

Role of Evangelism Marketing: Paradigm towards Brand Loyalty and Consumer Buying Behavior for Sri Lankan Tea Brands

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Abstract

Evangelism marketing (EM) generates robust emotional links towards a Brand. Evangelism marketing creates a strong emotional connection between the brand and the consumer by uplifting brand loyalty (BL) through leveraging passion and encouragement. The study examines the impact of evangelism marketing as a mediator on Brand loyalty and consumer buying behavior, with a special reference to Sri Lankan tea brands. Sample selected from Tea consumers, whereas the quantitative research design was adopted. Structured Equation Modelling was adopted as the analysis method, where the Smart PLS was adopted as the research tool. Results exhibit the positive and significant impact of the EM on consumer buying behavior, within competitive markets, with BL as a key mediating factor. The study provides managerial implications for developing and leveraging strong consumer relationships through EM. Moreover, suggests marketers would develop evangelists towards certain brands as an innovative strategy.

Keywords: *Brand evangelist, Consumer buying behavior, Evangelism marketing, Sri Lanka Tea industry, Word of mouth marketing*

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Introduction

Within the contemporary market, identifying various consumer behaviors is crucial due to the alignment of different emotional factors. Interestingly, the Brand loyalty provides strong evidence by committing consumers to a certain brand with emotional connections. is one of the keys to the setup. The challenge for marketers is to understand the diversity of consumer behavior and provide products where the market is mostly fully saturated. Within this framework, the success is determined by how effectively it meets various customer needs by treating each customer uniquely, offering products and services tailored to their needs, and creating a lifetime value and affiliation with them (Nair 2018). Brand loyalty (BL) is identified as consumers become committed to a specific brand or product and generate continuous purchases over time. BL strives for an emotionally charged consumer decision to purchase a particular brand repeatedly, whereas Ramesh Kumar & Advani (2005) highlighted that BL exists in the FMCG market for cognitive and emotional reasons. Consumer buying behavior is the steps consumers take before purchasing a product or service, including; search engines, commenting on posts on social media, or various other measures. Furthermore, BL is an increased likelihood of purchasing due to a positive customer experience or perception of a particular brand. Accordingly, consumers voluntarily continue to support a brand which maintained their trust over time. Consumer behavior is influenced by strong BL as it reinforces purchasing patterns, develops emotional connections, enhances engagement, and encourages brand recommendations.

Within this context, *evangelism* is a marketing strategy that emotionally links to a certain brand. Interestingly, a company can birth brand evangelists through facilitations by diverse loyalty

programmes, ultimately enhancing the satisfaction and BL (Iliescu 2020). Thus, customer evangelists are attentive to authenticity, culture, and knowledge sharing with a profound knowledge, emotional, and spiritual connection to a certain brand. According to Doss & Carstens (2014), the term brand evangelism is defined as “freely and often enthusiastically communicating positive information, ideas, and feelings about a brand with the desire to influence the behavior of others”, whereas Becerra & Badrinarayanan (2013) discuss the term brand evangelism intensively, as the “willingness to endorse the brand and persuade others to buy it”. Despite its importance, the conceptualization of brand evangelism remains unclear because it is a relatively novel concept in the marketing literature. Marketers must develop a brand evangelist in the market who speaks passionately about the brand without any ulterior motives, where these brand evangelists are perceived as unbiased and will gain more credibility. Evangelism marketing is referred to as a successful marketing strategy in the present environment, where the proliferation of contemporary brands and media creates intense competition, ultimately leading to market positioning and survival challenges (Kurian 2018). However, several variables affect evangelistic marketing effectiveness. Marketing through evangelism has been shown to increase BL and to have a significant influence on consumers' purchasing decisions. Indeed, evangelicalism will be the newest buzzword in the scholarly world. Evangelism marketing is a less discussed theme within the Sri Lankan context, as there is limited scholarly work available. Tea Brands play a vital role within the Sri Lankan economy, whereas the evangelism marketing within the Tea brands might fill the research gap within the scholarly context. Tea plays a huge role within day to day life in Sri Lanka, whereas Tea considered a beverage only second to water by some scholars (Joliffe et



al.,2023). Consumers show a strong BL towards the Tea Brands, which suggests a suitable context to assess the Evangelism marketing concept within Sri Lanka. The study aims to fill the gap in the concept of market evangelism towards the Sri Lankan Tea Brands.

