The Boots Advantage Card: The ‘Advantage’ Of Customer Loyalty

AUTHORED BY:
Jason J. Turner                         Garry Robertson
Dundee Business School                  Dundee Business School
University of Abertay Dundee           University of Abertay Dundee

ABSTRACT
This exploratory research aims to examine the impact Boots Advantage Card has on the shopping behavior and loyalty of Boots customers towards Boots. Using questionnaires with a quota sample based on the variables of gender and age, a total of 200 Boots customers in Dundee, Scotland were questioned. Initial findings were that although all 200 respondents owned a Boots Advantage Card, the impact of the loyalty program on customer loyalty to Boots was not significant, instead playing a supporting role and part of the overall value proposition from Boots. This research provides insight into the loyalty of Boots customers, which is helpful to both academics and practitioners given the limited amount of research into one of the UK’s most successful loyalty programs, the Boots Advantage Card.

The phrase loyalty program suggests that they are an instrument designed to engender loyalty. However, as outlined by O’Malley (1998:47) the overriding aim of a loyalty program is “to reward customers repeat purchasing and encourage loyalty by providing targets at which various benefits can be achieved”. Essentially, loyalty programs offer financial incentives for continued patronage via a redeemable currency ¹ (Duffy, 2005; Roehm et al, 2002), usually expressed as a percentage of total spend per transaction. In the case of the Boots Advantage Card, respondents receive four points for every £1 spent in store or online (Boots, 2010). Encouraging redemption of this currency seems at odds with relationship marketing principals, appearing transactional rather than focused on building sustainable customer relationships which raises the question of whether loyalty programs are attempting to buy a superficial, spurious type of customer loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994) or simply rewarding customers who are already loyal (Clemmet, 1998).

Some academics argue loyalty based purely on behavior could see high levels of switching and an emphasis on continually trying to make the currency and personalized offering attractive to customers is not only costly but is engendering loyalty on the basis of incentives (Banasiewicz, 2005, Rowley, 2005ab, Bellizzi and Bristol, 2004, Uncles et al, 2003, Smith et al, 2003, McIlroy and Barrett, 2000, Evans, 1999, Wright and Sparks, 1999, Duffy, 1998, O’Malley, 1998, Dowling and Uncles, 1997, Sharp and Sharp, 1997, Rayer, 1996, Sopanen 1996ab and Hochman, 1992). Furthermore, should the competition match or improve upon the incentives, the firm could lose its competitive advantage and this could create further customer defection (Dowling and Uncles, 1997). Another issue surrounding the buying and rewarding of loyalty in general is customers may come to expect it (Duffy, 1998). Therefore, the impact of loyalty programs and the greater notion of rewarding loyalty may be nullified if it is perceived as the established norm (O’Malley, 1998;Passingham, 1998). This view is supported by Byrom (2001) who noted in his research that there are more than one hundred and fifty loyalty schemes in the UK alone, which has resulted in the circulation of more than forty million loyalty cards. In addition, Wright and Sparks (1999) and later Magi (2003) stated the average consumer in the UK owns around two loyalty cards which are used regularly. In other words, due to the market saturation of loyalty cards customers could experience “loyalty overload, causing customer confusion and apathy” (Tapp, 2001:253).

The context in which loyalty programs are discussed is one where the notion of loyalty creation is perhaps misguided, as customers may be inherently disloyal, therefore the emphasis for companies should be to prevent defections from those who give repeat patronage, as increasingly customer loyalty remains an unrealistic aspiration (Divett et al, 2003, Stokes and Lomax, 2002, Mazur, 1995). The ability of loyalty programs to engender loyalty is regularly debated in the literature with opinion divided on its capacity and role (Miranda and Konya, 2008, Noordhoff et al, 2004, Parker and Worthington, 2000). A proportion of the discussion has been couched in specific program contexts, with the Tesco Clubcard proving a popular focus (Turner,

¹The ‘currency’ referred to here may also be known as points based rewards (Clemmet, 1998). “Points are awarded to customers depending on how much they spend in a particular store. These points can then be redeemed for a discount on future purchases at the store in which they were earned” (Wright and Sparks, 1999:432).
2011, Rowley 2007, Turner and Wilson, 2006, Humby et al, 2003), perhaps as a consequence of the supermarkets position as the market leader in its industry (Liptrot, 2005) and Tesco’s status as having the most successful grocery loyalty program in the UK with 16 million members in 2009 (Anon, 2009). Such research concludes “although the Clubcard contributes to customer loyalty to Tesco...it does not operate in isolation” (Turner and Wilson, 2006:963). This emphasizes the need for a loyalty program to be not only integrated into the strategic marketing operations of a firm, but also highlights the importance of other aspects to customer loyalty such as branding, customer service, product range, quality and convenience (Rowley, 2005 ab, Aaker, 1996, Grönroos, 1990). As a result, perhaps the future long-term role of the loyalty program is “one element of a coherent value proposition” (O’Malley, 1998:55).

