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Article

Close to consumers: How brands can foster brand loyalty within families

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Brand Loyalty



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Close to Consumers

How Brands Can Foster Brand Loyalty Within Families

Research shows that brands are embedded in familial consumption practices. However, it is unclear what brands can do to foster their inclusion within a practice. This article shows that brands can embed themselves in family practices by providing materials for practices, fostering extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices, and imparting competences.

Janina Rebecca Kauz

“Growing up, when I or my brother celebrated a birthday, we had to have this one kind of peach ice tea. It would not have been a proper birthday without it.”
(Pete, 30)

As this quote illustrates, brands can be deeply embedded in family practices: Pete’s family would not celebrate a child’s birthday without a specific brand of ice tea. Research documents that brands are often an integral part of family practices (Bradford & Sherry, 2013; Coupland, 2005; Epp & Price, 2011; Epp & Velagaleti, 2014). For brands, this is interesting because when a brand is embedded in a family practice, this can lead to family brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is defined as “the biased (i.e., non-random) behavioral response (i.e., purchase) expressed over time by some decision-making units with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, which is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes” (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978, p. 80). Thus, a brand’s involvement in a family practice can be considered brand loyalty: Habituated practices are enacted repeatedly (i.e., they are a behavioral response expressed over time) and thus capture the behavioral aspect of brand loyalty. Furthermore, practices also carry meanings (Reckwitz, 2002) (i.e., psychological processes), thus capturing attitudinal aspects as well.

The importance of attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty is evident in research documenting the embedded and complex nature of brand loyalty (Aggarwal & Shi, 2018; Coulter et al., 2003; Fournier & Yao, 1997; Khamitov et al., 2019; McAlexander et al., 2003; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001; Oliver, 1999) and studies showing that brand loyalty stems from and is connected to central areas of consumers’ lifeworlds (Coulter et al., 2003; Fournier, 1998; Moore et al., 2002). Thus, it is important that research on brand loyalty capture not just a behavior, but also the meanings associated with it, which is why this paper uses social practice theory as

a lens (for more details on the concept of a theoretical lens see Nordberg, 2023).

Thus, this paper conceptualizes a brand being embedded in a habituated family practice as brand loyalty. The question arises as to what brands can do to foster their inclusion in family practices in order to develop brand loyalty. While we know how consumers integrate brands into family practices (Epp & Price, 2011), how brands and consumers help create, shape, and spread practices (Akaka et al., 2022; Shove & Pantzar, 2005), and what brands can do to facilitate collective consumer practices (Thomas et al., 2020), it is unclear what brands can do to foster their inclusion in family practices. Therefore, this paper asks: *What can brands do to foster their inclusion in family practices?* This paper focuses specifically on family practices because research indicates that these may be particularly valuable sources of brand loyalty: Often, all members of a family are loyal to the same brands (Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Yao, 1997), and these loyalties can even be transmitted intergenerationally (Anderson et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2002; Olsen, 1995). Thus, if brands manage to insert themselves into family practices, they can potentially gain several loyal customers at once and profit from continued loyalty as later generations carry on these practices.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: First, it will review some literature on brand loyalty and works on so-

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cial practice theory. Then, it will explain the context and methodology underlying this paper and subsequently present the findings. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion.

Theoretical Background

In order to situate the research, this section focuses on brand loyalty and social practice theory.

Brand Loyalty

There is much prior work on brand loyalty. Due to the sheer volume of research, this paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of previous work. Suffice it to say that the literature indicates that consumer collectives and collective practices play a role in brand loyalty. Studies show the importance of social networks in creating and maintaining brand loyalty (e.g., Bloch & Richins, 1983; Celsi et al., 1993; Ditton et al., 1992). Furthermore, research demonstrates that brand loyalty depends on how well a brand fits into consumers’ lives (Bloch & Richins, 1983) and their life goals and themes (Fournier, 1998). Since these aspects are inextricably linked to relational and collective identity (Epp & Price, 2008), this also indicates the importance of consumer collectives for brand loyalty. Thus, social influences are central to brand loyalty. This is underlined

by research documenting that members of consumer collectives are often loyal to the same brands. For instance, brand loyalty often runs in families (Anderson et al., 2015; Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Yao, 1997; Ji, 2002; Moore et al., 2002; Olsen, 1995). Taken together, this research makes a strong argument that research should investigate how brands can insert themselves into collective practices to foster brand loyalty.

