A model of loyalty to services: an example from recreational riders in French riding schools

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Abstract:
Adopting a consumer’s behaviour marketing approach, the study questions the mechanisms of service loyalty to a sporting club in the field of horse riding. In a national context of high versatility of horse riders and of a recent drop in the number of French Equestrian Federation licensees, we are interested in riders’ relationship with their riding school. The loyalty concept has been widely studied in the literature. This study adopts a dynamic, relational and situational approach, assuming an influence of satisfaction, community and emotional commitments, trust and switching barriers on attitudinal loyalty. A quantitative survey conducted online in France among 630 riders (aged 15 and over, practicing in riding schools, and non-owners of horse(s)) enabled to build a structural equation model. This one shows that rider’s attitudinal loyalty to the club is directly influenced by their satisfaction, their relationship with their instructor, their community commitment toward their riding school, and switching barriers (that are perceived switching costs and the attractiveness of alternatives). Emotional commitment to the group of friends only influence community commitment. The results highlight the key role of the instructor in client satisfaction, community commitment, perceived switching costs and consequently in loyalty. In contrast to what we expected, the relationship with a specific horse does not directly influence attitudinal loyalty but increases perceived switching costs. The study also seems to underline a lack of customer knowledge about alternative offers. Multi group structural equation modelling points out differences according to the social profile of the rider. For instance, students and young workers are the only group whose attitudinal loyalty is influenced by switching costs. Another example is that community engagement does not seem to be important in older (and upper social class) clients’ attitudinal loyalty. Finally, these results provide evidence for equestrian structures to adapt their offer and communicate better to build customer loyalty.