its formative components)	<i>Pritchard's (1991) Psychological commitment scale (PCI)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My preference to fly with XYZ would not willingly change. 	(Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would be difficult to change my beliefs about XYZ. 	
Relationship Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relationship that my firm has with my major supplier...is something we are very committed to. 	(Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sharma & Patterson, 1999)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am willing "to go the extra mile" to remain a customer of <name> 	(De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am a loyal patron of this theatre. 	(Garbarino & Johnson, 1999)
	<i>Affective commitment:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I take pleasure in being a customer of the company. 	(Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005)
	<i>Calculative commitment:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It pays off economically to be a customer of the company. 	
Behavioral Commitment	<i>Social Investment:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of my friends are in some way connected with hiking 	(Kim, Scott, & Crompton, 1997; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004)
	<i>Financial Investment:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please specify your estimated investment in hiking equipment to date. 	

willingness to “go the extra mile” to maintain a relationship — two core components in the present definition of commitment (De Wulf et al., 2001). Other related constructs measured in the survey included behavioral loyalty, which was measured as proportion of cruise brand purchase (Cunningham, 1956; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998), repurchase intention (Grewal, Monroe, and Kirshnan 1998), willingness to recommend (Reichheld, 2003), and complaining behavior (Rundle-Thiele, 2005).

Results

A total of 727 responses were obtained from the online panel survey, which represents a response rate of 31.8 percent out of 2,283 email invitations that were sent. After deleting 61 problematic responses and 112 first-timers’ responses (it was assumed that first-time cruisers would not be valid for a loyalty study), the effective sample size for the present study was 554.

This sample was slightly dominated by male respondents (55.8%). The average age of the respondents was 53.9, and the vast majority of them were white (91.7%) and married (80.5%). About two thirds (63.9%) of respondents had a college degree or more. The median income range of the respondents was \$75,000 to \$99,999. On average, respondents had taken 8.3 cruises with 3.4 different cruise lines in their lifetime. For their brand purchase history (i.e., number of years they have cruised with the specific cruise line they chose), respondents had taken an average of 3.1 cruises with the cruise line, and had a history of 6.2 years cruising with that line.

The respondents’ demographic statistics and cruise history were then compared to that of Cruise Line International Association’s *2004 Cruise Market Profile* (CLIA, 2005). On the whole, the present sample is demographically similar to the general cruiser population, but behaviorally more active and experienced in cruise vacations. Since only current (i.e., those who have cruised at least once in the past 12 months) and repeat cruisers were included in this study, this result was expected. It was concluded that, this was a convenience, but representative sample of cruise industry customers.

Both scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability (commitment: Cronbach $\alpha = 0.94$; Composite $\alpha = 0.93$; attitudinal loyalty: Cronbach $\alpha = 0.83$; Composite $\alpha = 0.84$). The authors hence deemed it appropriate to proceed with the comparison. Specifically, the authors examined the relationship between commitment and attitudinal loyalty in four steps:

Step 1: Exploratory factor analysis

This examination started with exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to investigate the potential pattern of variables of interest. An EFA was performed on all six items measuring attitudinal loyalty and commitment. An EFA was conducted using SPSS Factor. As can be seen in Table 4, the six items all loaded on one single dimension (despite one reverse coded item has a fairly low communality), even though they were supposed to measure two separate constructs. The EFA results indicate that the two constructs might be measuring the same thing.

Table 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis of Loyalty and Commitment Items

	Item Wording	Factor 1	Communality
Comm1	I am willing "to go the extra mile" to remain a customer of <name>	0.902	0.813
Comm2	I feel loyal towards <name>	0.949	0.900
Comm3	Even if a <name> cruise would be more difficult to book, I would still keep cruising with them	0.883	0.780
Attloy1	I consider myself to be a loyal patron of <name>.	0.916	0.839
Attloy2	If I were to cruise again, I would cruise with another cruise line ¹	0.588	0.345
Attloy3	I try to cruise with <name> because it is the best choice for me.	0.906	0.820
Variance extracted		74.96%	
Eigenvalue		4.50	

¹Reverse coded

Step 2: Correlation check

Second, inter-correlations between the two constructs were obtained using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), as recommended by Hatcher (1994). CFA assumes both factors covary with each other (Kline, 2005). Not surprisingly, the two constructs were highly related, and the correlation was 0.95 ($p < 0.001$). Kline (2005) suggested that when two factors have a correlation over 0.85, they may not be accommodated in one structural equation model, as the two factors may demonstrate poor discriminant validity (Rundle-Thiele, 2005), and could cause SEM to be statistically unstable. In other words, they may be measuring the same construct.