Yet, most studies investigating how brands can create or maintain loyalty view brand loyalty as a dyadic phenomenon between a consumer and a brand (Thomas et al., 2020). Moreover, even commercial research tends to view the consumer as sovereign and independent (Arnould & Cayla, 2015). Accordingly, research examining the drivers of brand loyalty has mostly focused on factors leading the individual consumer to develop loyalty. This research generally indicates that individual brand loyalty stems from a combination of affective

Management Summary

For brands, being embedded in consumer practices can foster brand loyalty as consumers return to the brand each time they enact the practice. This paper shows that brands can embed themselves in practices by providing materials for practices, fostering extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices, and imparting competences. This is interesting for brands because embedding themselves in practices enables them to establish different types of relationships with their consumers.

and cognitive drivers (e.g., Frank et al., 2014; Han et al., 2011; 2018; Leckie et al., 2016; Oliver, 1999). To address the gap between this research and the works indicating that brand loyalty is connected

to collective practices, this paper examines brand loyalty in collective practices. The next section provides an overview of social practice theory.

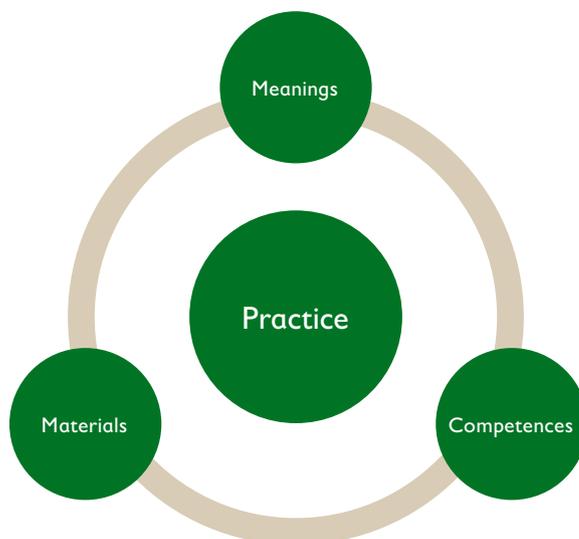
Social Practice Theory

Social practice theory describes how practices structure daily life (Thomas et al., 2020). Practices are defined as “a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). These practice elements are commonly summarized as materials, meanings, and competences (Shove et al., 2012) (figure 1). Practices can be individual when enacted by a single consumer or collective when enacted by a group of consumers (Thomas et al., 2020). Thus, family practices are collective practices as they are enacted by a group (the family).

Consumers enact practices by combining the practice elements into a performance. When these elements integrate into a practice, the practice can reproduce and habituate (Shove et al., 2012; Shove & Pantzar, 2005). Through the combination of these elements, practices incorporate both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty. Due to the multifactorial nature of practices it is important to consider how each practice element can contribute to ensuring a brand’s presence within a practice.

The author is aware that combining practice theory with Jacoby and Chestnut’s (1978) definition of brand loyalty means mixing concepts from different disciplines. However, this approach, known as retextualization (Thompson et al., 1998), has proven successful in revealing new aspects of brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñoz & O’Guinn, 2001) and is

Figure 1: Practices Consist Of Three Key Elements: Materials, Meanings, and Competences



Source: Own illustration.

considered a fruitful research strategy (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Methodology

To answer the research question, this paper takes a qualitative approach. Using purposive sampling, it is based on 17 in-depth interviews with consumers in whose family practices a specific brand is embedded (for an overview of respondents, see the web appendix). Family practices are rooted in consumers' lived experiences, which can be effectively discovered using interviews (Thompson et al., 1989). All participants were from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. To ensure a naturalistic setting, the interviews were conducted in Swiss German. The interviews were designed to uncover the respondents' lived experience of family practices involving the focal brand and resulted in 263 pages of single-spaced text, which was coded and analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Table 1 presents insight into how the data was analyzed. Please note that it only includes illustrative quotes. The dataset contained many more quotes, which cannot all be presented here due to space constraints.

Context

This research uses *Migros* as a focal brand. *Migros* is one of the largest supermarket brands in Switzerland (Benz, 2022). The larger stores often also boast a buffet-style restaurant.