This research will investigate whether the same argument can be levied at the Boots Advantage Card, a leading loyalty programme which has over 16 million customers in 2009 (Benady, 2009). The Boots Advantage Card is one of the longer established loyalty programs within the U.K., having launched in 1997 (Shabi, 2003) with customers twice as likely to rank their satisfaction for the scheme as “excellent” than that of the nearest supermarket card, with 70% of all Boots transactions involving the use of an Advantage Card (Boots, 2006). For these reasons one could argue the Advantage Card is “one of the most successful CRM programs ever” (Temporal and Trott, 2001:144). Owned predominantly by women who are argued to be loyal than males (Turner, 2011, Ndubisi and Madu, 2009, Yavas and Babakus, 2009, Patterson, 2007, Ndubisi, 2006, Snipes et al, 2006, Harmon and Hill, 2003, Bendall-Lyon and Powers, 2002), this research aims to contribute to the loyalty card debate within the context of Boots and their Advantage Card and provide some insight into its role in customer loyalty to Boots.

**METHODOLOGY**

Over a four day period in December 2008 in Dundee, Scotland, 200 Boots customers were questioned, 100 males and 100 females across 5 age ranges, 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 and 55 and over. The sampling technique this paper adopted was a quota sample, used to provide a predetermined number of targets under specific categories or variables (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). This sampling technique was beneficial because Boots specifically target females aged 20 to 45 with their Advantage Card (Temporal and Trott, 2001). Therefore, due to Boots segmenting its customer base on the basis of gender and age, the sample approach allows this research to gain an even distribution of respondents across these variables to facilitate more statistically representative comparisons. For future research a quota sample will be designed around Boots Advantage Card ownership and non-ownership to further investigate its role in loyalty towards Boots.

The chosen method for data collection in this research was the questionnaire, selected because this instrument is useful for measuring different group’s opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Dillman, 2000). Included in the questionnaire were a mix of Likert scale questions, open-ended questions, hierarchy rank questions and best match questions to best ascertain customer opinion of Boots Advantage Card and the role it plays in customer’s loyalty to Boots.

**RESULTS**

In terms of age and gender, 20 males and 20 females were surveyed across 5 age ranges, 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 and 55 and over, with the majority (160, 77 males and 83 females) patronising Boots once every two weeks. Regarding other male responses, 13 patronized the store less than once every two weeks (all respondents were aged 16-24), 3 frequented the store twice every two weeks, 3 frequented the store three times every two weeks and 3 frequented the store more than three times every two weeks. Regarding the other female responses, 12 frequented the store twice every two weeks, 4 frequented the store more than three times every two weeks and one frequented the store less than once every two weeks. In other words the majority of customers patronized Boots once every week to two weeks regardless of age or gender.

Regarding household income, the majority of respondents (76 males and 74 females) earned more than £900 per month, lower income was most pronounced among the younger males and females. Unsurprisingly 15 males and 8 females aged 16-24 had the lowest income, less than £299 per month, 3 males and 12 females earned between £300 and £599 per month and 6 males and 6 females earned between £600 and £899 per month.

Boots proved to be the most popular brand in the health and beauty sector among respondents with 141 preferring Boots over its competitors. However preferring Boots does not equate to loyalty, an observation supported by the fact that 176 respondents (99 males and 77 females) would consider shopping at Superdrug for identical or comparable products and 116 (49 males and 67 females) respondents having purchased products from Superdrug over the past two weeks. Purchasing from Superdrug was on a lower frequency to their purchases from Boots with the majority
(109, 57 males and 52 females) patronising Superdrug less than once every two weeks. Only 55 respondents (30 males and 25 females) patronized Superdrug every two weeks. Respondent’s main reasons for patronising Boots main rival in the health and beauty sector were two-fold, convenience (cited by 90 respondents, 37 males and 53 females) and because Boots did not stock the products they wanted (cited by 69 respondents, 43 males and 26 females). Other reasons given by respondents surround service and quality of product which indicate that Boots customers are not necessarily loyal and patronize stores for a number of reasons.

