OPPOSITIONAL LOYALTY OF THE INDIVIDUAL REALITY: ITS ANTECEDENTS AND EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper's objective is to explore oppositional loyalty concept by identifying its antecedents and effects on consumer behavior and brands. Oppositional loyalty is a phenomenon that is expressed by symbolic consumption of the chosen brand and anti-consumption of the rejected brand as well as defending the first and undermining the second in a given social context. Based on the smartphones field, we analyzed online internauts' comments, interviews and life stories. Our main results highlight three factors that can give rise to oppositional loyalty: brand behavior, brand experience and consumer image. Oppositional loyalty is found to contribute positively or negatively to brand equity according to the status of the brand (chosen versus avoided). These results allow managers to define strategies for defending brand equity and to resist their competitors' attacks.

KEYWORDS

Oppositional loyalty, symbolic consumption, anti-consumption, brand equity, smartphone brands.

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of this paper is to explore oppositional loyalty by identifying its antecedents and effects on consumer behavior and brands. Oppositional loyalty is a phenomenon that is expressed by symbolic consumption of the chosen brand and anti-consumption of the rejected brand as well as defending the former and undermining the latter in a given social context. Revealed for the first time by Muniz and Hamer (2001), few studies tried to explore it outside the context of brand communities despite its real potential to help reconsider existent loyalty model (Djedidi, 2014). This study, therefore, exposes elements identified in literature that can help us understand this phenomenon in brand community context and then explores the same elements in the case of individual consumers not belonging to brand community.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK / LITERATURE REVIEW /RESEARCH MODEL

Oppositional loyalty was first introduced by Muniz and Hamer (2001) in their study of Pepsi and CocaCola communities. They conceive it as the phenomenon where consumers define themselves by the brand they consume as well as by the brand they do not consume. They express this loyalty in two ways. First, consumers of a given product category express themselves by their chosen brand as well as the avoided brand. Second, these consumers express their opposition towards the competitive brand by developing an ironic rivalry towards consumers of the competitive brand. Indeed, they criticize the competitive brand and their consumers and playfully challenge these latter to defend their choice (Muniz and Hamer, 2001). Research efforts that followed the pioneering work of Hamer and Muniz (2001) are mainly interested in brands communities and most of them studied peripherally oppositional loyalty as shown in Table1.

Table 1: Summary of Work on Oppositional Loyalty

Authors	Product category	Brands	Content	Treatment
Hamer and Muniz (2001)	Soft drinks	CocaCola *vs* Pepsi	Definition of the phenomenon	Central
Muniz and O'Guinn (2001)	IT products	Mac vs PC	Identification of two kinds: 1) Brand *vs* brand. 2) Brand group *vs* brand group.	Peripheral
	Cars	Saab vs Volvo		
	4x4	Bronco, Jeep *vs* Suzuki		
Muniz and Schau (2007)	Personal Digital Assistants (PDA)	Newton *vs* Palm	Identification of the phenomenon in a community whose product is no longer on the market.	Peripheral
Hickman and Ward (2007)	IT products	Mac vs PC	Description of the dark side of the community: *trash talk* and *schadenfreude*.	Peripheral
	Football	Iowa University *vs* Purdue University		
Amine and Sitz (2007)	Cameras	Nikon *vs* Powershot (Canon)	Identification of the phenomenon.	Peripheral

Thompson and Sinha (2008)	Microprocessors	Intel *vs* AMD	Testing the impact of oppositional loyalty on the adoption of new competing products.	Central
	3D video cards	ATI vs Nvidia		
Ewing *et al.* (2013)	Cars	Ford *vs* Holden (GM)	Description of the dark side of the community: *trash talks* et *schadenfreude*.	Central

As shown in the previous table, few studies are interested in studying oppositional loyalty as an object as did Hamer and Muniz (2001), Thompson and Sinha (2008) and Ewing *et al.* (2013). These studies are interested in identifying this phenomenon as well as its impact on brand communities. Other studies, such as those of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) or Hickman and Ward (2008), whose main object is brand community, mentioned some interesting aspects of some antecedents and consequences of brand community behaviors such as oppositional loyalty. Main forces generating oppositional loyalty as well as consequences of this latter in brand community context are presented below.