The brand is a great case to investigate how brands are embedded in family practices because the phenomenon is highly salient in this context. Many of *Migros'* loyal customers refer to themselves as '*Migros children*'. If a consumer identifies as a *Migros* child, it means that they are loyal to *Migros* and that their parents (and, in many cases, other family members) share

Table 1: How Brands Can Foster Their Inclusion in Family Practices

Findings	Strategies	Illustrative Quotes
Providing materials for practices	The brand provides materials that encourage family members to enact practices together.	"They [<i>Migros</i>] had these sticker collections. And so we [respondent and his brother] always asked our parents to get the stickers. [...] And then we put them in the sticker book, all of us together, and I really liked it, doing something together as a family."
	The brand creates targeted promotions aimed at inserting itself into specific practices.	"I like <i>Famigros</i> . When it is our children's birthdays, they send us special vouchers for things that we might need for their birthday parties. So now we use those things on their birthdays."
Fostering extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices	The brand enables extraordinary meanings through a diverse portfolio.	"We used to go to the big <i>Migros</i> on <i>Limmatplatz</i> . It was like entering a wonderland. They had the flowers, the dry cleaning. I always went to see what they had."
	The brand enables extraordinary meanings through independent shopping.	"I knew exactly where my favorite cake was, so when my mom told me to go get it, I ran to it and felt like the king of the world."
Imparting competences	The brand employs knowledgeable staff who are able to help consumers with their problems.	"One time, we wanted to make a ragout but we did not know what kind of meat to use. So we asked the butcher at <i>Migros</i> and he was super nice and told me what to use and how to cook it."
	The brand imparts knowledge via communication channels such as newsletters and social media.	" <i>Migros</i> sends us these newsletters, which always come with tips, like what kind of arts and crafts we can do with the children, or some recipes for birthday cakes and so on."

Source: Own illustration.

the same brand loyalty (Gerny & Hehli, 2022). Therefore, in these families, *Migros* is deeply embedded in various practices. Importantly, *Migros* children are not children in terms of age. Rather, they are adult consumers. Thus, in the case of *Migros*, the brand remains embedded in practices even after the children have grown up, making this an especially compelling case to investigate the research question.

Findings

This paper finds that brands embed themselves in family practices by providing materials, fostering extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices, and imparting competences. Each aspect is presented in detail below.

Providing Materials for Practices

The data shows that *Migros* embeds itself in family practices by providing materials for these practices. Consider the following statement by Tony (30), whose family often gathers at a *Migros* restaurant on Sundays:

"It has become a tradition for us, a family gathering. If we went somewhere else for brunch every Sunday, it would be really expensive. [...] I often go there [to the Migros restaurant] with my parents and my brother and his wife. And we eat there together and it has become our place to be together."

Tony's family has started a tradition of going out for brunch at their local *Migros*

restaurant. The family does not live in a single household anymore as the children are grown up, and Tony's brother is married. Therefore, 'home' is no longer the default place for the family to be together. Their practice of 'eating together' has therefore been disrupted due to corporeal dynamics, i.e., the family no longer living in the same house. However, *Migros* enables them to reconfigure the practice elements to maintain the practice of 'eating together' ("... it has become our place to be together"). By providing these materials, *Migros* both lowers the barriers to enacting the practice and actively encourages the enactment. It lowers the barriers by being very affordable: Other places "would be really expensive" in the long run, thus prohibiting a frequent enactment of the practice. And it encourages the enactment of the practice of 'eating together' by providing physical materials such as large tables and flexible seating that allow five people to gather comfortably.

Migros thus provides the materials that Tony's family needs to reconfigure the practice of eating together. Importantly, in the process, the meaning of the practice ('being together') has attached itself to the materials, i.e., the *Migros* restaurant: It has become the family's "place to be together". Thus, *Migros* has become embedded in the family's practice of eating together by providing materials for enacting the practice, which in turn has led to the meaning of the practice being attached to *Migros*.

Brands can also take a more direct approach to inserting themselves into family practices by using targeted promotions. As the second quote in table 1 illustrates, by using promotions targeted at specific practices, brands ' earmark ' these materials for inclusion in this practice. In this example, *Migros* offers special vouchers on certain occasions, such as price promotions for birthday materials. Unlike Tony's family's practice of eating together, this family's birthday routine was not in need

of reconfiguration. Rather, through targeted promotions, *Migros* replaced some existing materials within the practice with its own, leading to *Migros*' inclusion in the practice of birthday parties.