**BOOTS ADVANTAGE CARD OWNERSHIP**

Prior to evaluating the influence of Boots Advantage Card, respondent’s levels of loyalty towards Boots were assessed. One hundred and ninety four respondents (100 males and 94 females) agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with Boots but only 97 (3 males and 94 females) agreed or strongly agreed they trusted Boots and as it can be observed from **Table 1** the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were loyal to Boots. The variables of age, gender and income were significant, the other tested variables, preference for Boots, Boots Advantage Card ownership, loyalty card ownership and frequency of shop were not significant in the responses. Respondents’ reasons for loyalty to Boots was not because of the Boots Advantage Card but rather the shopping experience (93 respondents), store layout (40 respondents) and product range and quality (30 respondents). Thirty respondents (30 males and only 1 female) did not consider themselves loyal to Boots.

When Boots customers were asked to rank in order of importance the factors they consider to be key influences on their loyalty to Boots convenience (12) and particularly sales promotions (88) were the most important factors for a female’s loyalty to Boots. Males were more divided on the issue, citing customer care (32), brand quality (24), convenience (21), Boots Advantage Card (11), sales promotions (10) and store layout (2) as the most important factors. No female selected Boots Advantage card as the most important factor, in fact 88 female respondents ranked the Boots Advantage Card as the least important factor on their loyalty. Regarding males, only 11 selected Boots Advantage Card as the most important with 42 indicating the loyalty card as the least important. These results provide some initial evidence that the role of the Boots Advantage Card is perhaps limited in terms of its importance to Boots customer’s loyalty to the organization and will analyzed in more depth in the next section of the paper.

The perceived value of the Boots Advantage Card to Boots customers can be divided into two categories, the first being in terms of its use and usability among Boots customers and the second being its influence on customer loyalty towards Boots. In terms of use, all 200 respondents indicated that they used their Boots Advantage Card because of the rewards or points. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the research was conducted with Boots customers, the Boots Advantage Card was owned by all 200 of the 200 respondents. This high level of ownership was reflected in the number of other loyalty cards owned by respondents with 59 males and 73 females owning 2 loyalty cards (one of which was the Boots Advantage Card). Of the remaining respondents, 32 males and 21 females owned 1 loyalty card which was the Boots Advantage Card and 9 males and 6 females owned 3 loyalty cards. In terms of use, 60 males and 41 females used their Boots Advantage Card very often, 17 males and 59 females always used their Boots Advantage Card and 23 males and no females used their loyalty card just when they remembered. An interesting observation to be made at this point is that females were most likely to ‘always’ use their loyalty card unprompted, indicating that there was some form of attachment to the card, whether this attachment was nothing more than convenience or incentive led will be analyzed in the remainder of the paper.

In terms of their rationale for using the Boots Advantage Card, responses can be grouped into three categories. The majority, 102 (28 males and 74 females) respondents, cited ‘I thought it was a good idea to reward my loyalty by receiving discounts’; 75 (66 males and 9 females) respondents cited ‘I was asked at the till to register and I agreed’; and 23 (6 males and 17 females) respondents cited ‘Somebody recommended the programme to me’. These responses indicate that the majority of males were arguably more passive in their accepting of the loyalty card, registering simply because they were asked to at the cash register. This is in line with the earlier point that around one quarter of

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**TABLE 1**

Statistics relating to loyalty to Boots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am loyal to Boots</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Number of those of Strongly Agree/Agreed</th>
<th>Percentage of agreement</th>
<th>Significant variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>Age = 0.000, Gender = 0.000, Income = 0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45 males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>96 females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1= Strongly Agree (SA), 2=Agree (A), 3=Neutral (N), 4=Disagree (D), 5=Strongly Disagree (SD)
male respondents only used their Boots Advantage Card when they remembered. Females were more likely to cite reasons for their adoption of the Boots Advantage Card which surrounded rewards and indicates that they understood the purpose of a loyalty programme. The latter point is underlined by the fact that the majority of respondents (6 males and 86 females) thought that the Boots Advantage Card was 'a mechanism which enables Boots to gather information about me which enables them to best meet my needs'. A further 71 males and 2 females thought the loyalty card was a promotional gimmick with the remaining 23 males and 12 females of the opinion that the 'Boots Advantage Card enables Boots to gather information about me so they can influence my spending'. All respondents were of the opinion that offers were both timely and appropriate. Similarly to previous responses, there is a clear divide between male and female responses with males perceiving the loyalty card as essentially a promotional gimmick and females of the opinion that the Boots Advantage Card was more than just a gimmick, it was an instrument which used customer data to satisfy their needs. These results indicate that the type of loyalty Boots customers have towards Boots Advantage Card is incentivized, an observation which requires further investigation and in the context of the loyalty card's role in a Boots customer’s shopping behavior.