Forces Animating Oppositional Loyalty: Protection Quest or Treasure Hunt

The essence of oppositional loyalty in brand communities is based on opposition and rivalry between groups because it emanates from "antagonistic vision of competition" (Ewing *et al*., 2013). This rivalry emerges particularly from danger felt by users of the brands that hold relatively low market shares from the dominant competitors and their users (Muniz and Schau, 2005). It also allows members of a given community to feel certain connection with the brand and especially with other members of the same brand by highlighting some demarcation between users of the brand and users of other brands (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2007). In other words, oppositional loyalty would, therefore, perpetuate the "consciousness of kind". Therefore, researches are split between those who attribute this strong opposition in the expression of brand loyalty to a danger or threat embodied by the competing brand (*protection quest*) and those that simply associate it to a need for differentiation (*treasure hunt*).

Oppositional loyalty and social bias, trash talk and Schadenfreude

Although the rivalry and challenge side that occurs in the domain of football and politics, where oppositional loyalty is obvious, seems fun, the dark side of communities' oppositional loyalty has not been neglected by academic research. Indeed, there are behaviors that vary from a simple negative assessment to a violent behavior between brand communities members which manifest oppositional loyalty (Hickman and Ward, 2007; Ewing *et al*, 2013.). The more individuals identify themselves with their brand, the more they are inclined to evaluate it as well as its consumers positively compared to the competing brand and its consumers. Moreover, the more you perceive members of your competing brand as competent, the more you see them as a threat, and, consequently, the more you tend to discredit the competing brand, and vice versa. Furthermore, community members who derive pleasure in making fun of competing brands also feel a pleasure from misadventure information of competing brand (Schadenfreude) (Fiske *et al*., 2002; Hickman and Ward, 2007).

Moreover, we note that contributions on oppositional loyalty were interested in brand communities and behavior of community members. But the momentum that comes from the group meaning and affiliation immerses individual in this euphoria of "*deindividuation*" (Zimbardo, 1969) following the current group. However, once the individual is far from this community, his/her reaction could change (Thompson and Sinha, 2008), hence our interest in consumers not belonging to brand community and our research question.

RESEARCH QUESTION
What are the antecedents and the consequences of oppositional loyalty of the individual?

METHOD

Studied brands
We chose smartphone brands because of their conspicuous consumption which gives an important symbolic and social dimension. It is also about a very expanding market in Europe where the leader position has been threatened by the challenger. According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), oppositional loyalty exists among consumers of brands that hold the biggest market shares.

Data collection
We opted for three data collection tools:
(a) Netnograpy. In order to identify oppositional loyalty among smartphone consumers, it would be appropriate to observe their behaviors in diverse everyday life contexts. This task turned out to be unrealistic as we cannot guess when a conversation on smartphone subject would be initiated and only consumers exchange could allow us to identify oppositional loyalty behavior. In addition, our presence would provoke uneasiness among the consumers and create social desirability bias. For instance, teasing someone about his brand choice would be considered as a childish behavior. Consequently, we decided, as a first step, to study this behavior in a naturalistic and non-obtrusive context where individuals can talk easily about their ideas and emotions (Buechel and Berger 2012) by communicating in an online context. To this end, we were inspired by netnography (Kozinets 2010) and we analyzed the traces left by consumers online as a reaction to an information about smartphone brands that was published in a non-specialized newspaper. In fact, we analyzed 66 comments left by 44 internauts as a reaction to an article published on the website of the most popular French newspaper, Le Figaro, in November 2011. The article mentions statistics concerning market shares of different smartphone brands. This was an occasion for internauts to side with their brand and to compare it (or not) with the competitive brand (oppositional loyalty behavior)..
(b) Thirty (30) semi directive interviews (see table2). As an additional step to netnography to look for traces of oppositional loyalty in the real world, we opted for semi-directive interview as it relates to consumer experience and not to fictional situations as in projective methods. It helps developing consumer motivations, brand and self image that are necessary to identify oppositional loyalty. The purpose of this step is twofold: (1) ensure that oppositional loyalty exists beyond virtual world and is expressed in daily life. (2) Identify individuals manifesting oppositional loyalty and that are our "*target* ".
(c) 14 life story interviews (with asterisk in table2). After identifying oppositional loyal consumers, we continued our investigation through life stories. We were able to keep in touch with 14 interviewees who agreed to have a second interview. We explained to them the need for this second phase as to "*know a little more about their overall consumption*". This phase was mostly performed at the place of interviewees or in an isolated room in their workplace (individual office, meeting room or reading room) in order to preserve privacy. The interviews were recorded with a recorder.