Migros differs from other brands in that it provides more materials. Other brands, for instance, do not include restaurants in their supermarkets or use vouchers to insert materials into specific practices.

Fostering Extraordinary Meanings in Ordinary Practices

Migros also embeds itself in family practices by fostering extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices, as the following statement by Matteo (27) illustrates:

"When I was a child, grocery shopping was like a little trip. We used to go to Migros on Saturdays. The store had what seemed to me like a million different kinds of products.

And I would be asked to get a few things, so I would run around looking for them. It was like a treasure hunt. And I liked food, so it felt like paradise, because there was food everywhere. I felt like Scrooge McDuck in his vault, swimming in his money."

As Matteo describes, the mere act of grocery shopping was wondrous to him as the mundane practice of grocery shopping took on extraordinary meanings ('treasure hunt', 'paradise', 'Scrooge McDuck'). Within the ordinary practice of grocery shopping, he had an extraordinary experience because the store was like a playground for him. This led him to favor *Migros* over all other grocery stores and cemented the family's loyalty to the brand.

Migros does two things in particular to foster these meanings. One is to offer products and services that seem magical (i.e., carry extraordinary meanings) to children. As the interviews reveal, these materials and services are multifaceted. Respondents state that they were especially attracted to the toy aisles (as might be expected), but also to things such as flower stands, dry cleaning services, exotic fruit displays, and the buffet at the *Migros* restaurant. The key seems to be that there is a great variety of products and services on offer so that children can constantly discover new things (as underlined by quote three in table 1). The other aspect is that *Migros* keeps their product portfolio relatively stable and does not change the layout of the stores very often. As many respondents pointed out, they knew exactly where to find some of the products (e.g., yogurts, cookies, chips), which enabled them to participate in the grocery shopping process independently by picking up these products without their parents. This, in turn, enables further extraordinary meanings within the mundane practice of grocery shopping. As Carina (29) describes:

"At a certain age, I realized that we went grocery shopping every Saturday. And I thought,

Main Propositions

- 1 Consumers often incorporate brands into family practices.
- 2 This can be thought of as brand loyalty as practices encompass both attitudinal and behavioral aspects of brand loyalty, and consumers return to the brand each time they enact the practice.
- 3 Brands can use various methods to foster their inclusion in consumers' practices.
- 4 Brands can provide materials for practices, foster extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices, and impart competences to embed themselves in consumer practices.

'Cool, we go there to get food and I want to go along and help'. It was because mom and dad were doing it, and I wanted to do it too and be able to help. And so it turned into a family event because everyone was involved.'

As this quote illustrates, Carina's sense of independence in the process turned grocery shopping into a 'family event', thus imbuing the practice with special meaning.

Importantly, these meanings are closely associated with the enactment of the grocery shopping practice at Migros as it does not carry these meanings when respondents shop at other supermarkets. In contrast to Migros, other stores (such as Aldi, Lidl, and Denner) frequently change their assortment and layout or offer only a limited number of products and services and therefore offer limited potential for extraordinary experiences within ordinary practices. In these cases, grocery shopping remains mundane and

does not acquire any special meanings so that brands become interchangeable and brand loyalty is limited.

Imparting Competences

Migros also embeds itself in family practices by imparting competences. Consider this statement by Linda (28):

"I sent him [Linda's boyfriend] to Migros, because... Well, with Migros, I knew they have everything, and I told him, 'If you don't know something or can't find something, just ask the staff, they are super helpful'. [...] And really, Migros was just the easiest supermarket for him to go shopping on his own."

Linda lives with her boyfriend and usually does all the cooking and grocery shopping. During a period when she had less time to do so due to her job, her boyfriend started grocery shopping for

the household. At first, however, Linda's boyfriend did not know how to do the shopping, even when she made lists for him. Thus, he lacked competences to enact the practice of grocery shopping. However, Migros compensated for this lack of competences by teaching him through the staff: He was able to do the shopping successfully by asking the staff for directions. Thus, Migros embedded itself in the family practice of grocery shopping by imparting competences. In the process, it became a central element of the practice, as Linda's boyfriend could not enact the practice without it.

In addition to employing knowledgeable staff, Migros also imparts competences through communication channels. As the last quote in table 1 illustrates, Migros provides instructions for arts and crafts, baking cakes, and other ideas for family activities. By instructing parents and children how to do these activities, Migros imparts competences that enable family practices. By proving to be a good source of competences, Migros becomes central to these family practices because both parents and children return to Migros for inspiration and instruction when they are looking for a new activity.