**BOOTS ADVANTAGE CARD IMPACT ON SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR**

When the research evaluated the influence of Boots Advantage Card in respondent's shopping behavior towards Boots the majority of respondents (182 which included all females) stated that 'factors other than the Boots Advantage Card [proved] more influential on [their] loyalty to Boots'. The majority of respondents (118), again, particularly females, did not view the Boots Advantage Card as simply another loyalty scheme and were not particularly agreeable to adopting a loyalty card from a competitor, with only 90 agreeing or strongly agreeing (Table 2). However, its overall influence in a Boots customer’s loyalty is not particularly important with a minority of respondents (62, more males than females) agreeing that they would shop less frequently at Boots if the points were less and less than half the sample (96 respondents) would spend more in store if the points were higher. The majority of respondents (194) were either neutral or would remain loyal to Boots even if the Boots Advantage Card was discontinued and 124 respondents viewed the scheme as simply a promotion. Respondents would continue to patronize Boots even if the incentives were less and would not switch to a competitor if the loyalty programme were withdrawn. Although Boots customers appreciated the rewards it was not their main reason for patronising Boots, the Boots Advantage Card played a supporting role in influencing shopping behavior.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics relating to Boots Advantage Card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would shop less frequently at Boots if the points were lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would spend more in Boots if the points were higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Boots discontinued the Boots Advantage Card I would defect to a competitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boots Advantage Card is just the same as other loyalty cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors other than the Boots Advantage Card are more influential in my loyalty to Boots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boots Advantage Card is just another promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a rival to Boots offered a loyalty card I would adopt it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1= Strongly Agree (SA), 2=Agree (A), 3=Neutral (N), 4=Disagree (D), 5=Strongly Disagree (SD)

**BOOTS ADVANTAGE CARD IMPACT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

Similarly to questions pertaining to the value of Boots Advantage Card in a customer’s shopping behavior towards Boots in Table 2, the variables income and particularly age and gender proved significant when we examine statements relating to the nature of customer loyalty to Boots Advantage Card (Table 3). There was high level of disagreement to the question 'Boots Advantage Card is the main influence behind my loyalty to Boots', with only 16 respondents...
TABLE 3
Statistics relating to Boots Advantage Card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Number of those of Strongly Agreed/Agreed</th>
<th>Percentage of agreement</th>
<th>Significant variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boots Advantage Card is the main influence behind my loyalty to Boots</td>
<td>N = 16 (9 males, 7 females)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Gender = 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boots Advantage Card enhances my satisfaction towards Boots</td>
<td>N = 177 (80 males, 97 females)</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>Gender = 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boots Advantage Card enhances my trust towards Boots</td>
<td>N = 53 (4 males, 49 females)</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Age = 0.000, Gender = 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend the Boots Advantage Card to other Boots customers</td>
<td>N = 101 (5 males, 96 females)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>Age = 0.000, Gender = 0.000, Income = 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boots Advantage Card is the main reason for shopping at Boots</td>
<td>N = 16 (9 males, 7 females)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Gender = 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boots Advantage Card enhances my attitude towards Boots</td>
<td>N = 129 (48 males, 81 females)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Age = 0.000, Gender = 0.000, Income = 0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1= Strongly Agree (SA), 2=Agree (A), 3=Neutral (N), 4=Disagree (D), 5=Strongly Disagree (SD)

Advantage Card was their main reason for patronising Boots. These results indicate that the Boots Advantage Card is not the main influence behind customer’s loyalty but it may indeed play a role in a customer’s loyalty towards Boots or at least is something which is valued by Boots customers, which is supported by our earlier scoring of the Boots Advantage Card in contrast to other factors which influence customer loyalty to Boots.