Table 2: List of the interviewees

Pseudo	Gender	Age	Function	Marque
Adam*	M	32	Entrepreneur	iPhone
Anaïs*	F	24	Biologist	iPhone
Charlotte*	F	27	Trainee	Sony Experia
Chris	M	34	Research Engineer	Samsung
Elise	F	24	Waitress	Blackberry
Emile*	M	31	Technician	iPhone
Fanny*	F	28	Officer	Samsung
Fleur*	F	40	Doctor	iPhone
Imen	F	29	IT Engineer	Nokia
Jean-Philippe*	M	31	Photograph	Sony Experia
Julie*	F	28	Journalist	Sony Experia
Kevin	M	33	Officer	iPhone
Léo*	M	25	Architect	Blackberry
Louisa	F	33	Chemist	Samsung
Marcel*	M	26	Lawyer	iPhone
Marco	M	37	Public officer	iPhone
Mathieu*	M	28	Engineer	iPhone
Maxime	M	25	Student	Nokia
Michel	M	24	Engineer	Samsung
Nel	M	31	Researcher	iPhone
Nicolas*	M	25	Apprentice	Samsung
Olivier	M	25	Teacher	iPhone 4s
Paul-Armand	M	25	Hospital Engineer	Samsung
Rémy	M	26	customer advisor	iPhone
Roland	M	34	Student	Sony Experia
Rym	F	24	Student	Samsung
Sophie*	F	25	Seller	Samsung
Thomas	M	24	Student	Nokia
Victor*	M	26	Project Engineer	Blackberry
Zak	M	27	Male nurse	Samsung

Data analysis

In addition to internauts' comments collected online as part of netnography, we transcribed the 30 semi-directive interviews and the 14 life story interviews. Our material consists of 23 pages of user comments, 270 pages of in-depth interviews and 443 of life story interviews pages. In total, our analysis includes 736 pages of qualitative data. For data processing, we used to thematic content analysis, the most commonly used in marketing (Evrard *et al.,* 2009) and the most appropriate for our exploratory and comprehensive approach. We used two qualitative data analysis software: Atlas.ti and Nvivo. Initially, we used Atlas.ti for netnography. When data increased significantly due to the addition of interviews, so we decided to use Nvivo, which is more suitable for processing a much larger data quantity.

FINDINGS

Emergence factors of oppositional loyalty
Our data analysis allowed identifying some factors that could initiate oppositional loyalty. Because this latter is nourished by positive relation with the chosen brand as well as by negative relation with the avoided brand, consumers rarely evoke factors behind adopting one brand and avoiding the other in a simultaneous manner. For example, Chris was very clear in his discourse and described Apple strategy (avoided brand) as ambiguous and freedom limiting. On the contrary, he depicts Samsung as offering a more open and transparent operating system. In this case, informant speaks openly about the negative elements of the avoided brand and the positive point motivating his positive relation with the chosen brand. These two elements converge towards the same aspect: brand strategy. Nonetheless, when Fanny expresses her aversion towards the avoided brand, she depicts its strategy as sectarian and alluding to status but she does not approach this point when talking about her chosen brand. However, life history showed that she has always been loyal to this brand that she trusts. This allowed us to do an asymmetric description of sources that may initiate oppositional loyalty by putting forward the negative relation with the avoided brand. We noticed that the avoided brand occupies more space in the consumer's speech: on average, when the interviewee uses 100 words to talk about the chosen brand, he/she uses 150 to talk about the avoided brand, which reinforces the idea that the anti-choice is at least as important as the choice for the consumer (Wilk, 1997). We notice across the analyzed data three factors that may initiate oppositional loyalty: brand behavior, consumer image and brand experience.