In this aspect, too, Migros differs from other supermarket brands. Respondents describe that in supermarkets such as Aldi, Lidl, or Denner, the staff do not usually have specialized knowledge about which products are best for which recipes. Furthermore, these brands do not provide instructions for family practices via their communication channels.

Discussion And Implications

This paper shows that there are three ways in which brands can embed themselves in family practices: by providing materials, by fostering extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices, and by



Source: © Shutterstock.

imparting competences. As a result of all three avenues, the brand becomes deeply embedded in the family practice and benefits from the habituated enactment of the practice in the form of sustained loyalty.

There are subtle differences between these strategies: When brands provide materials or impart competences, they give consumers an essential building block for a practice, without which the practice could not be enacted. In contrast, when they foster extraordinary meanings in ordinary practices, they make the enactment of the practice something special for consumers when it takes place within the brand's universe. The practice could also be enacted using another brand (e.g., by shopping at a different supermarket), but it would not carry these special meanings that draw consumers back to the same brand again and again.

This paper has focused specifically on family practices because of their high potential for ensuring the long-term brand loyalty of several consumers at once. Yet, there are brands that are unable to enter family practices because they offer products that are unsuitable for children, such as brands in the alcohol or extreme sports industries, to name but two examples. However, there exist many other collective practices that may be open to such brands and that provide similar benefits in terms of brand loyalty. For instance, brands may insert themselves into the practices of subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), which form around particular consumption activities, such as skydiving (Celsi et al., 1993) or musical tastes (Hebdige, 1979). And, of course, individual practices are also open to brands (Fournier, 1998), although they have the drawback that they involve only one consumer, as opposed to a group of them, and are usually not transmitted to other people.

Therefore, it is crucial for brands to select the 'right' kinds of practices. Brand managers should consider both the meanings

they wish their brand to carry and the types of brand relationships they want to build with consumers. Research shows that a brand's association with a subculture may result in new brand meanings that are undesirable to mainstream consumers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Dietrich & Russell, 2021). Thus, when selecting practices, brands need to be careful not to alienate certain consumer groups. Furthermore, the type of practice a brand is involved in will also impact the kind of brand relationship it establishes with consumers. Being involved in very intimate practices, such as childcare, potentially fosters very close relationships with consumers but also carries the potential for negative consumer reactions if consumers feel the brand is invading private aspects of their lives (Epp & Velagaleti, 2014). In contrast, brands can also foster less intimate relationships by involving themselves in more functional but nevertheless central practices (Fournier, 1998).

When selecting practices, brand managers need to pay close attention to consumers' lives as they need to know what

practices these consumers engage in and what meanings these practices carry. Ideally, brands will insert themselves into practices filled with meanings that fit the brand. For example, consider the brand Red Bull: It embodies meanings of fun, sports, and adventure and has successfully inserted itself into practices surrounding extreme sports, which are a good fit because they carry similar meanings. In contrast, family practices would be a poor fit for Red Bull because its meanings are incompatible with family life.

Ultimately, brands can benefit greatly from involvement in consumer practices, as consumers will return to the brand whenever they enact the practice. Simultaneously, brands can foster the kinds of relationships they want with their consumers by selecting the kinds of practices they aim to embed themselves in.

Limitations and Future Research

While this paper provides insight into the ways in which brands can embed themselves in consumer practices, it does not quantify the monetary benefit for brands. Thus, future research could investigate how much brands can gain from embedding themselves in practices. Similarly, future research should also examine whether there are differences between the practices in terms of how beneficial they are to brands and rank them accordingly. Furthermore, this study answers the research question in the context of grocery shopping. However, the strategies open to brands may be different in other industries. It would therefore be instructive to examine the ways in which brands can embed themselves in consumer practices in other industries. Lastly, this paper has specifically looked at family practices, i.e., collective practices, so future research should also investigate how brands can embed themselves in individual consumer practices, as the ways to do so may differ. ■

Lessons Learned

- 1 Think about which practices your brand can be part of, depending on the services and products it offers.
- 2 Include all aspects of practices in your considerations – depending on your brand, think about the materials, meanings, and competences it can provide or impact.
- 3 Consider the type of relationship you want with your consumers and select the practices you associate your brand with accordingly.

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