Step 3: Discriminant validity check

Discriminant validity "assesses the degree to which two measures designed to measure similar, but conceptually different, constructs are related" (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003, p. 142). If attitudinal loyalty and commitment are two distinct constructs, they should demonstrate reasonable discriminant validity.

Hatcher (1994) recommended that discriminant validity might be assessed by comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) for the pairs of factors of interest and the square of the correlation between the two factors. AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) assesses the amount of variance captured by an underlying construct in relation to the amount of variance resulting from measurement error. Discriminant validity is demonstrated if both AVEs are greater than the squared correlation.

Following Hatcher (1994), the AVEs for both attitudinal loyalty and commitment were calculated (0.65 for attitudinal loyalty, and 0.82 for commitment) first. These were then compared with the variance they shared (i.e., squared correlation,

and in present case, 0.89). Since neither attitudinal loyalty nor commitment's AVE was greater than their squared correlation, the two constructs failed to demonstrate discriminant validity. Put differently, this suggests that attitudinal loyalty and commitment may be measuring the same construct.

Step 4: Comparing Predictive Power

Finally, the authors tested the difference between the two constructs by using them to predict four behavioral and attitudinal indicators that the literature suggests as attitudinal loyalty outcomes. These included behavioral loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Kyle et al., 2004), repurchase intention (Morais et al., 2004; Petrick, 1999; 2004), willingness to recommend (Dick & Basu, 1994; Morais et al., 2004), and complaining behavior (Davidow, 2003; Dick & Basu, 1994; Rundle-Thiele, 2005). It was postulated that if attitudinal loyalty and commitment are two distinct constructs, they should demonstrate different effects on these behavioral and attitudinal indicators.

To test this, a series of regression analyses were performed, where either attitudinal loyalty or commitment (operationalized as the mean of the three items measuring them respectively) were modeled as predictors of behavioral loyalty, repurchase intention, willingness to recommend, and complaining behavior.

Table 5 presents the results of the eight regression analyses. As can be seen, the two constructs demonstrated a similar pattern of effect on all four indicators. In the four models, both attitudinal loyalty and commitment's effects on the dependent variables were statistically significant, and the magnitude and direction of their effects on these loyalty outcomes were consistent with what the loyalty literature has previously reported (Davidow, 2003; Dick & Basu, 1994; Morais et al., 2004; Petrick, 1999; 2004; Rundle-Thiele, 2005).

Table 5. Summary of Regression Analyses

DV	IV	B	SE	β	F	R ²	R _{adj} ²
Behavioral Loyalty ^a	Attitudinal loyalty	0.068	0.008	0.357***	80.694***	0.128	0.126
	Commitment	0.048	0.007	0.281***	47.477***	0.079	0.078
Repurchase Intention ^b	Attitudinal loyalty	0.616	0.017	0.845***	1318.004***	0.714	0.713
	Commitment	0.501	0.018	0.770***	803.995***	0.593	0.592
Willingness to Recommend ^c	Attitudinal loyalty	1.420	0.047	0.791***	924.08***	0.626	0.625
	Commitment	1.175	0.046	0.734***	645.933***	0.539	0.538
Complaining Behavior ^d	Attitudinal loyalty	-.15	0.032	-.198***	22.406***	0.039	0.037
	Commitment	-0.082	0.029	-.121**	8.227**	0.015	0.013

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

^a Measured by proportion of cruise brand purchase (Cunningham, 1956; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998)

^b Measured by Grewal et al.'s (1998) two-item, five-point scale

^c Measured by Reichheld's (2003) one-item, 11-point scale

^d Measured by Rundle-Thiele's (2005) seven-item, 7-point scale

Specifically, both attitudinal loyalty and commitment were found to have significant and positive influence on behavioral loyalty, repurchase intention, and customers' willingness to recommend. Thus, the more attitudinally loyal or committed the cruisers are, the more likely they will have a higher level of behavioral loyalty, and be willing to cruise with the same line again and recommend the cruise line to others. Attitudinal loyalty and commitment were also found to significantly but negatively affect customers' complaining behavior. In other words, the more attitudinally loyal or committed the passengers were, the less likely they would complain.