Research Question

The paper aims to discuss how evangelism marketing has influenced Sri Lankan consumers' choice towards the Tea brands. The study is relevant and identifies the product categories for which it is efficient, the contribution of evangelism marketing to brand loyalty, and its effect on various purchase methods.

RQ 1: How does evangelism marketing impact consumer buying behavior within the Sri Lankan Tea brands?

RQ2: How does Brand Loyalty impact Evangelism Marketing?

RQ 3: How does Brand Loyalty impact Consumer Buying Behavior?

RQ4: To what extent does Evangelism Marketing mediate the relationship between Brand Loyalty and Consumer Buying Behavior within Sri Lankan Tea Brands?

Therefore, research objectives have been formulated to address the identified research gaps within the context of Sri Lankan Tea Brands.

Research Objectives

RO1: To examine how evangelism marketing impact towards the consumer buying behavior within Sri Lankan Tea brand

RO2: To assess the impact of Brand Loyalty on Evangelism Marketing

RO3: To assess the impact of Brand Loyalty on Consumer Buying Behavior

RO4: To assess the mediation of Evangelism Marketing within the relationship of Brand Loyalty and Consumer Buying Behavior within the Sri Lankan Tea brands

Literature Review

Literature on consumer behavior offers lots of examples of passionate and intensely emotional consumer-object relationships. Having witnessed these enthusiastic consumers, word of mouth as a dimension likely underestimates the evangelical forms of talking regarding the precious items and the inclination of passionate consumers to induce other consumers into their lives. However, there are indications both in theory and in practice that BL might elicit more extreme and passionate actions than merely goodwill (Matzler & Hemetsberger, 2007). Moreover, scholars (Pimentel, Reynolds, & Pimentel, 2004) have demonstrated that genuinely loyal customers actively attract new customers to their favorite brands in addition to spreading positive word-of-mouth (WOM) regarding the brands. Rozanski, Baum, and Wolfson (1999) depict the behavior of brand zealots, who might be moved to do extreme acts by their intense emotional attachment to and loyalty to their preferred brand.

According to Riivits-Arkonsuo et al., (2014) Evangelism is a marketing tactic that has been used to highlight how a company can create brand evangelists by encouraging product adoption by keeping customers happy and cultivating BL through a story that is more persuasive than a massive advertisement campaign. Moreover, evangelists are more concerned with authenticity, coltishness, and knowledge sharing, which similarly depicts a robust emotional and divine assembly to the brand. Additionally, they

are more likely to make future purchases compared to the non-customer evangelists (Fay & Larkin, 2017). Involvement of customer evangelists in unpaid, unsupervised brand activity and comments online and offline on the basis of consumer culture theory and service-dominant logic, which increases the rank web and social networking media on brand messages (Keller, 2009). Within this context, Evangelist consumers frequently wind up becoming important influencers due to their independence. Evangelists' beliefs are seen as legitimate and trustworthy by others because they are not compensated or affiliated with any companies and mostly cater to spreading the word about the business out of a deep religious conviction rather than in exchange for products or cash (Fetherstonhaugh, 2009). Furthermore, (Kurian, 2018) refers to evangelism marketing as developing a brand experience and mission that are so motivating to customers that they commit to a business and spread their enthusiasm to others. Thus, Hypothesis 1 has been developed through the scholarly discussion.

H1: There is a significant impact exists with BL on Evangelism Marketing

EM links the business systematically and over time to the cycle containing of a trustworthy customer connection and the promoters emerging from interactions with brand ambassadors in order to achieve a continuous influx of new clients and sales growth. Interestingly, traditional marketing platforms, according to those who specialize in developing customer evangelists, are no longer relevant and efficient (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Thus, modern businesses are paying close attention to a relatively small but powerful group of consumers known as brand evangelists, who are known for their intense brand loyalty, active sharing of brand-related experiences with others, recruitment of others to experience the

brand, and active discouragement of others from consuming rival brands.