Brand behavior
Results highlight an increased focus of the consumer on brand behavior with stakeholders. Multinationals tend to be judged more severely by consumers because of their visibility (Dalli *et al.*, 2006). Even if these behaviors are presented sequentially, they are embedded in the discourse of oppositional loyal consumers. Moreover, consumer uses added value as a criterion for judging whether brand is accepted as a partner in a positive relationship or if instead it will be part of anti-constellation category. Indeed, when the brand added value is negative, consumer rejects this brand as the trade-off of this transaction is considered as unfair and unacceptable (Lee *et al.,* 2009). When he/she chooses another option with a positive added value, he/she keeps as a reference the rejected option with negative added value. This parallel is even more obvious when both options are comparable since they are present in the same market, offered for the same targets and using common supply sources.
In the Samsung and Apple case, although both companies are in direct competition, they cooperate in the value chain (Dikmen and Cheriet, 2012). Thus, they engage in a complex paradoxical relationship, characterized by efforts of cooperation and competition simultaneously, that is called vertical coopetition (Lacoste, 2012; Hani and Dagnino, 2014). This coopetition, being largely publicized and generating intellectual properties issues, reinforces comparison between the two brands and their added value in consumers' minds to justify choosing one and rejecting the other. Furthermore, being the pioneer to launch tactile smartphone, Apple became a comparison reference for other brands that arrived later on the market. Noticed similarities with smartphones launched by Samsung fed some aversion towards this latter among Apple consumers reflecting their dissatisfaction with the decried perceived plagiarism. « *(…) We should admit that it (Apple) was the pioneer (…) we can only think of a kind of plagiarism from the other brands like Samsung!*» (Anais1).

Consumer Image
As mentioned earlier, for various reasons not all the interviewees described brands in terms of typical user's image. Some consider talking about brand stereotype as a form of superficial

discrimination, that is not acceptable, or that refers to a lack of open-mindness. For others, consumers are alike regardless of their brand. Those who manage to describe brands and users showed more sensitivity towards the symbolic aspect of their consumption. Indeed, results revealed that brand image allows placing this brand either in the constellation group of adopted options or in the anti-constellation group of rejected options. This image may reflect a certain ideology, lifestyle or way of being: « For me, people who have a certain social level choose iPhone (…) For me someone who does not have an iPhone is someone who only eats and drinks, once I realize that the person does not have an iPhone, it proves that he is sedentary*, you can understand that he is not interesting, does nothing in his life!* » (Adam1).