Overall, it seems the effects of attitudinal loyalty and commitment on the four attitudinal and behavioral outcomes are systematically and consistently similar. Combined, the empirical results suggest that attitudinal loyalty and commitment, at least with the way they are being operationalized in this study, are essentially the same construct.

Discussion

The present study attempted to revisit the commitment-loyalty relationship by conceptually and empirically examining the differences (and similarities) between the two constructs. A review of the extant literature suggests that the key issue regarding this relationship is whether we can equate commitment with the attitudinal dimension of loyalty. A project on cruise passengers' brand perception provided the authors an opportunity to empirically compare attitudinal loyalty with commitment. The relationships of the two constructs were examined in terms of their loading pattern, correlation, discriminant validity, and predictive power on loyalty outcomes suggested by the literature. The tests showed that attitudinal loyalty and commitment were very similar. This result is in line with the mainstream view that the attitudinal subsection of loyalty and commitment are essentially the same thing (Backman, 1991; Backman & Crompton, 1991b; Day, 1969; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Kyle et al., 2004; Park, 1996; Pritchard, 1991). It is hence concluded that the traditional view still holds conceptual and practical value, and it is conceptually appropriate to use the two interchangeably. For recreation and/or tourism management this suggests that psychological processes that customers use to formulate their attitudinal loyalty are driven by their desire to continue a relationship with the service provider, and their willingness to maintain this relationship. Put simply, when attitudinal loyalty is achieved, commitment is also achieved.

Obviously, whether attitudinal loyalty and commitment should be treated as the same thing is first and foremost a theoretical question. The literature review suggests that researchers' answer to this question basically depends on how they define and measure commitment and loyalty. For researchers using the term loyalty in a behavioral sense, the distinction between (psychological) commitment and (behavioral) loyalty could be fairly straightforward. For those incorporating an attitudinal dimension in their loyalty conceptualization, the conceptualization and operationalization of attitudinal loyalty is critical in differentiating these two constructs. That is, it is important to clarify what attitudinal loyalty is, if it is not commitment. Although attitudinal loyalty used to be conceptualized and mea-

sured as mere brand preference, researchers (Jones & Taylor, 2007) have increasingly agreed that it should encompass the “emotional attachment” or “psychological bonding” connotation as suggested by Day (1969) and Jacoby and Chestnut (1978). In a way, this illustrates the convergence of the definition of attitudinal loyalty and psychological commitment.

Moreover, another fair question to ask is: What can be gained from distinguishing psychological commitment from attitudinal loyalty? The present results revealed that attitudinal loyalty and commitment were highly correlated, and both predicted various attitudinal and behavioral indicators in a similar manner. One may argue that differentiating the two might not add much value to our understanding of the phenomenon (Rundle-Thiele, personal communication). Further, from a theoretical perspective, equating the two constructs means loyalty research can thus benefit from the rich history of commitment studies from different disciplines. This means the two streams of research (i.e., the multiple decades of marketing research on loyalty and the multi-disciplinary research on commitment) may eventually converge, which could provide fertile ground for future research.

For instance, the Investment Model, a social psychology theory, provides a parsimonious explanation of what makes people committed to their interpersonal relationship. It proposes that one's commitment to a dyadic relationship is a function of (a) satisfaction with the relationship, (b) a comparison of the best available alternatives to the relationship, and (c) his or her investments in the relationship (Rusbult, 1980a; 1980b; 1983). Although somewhat ignored in the leisure and recreation literature, the Investment Model has won substantial support from numerous studies in social psychology and related areas (Le & Agnew, 2003).

Since the present study suggests commitment and attitudinal loyalty are essentially the same thing, and previous studies have found the utility of interpersonal relationship theories in examining brand-person types of relationships (Fournier, 1998), it is reasoned that the three determinants of interpersonal commitment may serve as the determinants of customer loyalty as well. Recent research has supported this postulation (Li & Petrick, 2008b), which may provide a handy tool to measure leisure service providers' success, benchmark their performances, and diagnose their problems in keeping customers loyal. The generally high customer involvement and frequent service provider-customer interactions (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997) may make these theories particularly applicable to leisure services.