Consumer inclination to acquire a definite brand/or a product category is referred as Brand Loyalty (BL), where the preference and loyalty to a brand are tied to generate robust BL. Herein, BL refers to the level of attachment towards a specific brand and evaluates how likely a consumer is to switch brands when the pricing or features change (Aaker 1991). BL serves as the foundation for the relationship marketing idea, with numerous complexities that influence fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). Once it has been established, BL is relatively easy to keep up as long as the level of service and product quality is kept at a high level.

Consumer buying behavior is a complex phenomenon (Iliescu, 2020) influenced by consumer perception, product qualities, pricing strategy, income level, and diverse factors, and varies according to income level and different pricing strategies. Consumer buying behavior defines logical steps before purchasing a good or service. Interestingly, this would involve using search engines, websites, commenting on posts on social media, or taking various other actions that connect other consumer segments. Understanding this procedure is critical for businesses since it permits them to better tailor the marketing initiatives, specifically those that successfully persuade consumers to make purchases. Therefore, Hypotheses 2 and 3 have been developed through the scholarly discussions on key concepts.

H2: There is a significant impact exists with evangelism marketing on consumer buying behavior

H3: There is a significant impact exists on BL towards Consumer Buying Behavior

Tea is the most successful commercial plantation, which resulted in a huge amount of net foreign export income from

the colonial era, and the brand “Ceylon Tea” is a more powerful global brand. Herein, the Brand image qualities: recognition, suitable positioning, credibility, and uniqueness each exhibit a favorable effect on the BL of the Ceylon tea brands (Ahuvia, 2005). Brand image concepts could be suggested based on the BL to develop the Ceylon tea brand globally, with the correct strategic framework. According to Variawa (2010), the steady repurchasing of a favored brand by a consumer predominantly stimuli the consumer's choice of a particular brand of tea. Thus, as Sri Lanka owns the reputation of “Ceylon Tea as one of the finest Tea Brands of the world”, the study, which highlights the” evangelism concept” for Tea Brands, might provide clear directions for the marketers.

Managing loyalty is crucial for retaining customers in marketing; a study on the evangelism concept would uplift the Sri Lankan Tea industry as a whole. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 has been developed through the scholarly discussions by focusing on the less-researched Sri Lankan Tea Brands.

H4. Evangelism marketing mediates the relationship between BL and consumer buying behavior within Sri Lankan Tea Brands.

Therefore, the Conceptual model has been developed based on scholarly content and evidence by catering to the Tea brands in Sri Lanka.

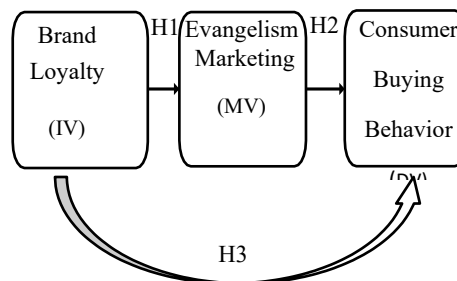


Figure 01: Conceptual model

Source: author developed

Hypothesis development

H1: There is a significant impact exists with BL on Evangelism Marketing

H2: There is a significant impact exists with evangelism marketing on consumer buying behavior

H3: there is a significant impact exists on BL towards Consumer Buying Behavior

H4: Evangelism marketing mediates the relationship between BL and consumer buying behavior within Sri Lankan Tea Brands

Methods

The study followed a quantitative research design, and data were collected through a survey. The study population consisted of the Tea consumers whom using Sri Lankan Tea Brands. The tea industry has extended over time, and from a market perspective, numerous local/ global tea brands have been released, highlighting the requirement of this kind of study. The population is unknown, whereas Morgan's table has determined the sample size of 384 Tea consumers. A stratified random sampling method was adopted by identifying each Tea Brand as a stratum. A structured questionnaire was adopted as the instrument to gather the data, with both

closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. Through the questionnaire, a large sample could be easily collected, whereas the generated results would be highly influential to the population, as well as rapid data gathering from a comparably minimal cost and more flexible (Flaherty et al., 2015). In addition, the researcher disseminated the questionnaire through online and social media to gather data more effectively, in a convenient way for respondents due to the massive usage of web sources. While conducting the data collection, informed consent was taken from the respondents in accordance with academic ethics. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted with 10% of the sample respondents, and the instrument's validity and reliability were measured. The researcher tested the Cronbach's alpha reliability test to determine the reliability of collaborative independent and dependent variables, where all the variables reached more than 0.8, which counts as an accepted level. The validity was determined from convergence and discrimination validity tests, whereas the convergent validity acts as a construct that is convergent in relation to many construct measurement elements. The study assessed the convergent validity by adopting the Average Variable Extraction value (AVE) accordingly. Data analysis was conducted through Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS software, whereas the SEM model is a statistical analysis method that involves multivariate and factor analysis. Path analysis, assessing links among dependent and independent variables, is used to evaluate data and test hypotheses. The researcher was able to gather data reliably and easily using this tool for the analytical procedure, and the suitable for smaller sample sets as well as the most intricate models (Hair et al., 2014). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) consists of a measurement model and a structural model by adapting the measurement model to create the relationship among the observed data and the variable. A

structural model is used to determine the relationship between variables. According to (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014), the PLS-SEM technique can be used to construct complex causal link models using latent variables and to investigate conceptual frameworks and hypotheses. Within this context, PLS-SEM model was adopted as a suitable model to identify the relationships among the variables and mediation. Thus, the researcher examined the effect of BL on consumer buying behavior in the context of evangelism marketing as a mediator with the use of PLS-SEM.

Findings and Discussion

Validation of the measurement model:
Convergent Validity

The lowest AVE value in the table is for the variable "Brand Experience" with a value of 0.663. While this value is above the threshold of 0.5, indicates that the observed variables related to brand experience may be measuring the underlying construct with slightly lower convergent validity compared to the other constructs

Table 01: Convergent Validity

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Experience	0.663
Brand purchase intention	0.897
Brand trust	0.818
Oppositional brand referrals	0.905
Positive brand referrals	0.911
consumer preference	0.717
length of purchase	0.844
purchase frequency	0.924

time of purchase	0.941
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Source: Smart PLS analysis

Reliability measurement: Composite Reliability

Composite reliability in SEM gauges the consistency of observed variables in measuring a latent construct. High values (0.88 to 0.979) in the table indicate strong reliability, with more indicators and less redundancy leading to higher reliability. These values validate accurate and reliable measurement of constructs, supporting the study's suitability, and overall, these results provide evidence for the validity and reliability of the latent constructs in the SEM analysis

Table 02 : Composite Reliability

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Experience	0.663
Brand purchase intention	0.897
Brand trust	0.818
Oppositional brand referrals	0.905
Positive brand referrals	0.911
consumer preference	0.717
length of purchase	0.844
purchase frequency	0.924
time of purchase	0.941

Source: Smart PLS analysis

Path analysis model

Path coefficient, also known as regression coefficient or structural coefficient, is a parameter in SEM that represents the strength and direction of the relationship between two latent variables or between a latent variable and an observed variable. In SEM, a path coefficient is estimated for

each path or arrow in the model, which represents the hypothesized causal relationship between the variables. The path coefficient indicates how much the value of the dependent variable is expected to change when the independent variable changes by one unit, while holding all other variables in the model constant (Memon et al., 2021).

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics (O/STDE)	P values
Brand Loyalty -> Consumer Buying Behavior	0.267	0.269	0.056	4.727	0
Brand Loyalty -> Evangelism Marketing	0.848	0.849	0.013	52.943	0
Evangelism Marketing->Consumer Buying Behavior	0.658	0.656	0.057	11.488	0