Brand Experience
Results show that the experience consumer can have with a particular brand may subsequently pave the path for their relationship. Although our study was not longitudinal, consumers' life stories have helped identify two types of oppositional loyalty evolution:
a) The one that springs out of a positive experience with the brand in a different product category. This positive experience reflects the brand's ability to honor its promise to the consumer, who in turn shows some commitment through time and even some attachment and affect. Once the presence of a strong competitor is noticed, consumer develops this aversion to that competitor for several reasons: its behavior, its strategy or its image: « *I love Samsung…I am happy when I see people who have Samsung, it's true that I defend Samsung, I have friends who have something else than Samsung, but I am always there to tell them to try Samsung , it is good, I always loved this brand (…)I don't know, I don't like iPhone, when I see people with their iPhone, they look pretentious* » (Louisa1).
(b) The one that emerges from a negative experience with a given brand and becomes subsequently the rejected brand from the moment the consumer finds the brand that meets their expectations. Such is the case of an oppositional loyal consumer who, tired of the brand operating system complexity, opts for another brand that matches exactly his expectations in terms of functionalities. Now, this consumer maintains a comparative discourse reflecting his misfortune with the previously acquired (and currently avoided) brand while highlighting the chosen brand and how he/she intends to repurchase it soon. Furthermore, two informants categorized as non oppositional loyal consumers in the first data collection phase, show some dissatisfaction with their brand strategy that limits their freedom and flexibility. They reflect a premise of resistance to the currently owned brand. We also found that both interviewees are oppositional loyal for other brands in other product categories and for the same reasons, *i.e.*, freedom restriction policy and perceived loss of control of the consumer. This leads us to suggest that this negative experience with their current smartphone brand will serve as a selection criterion for the next brand. This latter will certainly be the opposite of the current brand that will become in the future the rejected brand: « *…there are lots of invisible strings between iPhone customers and Apple (…) we do not see these strings. We only buy a telephone (…) I do not like the idea of not being free with an iPhone. I do not feel free; I do not feel that I own this telephone. It is as if I only have using rights and not an absolute right over the telephone (…) In the future, I think that I will not buy an iPhone (…) I will look for something else* » (Marcel2).

Consequences of oppositional loyalty
Oppositional loyalty is expressed differently according to consumers in a twofold way: a positive behavior towards the chosen brand and a negative one towards the rejected brand. Moreover, these behaviors are either directed at the brand itself or its consumers as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Behavioral Level of Oppositional Loyalty

Behaviors	Chosen Brand	Rejected Brand
In relation with the brand		
Purchasing, repurchasing intention	Certainly, may be	Avoidance, resistance, boycott
	Engagement	If it is like the chosen brand
In relation with the consumer		
Teasing (Action/reaction)	Put forward positively	Put into question, devalue
	BIRGing, showing off the brand	Defy, trash talk*, schadenfreude*
Expression	+W-O-M, recommending, proselytism	No + nor - W-O-M, criticizing , warning

Oppositional Loyal Consumer as Asset for the Chosen Brand

-Purchasing, Repurchasing intention: Oppositional loyal consumers foster a positive relationship with their chosen brand and express their loyalty through expressing their future repurchase intention of the chosen brand without hesitation. For those interviewed in the second phase, we could observe their repurchase of the same brand one year later.

- Teasing (Action/Reaction): It is about interacting with one's environment in a playful way when talking about smartphone brands either in a friendly or in a more aggressive way. On the contrary, the majority of the interviewed oppositional loyal consumers depict this kind of behavior (especially aggressive criticism and devaluating the others and their choices) as childish or arrogant.

Basking in reflected glory (BIRGing), a commonly found behavior among football fans and political party partisans, is a self-serving cognition whereby individuals associate themselves with successful people so that someone else's success becomes their own (Aronson 2007).

- Expression: Oppositional loyal consumers used to spread positive W-O-M on their chosen brand by highlighting its positive aspects and its products. They may even recommend it to their friends. Consumers may go further through proselytism. It happens that an oppositional loyal consumer declares that he/she usually tries to "convert" others and make them adopt his/her chosen brand. « If someone asks me a question *(...) euh, at this moment I I get out my advertising arsenal just like this, free of charge for Apple (...) but everybody, all my friends have bought an iPhone, since 2010... (Q: Thanks to you?) Yes! All, without exception* » (Nel1)

Oppositional Loyal Consumer as Liability for the Avoided Brand

-Avoidance and resistance**:** It is found that when consumers consider their relation with the rejected brand, they use elements put forward in resistance context, especially when they see his freedom threatened by this same rejected brand. Therefore, oppositional loyalty, which traditionally results from the interaction between consumption and anti-consumption, acquires a new component: consumer resistance.