From a managerial perspective, the discussion on loyalty and commitment could help practitioners better understand what brand loyalty is, and what it is not. Acknowledging a well-defined commitment component of brand loyalty may expand some of the current customer loyalty programs, which have focused predominantly on the behavioral aspect of customer loyalty (Dowling & Uncles, 1997). Programming focused on commitment would include offerings focused on creating a desire from customers to continue their relationship with the organization, and to increase their willingness to maintain that relationship. Future research is necessary to determine ways in which to create and nurture this relationship in customers. Additionally, since loyalty has been widely considered one

of the key brand performance metrics (Kyriakidis & Rach, 2006), this discussion will hopefully contribute to more accurate measurement of brand loyalty.

Results from this study imply that the attitudinal dimension of loyalty may be measured as customers' commitment to a brand or service provider. The present authors hence join the group of proponents of commitment-based marketing (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), and suggest that the attitudinal dimension of loyalty may be explained, nurtured and maintained in the same way as religious commitment, interpersonal commitment, and organization commitment are explained, nurtured and maintained. Hofmeyr and Rice (2000) went on to suggest that commitment becomes the ultimate gauge for marketers to profile and communicate with customers, segment and target the markets, position and advertise the products, and define and design strategy against competitors. In this sense, loyal customers are not merely ones who consistently buy the brand, but those who become a "missionary" or "champion" for the brand or service (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000; Reichheld, 2003).

Finally, the present study also contributes to the literature by clarifying the use of several terms. The conceptual discussion and empirical examination of this study suggest that the term "loyalty" refers to a composite phenomenon, including both attitudes and behaviors. The authors suggest that, the behavioral dimension of loyalty may be explicitly termed as "behavioral loyalty," while the attitudinal dimension may be called either "attitudinal loyalty" or "commitment." It is hoped that using common language may help remove conceptual confusion, and enhance the interdisciplinary communication in this area.

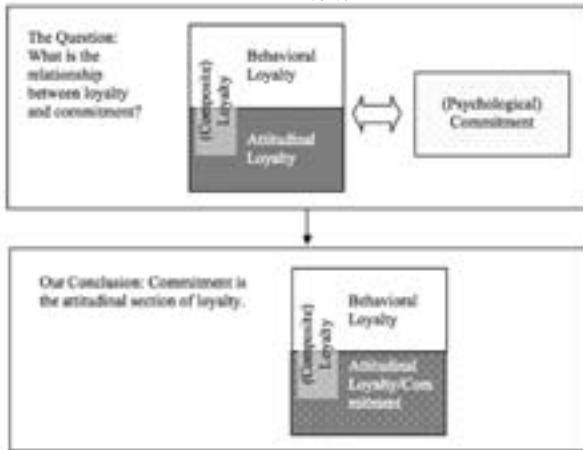
Caution should be practiced when interpreting the results of the present study, which may be limited to respondents who participated in this study. The cross-sectional design makes it possible that the results have common method bias (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The way attitudinal loyalty and commitment were defined and operationalized here represent just one school of thinking on the two constructs. Admittedly, owing to different traditions in conceptualizing the two constructs (particularly commitment), researchers' in different disciplines could have used the two terms in substantially different ways, which could make the present results not compatible.

The semantic similarity in the scale items (which by itself reflects the conceptual proximity of the two constructs) used in this study could have affected the statistical results. Considering the impact of the selection of the particular scales on the present analysis and conclusion, this limitation is a critical caveat warranting readers' attention. Further, when examining the connection between the two constructs of interests, the present authors took a nomological approach, and compared the two constructs in terms of their loading pattern, correlation, discriminant validity, and predictive power on loyalty outcomes. Admittedly, there are other approaches to examining the relationship, such as exploring the directional link of the two constructs (Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999), the stimulus-disposition-response structure (Bloch & Richins, 1983), and so on. Employing those methods may bring new insights to this discussion.

Conclusion

In conclusion the present study explored the commitment-loyalty relationship starting from a systematic review and summary of three dominant views. Empirical analyses suggested that attitudinal loyalty and commitment (as operationalized in the leisure and marketing literatures) are essentially the same constructs. It is hence concluded that commitment is at a minimum highly correlated with the attitudinal dimension of loyalty, and could very well be the same construct (Figure 2). Thus, future loyalty research should be able to benefit from the rich legacy of multi-disciplinary research on commitment. This paper hence contributes to the literature by: resolving a long-debated issue, helping practitioners understand the loyalty phenomenon, and clarifying the terminology used to explain loyalty.

Figure 2. *The Relationship Between Loyalty and Commitment: Conceptual Development*



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