Source: Smart PLS analysis

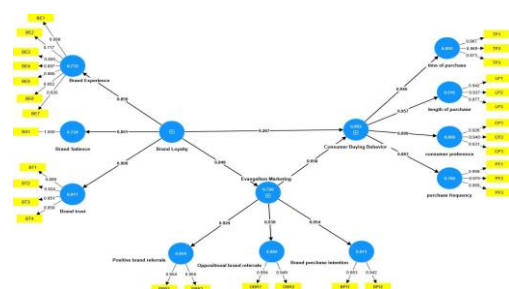


Figure 02 : Structural Equation Model Smart PLS

Specific Indirect Effect

Measurement is used to test the mediating effect of the mediator (indirect effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable through a specific mediator variable). The specific indirect effects can be estimated using the product of the coefficients approach or the difference in the coefficients approach. The product of the coefficients approach involves multiplying the path coefficient between the independent variable and the mediator variable by the path coefficient between the mediator variable and the dependent variable. The difference in coefficients approach involves subtracting the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable from the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, which includes both the direct and indirect effects. The resulting difference represents the specific indirect effect through the mediator variable (Kwong & Wong, 2013).

Table 04 : Specific Indirect effect

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics (O/STDE)	P values
Brand Loyalty -> Evangelism Marketing -> Consumer Buying Behavior	0.558	0.557	0.053	10.543	0

Source: Smart PLS analysis

H4 is testing the mediator impact where the P value of the specific indirect effect is 0.000. Therefore, evangelism marketing mediates the relationship between brand loyalty and consumer buying behavior.

According to Table 4, the specific indirect effect of BL on Consumer Buying Behavior through Evangelism Marketing is the mediator variable and is estimated to be 0.558, which is greater than the sample mean of 0.557. The standard deviation for this specific indirect effect is 0.053 and the t-statistic of 10.543 indicates that the specific indirect effect is statistically significant, as the p-value is 0, which is less than the conventional threshold of 0.05. Thus, a significant relationship exists between BL, Evangelism Marketing, and Consumer Buying Behavior, where Evangelism Marketing plays a mediating role. Behavior.

Discussion on RO1: RO1 determines the impact on consumer buying behavior, with the mediating role of evangelism marketing. The study used several measures to ensure the validity and reliability of the constructs being measured, such as convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability. These measures provide evidence that the latent constructs in the study are accurately and consistently measured by the observed variables, which supports the RO. The findings suggest that evangelism marketing has a significant impact on consumer buying behavior in the context of Tea brands. Evangelism marketing can have a significant impact on consumer buying behavior whereas ; (a) Trust: Evangelism marketing can help build trust in the brand among consumers, as recommendations from trusted sources can carry more weight than traditional advertising (b) Brand loyalty: Evangelism marketing can help to foster BL, (c) Word-of-mouth (WOM): Evangelism marketing relies on word-of-mouth recommendations, which can be very effective in influencing consumer behavior (d) Social influence: evangelism marketing takes advantage of this by leveraging the social networks of satisfied customers to spread positive messages about a brand. Overall, evangelism marketing can have a

powerful impact on consumer buying behavior, particularly in a market such as Sri Lanka where personal relationships and trust are highly valued.

Discussion on RO2: findings advocate that BL has a positive and significant impact on evangelism marketing, which implies consumers who are loyal to a particular brand are more likely to engage in word-of-mouth marketing activities, recommending the brand to others, sharing positive reviews on social media, and advocating for the brand. SEM analysis provides evidence for the validity and reliability of the constructs, indicating that the observed variables are consistently measuring the underlying constructs. In addition, the high values of composite reliability and AVE indicate that the constructs have good internal consistency and discriminant validity. Overall, the research highlights the importance of BL in driving evangelism marketing, which can have a significant impact on consumer buying behavior. By developing and maintaining strong relationships with loyal customers, brands can leverage the power of word-of-mouth marketing to increase brand awareness, attract new customers, and ultimately drive sales.

Discussion on RO3: findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between BL and consumer buying behavior where the BL acts as a construct that reflects a consumer's commitment to a brand based on their positive experiences and perceptions. The composite reliability

Conclusion

The study examined the impact of evangelism marketing, a novel concept in Sri Lanka, specifically on the Sri Lankan Tea brands. A research gap was identified as lesser scholarly work conducted within the Sri Lankan context, and specifically by targeting Sri Lankan Tea Brands, one of the most vital industries. Tea consumers were selected as the study population,

values for brand loyalty are above the acceptable threshold, indicating that the measurement of the construct is reliable and consistent. Consumers with high BL are more likely to purchase products from the same brand repeatedly, and this behavior is influenced by their positive perception of the brand. Implications for marketing strategies could be linked, as companies can focus on building BL through various means, such as product quality, customer service, and brand communication, to influence consumer buying behavior positively.