DISCUSSION
This exploratory research investigated the impact Boots Advantage Card has on the shopping behavior and loyalty of Boots customers towards Boots, contributing to existing knowledge on the role of loyalty programs (Banasiwicz, 2005, Rowley, 2005 ab, Uncles et al, 2003, Smith et al, 2003, McIlroy and Barrett, 2000, Evans, 1999, Wright and Sparks, 1999, O’Malley, 1998, Dowling and Uncles, 1997, Rayer, 1996 and Hochman, 1992). Although both males and females (141) were of the opinion that Boots was their preferred health and beauty retailer, they still patronized and purchased products from other retailers, most notably Superdrug. Boots Advantage Card enhanced respondent’s satisfaction and attitude towards Boots with females the most likely to be loyal to Boots and recommend the card to others. However, the research found that the Boots Advantage Card was not the main reason for their loyalty to Boots with only 11 males and no females citing this as a reason for loyalty to Boots. Sales promotions (98, 88 of which were female), convenience (33), customer service (32, all male) and product quality (24, all male) were perceived as more important. Thirty respondents, 30 males and only 1 female did not consider themselves loyal to Boots. Usage of the card was incentive led with all 200 respondents indicating that they used their Boots Advantage Card because of the rewards or points and was not deemed to increase spend or frequency of visit. Of the variables tested for significance, only income and more frequently gender and age proved significant, with a preference for Boots, frequency of shop, ownership of the Boots Advantage Card and loyalty card ownership in general not significant variables. In other words the Boots Advantage Card plays a supporting role in a respondent’s loyalty to Boots with respondents using the loyalty card because of convenience and incentives.

Of the 200 respondents questioned, all respondents owned a Boots Advantage Card, where the older the individual the more likely they were to own more than one loyalty card and females being more likely to own more than one loyalty card than males. Overall 147 respondents owned 2 or more loyalty cards which are in line with existing research.
specifically the work of Magi (2003) which revealed 49% of survey participants possessed at least two loyalty cards and Miranda and Konya (2008:44) who revealed “about three quarters of the [sampled] respondents claiming membership”. Although the majority of males (77) indicated frequent use of their Advantage Card, 23 showed an ‘indifference’ towards usage, i.e. using the card when they remembered. In contrast all 100 females used the Boots Advantage Card ‘very often’ or ‘always’. These results indicate that although ownership was high, ownership does not necessarily mean sentiment or loyalty and as argued by Humby et al, (2003) and Mazur (1995) such a relationship could be susceptible to the criticism of a ‘zero sum game’. As a result of the number of loyalty programs in operation in the UK, according to Byrom et al (2001), the number of members is more than 40 million, their capacity to engender behavioral, let alone attitudinal loyalty is diminished (Noordhoff et al, 2004). According to Parker and Worthington (2000:490) “if shoppers are rewarded for their loyalty in all stores, then there is no reason to be loyal to any one in particular”.

When the responses pertaining to the role of the Boots Advantage Card in a customer’s loyalty towards Boots are assessed, it is clear that the scheme is not particularly influential, neither increasing in-store spend or store patronage. The Boots Advantage Card could be viewed simply as a medium which moves customers “along a relationship chain from casual shoppers and disloyal consumers to real brand loyalists, where they get stuck in what we call a ‘spin cycle’ of shopping frequently and responding to offers” (Shabi, 2003:7). Although all respondents thought the offers were both timely and appropriate, and they, particularly females, agree that Boots Advantage Card enhances their satisfaction and attitude towards Boots, it is not the most important antecedent in a customer’s loyalty to Boots, in fact 88 females and 42 males ranked the Boots Advantage card as the least important factor in their loyalty to Boots. No correlation was found between Boots Advantage Card and increased attitudes or satisfaction towards Boots. Respondents disagreed with the statement that the Boots Advantage Card enhanced their trust in Boots, with no respondent ranking the card as the most important variable in their loyalty to Boots and only females demonstrated a willingness to recommend the card to others. This is underlined by the fact that the majority of respondents would not switch to a competitor if the loyalty card was withdrawn. Males largely exhibited an indifference towards the Boots Advantage Card in terms of usage, attitudes, referrals and response to changes in the returns offered, viewing the schemes as simply another loyalty programme, a ‘gimmick’, which offers rewards in exchange for patronage (Bellizzi and Bristol, 2004, Harmon and Hill, 2003, O’Malley, 1998) and would remain loyal to Boots even if the scheme was discontinued. In other words, the loyalty of males is essentially spurious (Dick and Basu, 1994) because they had a relatively strong indication of repeat purchase but a weak attitude towards the Boots Advantage Card overall.