-Teasing (Action/Reaction) and Expression: However, it is relevant to attract attention to the difference between behaviors of oppositional loyal consumers in real context (interviews) *vs* in a virtual one (netnography). Consumers are reluctant to be associated with an « *out-group* » that may tarnish their self image. In a virtual context, they use trash talk in order to differentiate their group positively from the rival one (Hickman and Ward, 2007). These practices were used by internauts in order to degrade the rival brand and its consumers and to show its failure. In fact, when consumers interact in virtual context where social codes are less coercive, they express their opposition by behaving violently. In fact, we realized the use of negative words and strong propositions. Even if this behavior is absent in a real social context,

we noticed, however, the use of negative adjectives when describing consumers of the rejected brand « *stupid, pretentious, superficial…etc.* ».

DISCUSSION

Our main results highlight three factors that can give rise to oppositional loyalty and that allow anchoring this studied phenomenon in current research on symbolic consumption, anti-consumption as well as brand relationship. The first identified factor, brand behavior, has already been highlighted in literature on avoidance and specifically moral avoidance (Lee *et al.*, 2009). The second factor, which refers to its consumer-brand image congruence originated in previous works under congruence theory (Sirgy, 1982). The third factor refers to positive / negative experience that a consumer can have with brands and was exploited by Wilk (1997) and Banister and Booth (2004) who admit that a negative experience with a particular brand shifts this latter from the individual constellation set to anti-constellation set (Hogg, 1998). This last factor puts this research as a continuation of research on brand relationship (Fournier, 1998a ; Lacoeuilhe, 2000) as it allows to give full account of oppositional loyalty development starting either by a positive relation with the chosen brand or, on the contrary, by a negative experience (relation) with the rejected brand.

Oppositional loyalty is found to remain constant over time when it is animated by brand image rejection. It can also evolve when it reflects a rejection related to product performance. This result reveals an increased emphasis on brand symbolism. This symbolic dimension has the power to strengthen brand image and, therefore, contributes to make it a strong competitive advantage (Porter, 1980) or an asset for brand equity. This result enriches extant studies on brand image and its capacity to enhance brand equity. This brand equity increases thanks to future additional cash flow related to brand preference, repurchase as well as oppositional loyal consumer engagement, positive word-of-mouth, recommendation and active proselytism. On the contrary, by rejecting the avoided brand, oppositional loyal consumer becomes a liability for this brand equity since he/she does not only avoid it, but also engages in spreading negative word-of-mouth and warning people against it.

CONCLUSION

Our paper objective is to explore the forces that may initiate oppositional loyalty and the consequences of this latter. Results helped to identify three types of antecedents: brand behavior, consumer image and brand experience. This study allows feeding existent knowledge on brand equity as they show how an oppositional loyal consumer can be considered as an asset for brand equity of his choice and a liability for that of his anti-choice.

LIMITATIONS

Like in any research, we can highlight the following limitations. First, we chose to analyze consumers' comments online without carrying interviews with them. This could have shed light on the difference between online and offline oppositional loyalty behavior. Second, we used snowball method to select interviewees. Even if it is about an exploratory study with *a priori* no relevant theoretical sampling criteria, it would have better diversify the sample. Third, the case of smartphones has been particularly relevant to our study. However, results could be specific to this growing market which arises transferability issue.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Some tracks for future research can be suggested. A longitudinal approach would study its emergence and its mechanisms in order to better understand it. Furthermore, a quantitative study would measure the phenomenon extent. If its presence turns out to be significant, the quantitative study would spotlight this concept importance and the need for its exploitation by

managers. By admitting its existence, oppositional loyalty would offer a new reading grid for loyalty concept.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Oppositional loyalty translates into repeated purchase behavior, positive word-of-mouth for the selected brand and avoidance, boycott and negative word-of-mouth for the rejected brand. Thus, managers can exploit this study results to make their consumers more as assets than as liability. Furthermore, fierce competition between brands may lead to market polarization around the two major competitors and, therefore, to reconfigure it. This can help to eliminate other competitors from the consumer brandscape so that it contains only one competitor.

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