Discussion on RO4: Evangelism marketing can have a significant impact on consumer buying behavior. When consumers are exposed to positive WOM recommendations from other consumers, it can influence their perception and attitude toward the brand, leading to an increased likelihood of purchase. This is particularly true in situations where the consumer has little prior knowledge or experience with the brand. In addition, evangelism marketing can create a sense of social proof, where consumers may feel more comfortable buying a product if they see others doing the same while linking to social media, which constantly exposes them to the opinions and behaviors of their peers. Evangelism marketing can also contribute to the formation of brand communities, where consumers feel a sense of connection and loyalty to the brand and other consumers who share similar values and interests, which ultimately leads to repeat purchases.

whereas a sample of 384 consumers was selected through a stratified sampling method. Quantitative research method adopted with Structural Equation Modeling – Smart PLS analysis between various latent constructs, including BL, and evangelism marketing, with the impact on consumer buying behavior. Data was collected through a survey, which covered the main Sri Lankan Tea Brands. Findings suggest that evangelism

marketing has a significant positive impact on both BL and consumer buying behavior, and agree with previous scholarly findings on similar contexts, aligning with WOM marketing in shaping consumer behavior. Furthermore, consumers who have a strong connection to a brand are more likely to make repeat purchases and continue to support that brand over time. The finding is particularly relevant, as many consumers in the region have strong emotional connections to specific tea brands, which implies the concept of “evangelism”. The study highlights the significance of developing effective marketing strategies that leverage the power of WOM marketing to build BL by linking evangelism. By leveraging the power of evangelism marketing, companies can strengthen their customer base and drive sales over time, which leads to BL. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of conducting rigorous measurement and statistical analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of SEM models. Overall, valuable insights into the complex factors that shape consumer behavior highlight the potential impact of effective marketing strategies in driving business success.

Managerial implications

Brand evangelists actively seek out methods to enhance the company's products or brand, offer suggestions, and provide honest and helpful opinions, assuring support for brand adjustments; thus, the following MIs are proposed.

- (a) Promote brand experience:
- (c) marketers should invest in building a strong brand identity, reputation, and credibility to increase consumer trust and salience

This can be achieved through effective branding strategies, transparent communication, and consistent quality to

As limitations, the narrow scope of the evangelism concept could be identified, where as to border the evangelism marketing concept towards FMCG was suggested. Future researchers could be more focused on identifying the evangelism marketing concept within MCG, as well as with service Brands. Thus, it will provide effective managerial implications for the sectors.

Theoretical implications

From an academic perspective, this study investigates the impact of Evangelism Marketing on consumer buying behavior. The study draws upon the existing literature to establish that consumers are becoming more conscious of the value of brands and the experiences associated with them, which they tend to share with others, where an evangelist not only shares his/her experience of the brand but also actively promotes it to other potential consumers. To fill the research gap, the study develops and tests a measure of Evangelism Marketing in the context of Sri Lankan Tea Brands.

marketers should focus on creating positive and memorable experiences for consumers to encourage them to become brand evangelists.

This can be achieved through innovative marketing campaigns and personalized experiences.

- (b) Build brand trust and salience:

create evangelists.

- (d) Encourage brand evangelists: Marketers should encourage brand evangelists who are passionate about the brand and actively promote it to others.



Loyalty programs, recognitions, and targeted advertising campaigns could be proposed.

As a concluding note, the paper fills a gap by identifying a less-discussed scholarly area of evangelism marketing with the

context of Sri Lankan Tea Brands. Herein, evangelism plays a vital role in shaping up the consumer behavior, whereas Marketers might promote Brand evangelists through diverse strategies. The paper proposed future scholarly themes that ultimately fill the scholarly gaps within the context.

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