Females in contrast to males, exhibited stronger levels of agreement towards the Boots Advantage Card in terms of usage and how it compares to other loyalty cards. The majority of females (75) did not perceive the Boots Advantage Card as ‘just another loyalty card’ nor did the majority of females (61) view it as ‘just another promotion’. In terms of referrals, females on average suggested they would recommend the Advantage Card programme to other
people, with the 16 to 24 age category in particular “very likely” to do so. This illustrates that the attitude among females had to have a level of positivity that would likely encourage referrals (Stokes and Lomax, 2002). To support a relationship between loyalty and referrals, a correlation was conducted using Spearman’s rho which revealed a weak positive correlation among female loyalty and the likelihood to recommend the Boots Advantage Card to others (p=0.008, r=0.265). However, despite these favorable views females exhibited weak attitudes towards the Boots Advantage Card in terms of its capacity to build loyalty and increase spend and frequency of visit to Boots. Females valued factors other than the loyalty programme as impacting on their loyalty, namely convenience and sales promotions. All 100 female respondents either ranked the loyalty card 7th out of 8 variables (12) or 8th out of 8 variables (88) as influencing their loyalty towards Boots. No correlation was identified between the Boots Advantage Card and loyalty to Boots. When female respondents were asked if withdrawing the Boots Advantage Card would encourage the customers to defect, the majority of females (99) said that would be “very unlikely”, these results combine to indicate that the Boots Advantage Card is not a prime factor behind female customer loyalty to Boots. Similarly to male respondents, the type of loyalty exhibited towards Boots Advantage Card was essentially spurious because, even though a positive attitude exists, the ability of the card in isolation to strengthen female attitudes towards the firm remains limited.

The research revealed a gender difference with females more likely to always use their Boots Advantage Card unprompted and have a more ‘positive’ perception of the loyalty programme, i.e. of the opinion that the loyalty card was an instrument which used customer data to satisfy their needs and not simply a promotional gimmick. Such gender differences are not uncommon in the loyalty literature (Turner, 2011, Ndubisi and Madu, 2009, Yavas and Babakus, 2009, Patterson, 2007, Ndubisi, 2006, Snipes et al, 2006, Harmon and Hill, 2003, Bendall-Lyon and Powers, 2002). However both males and females are in agreement that they use the Boots Advantage Card because of incentives and convenience and would neither spend nor frequent the store more if the points were increased or decreased. This research identified that respondents valued the loyalty programme as a means of reward but not as vehicle to make them more loyal to Boots. Rather, the Boots Advantage Card was “one element of a coherent value proposition” (O’Malley, 1998:55).

CONCLUSION
The Boots Advantage Card is one of the most subscribed loyalty schemes in the U.K, yet little research has been conducted on its impact on customer loyalty. This exploratory research found that Boots was the preferred brand in the health and beauty sector by 141 respondents and all 200 Boots customers owned and used the Boots Advantage Card for the rewards/points. Regarding respondent perceptions of the Boots Advantage Card, customers, particularly females, agreed that they always used their Advantage Card but were less agreeable reference its capacity to influence their loyalty to store, their in store spend and frequency of visit. Only 16 agree or strongly agreed that Boots Advantage Card influenced their loyalty to Boots, with 62 (42 males and 20 females) agreeing they would patronize Boots less if the points were lower and 96 (52 males and 44 females) agreeing they would spend more if the points were increased. The majority of respondents (194) would not defect if Boots withdrew their loyalty card. Respondents did however all agree that the offers from Boots Advantage Card were timely and appropriate. Respondents appreciated the rewards from the Boots Advantage Card but were loyal to Boots because of convenience and sales promotions and not loyalty card incentives. Such data points towards Boots Advantage Card being limited in its ability to engender loyalty. Of the variables tested for significance, only income and more frequently gender and age proved significant, with a preference for Boots, frequency of shop, ownership of the Boots Advantage Card and loyalty card ownership in general not significant variables. Overall, it would be fair to conclude that although Boots Advantage Card does play a role in influencing satisfaction and attitude towards Boots it is more of a contributory role, where the rewards alone do not impact significantly on the shopping behavior and loyalty of Boots customers.
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