

## Building Retail Advocacy: The Case of Pakistani FMCG Sector

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### ABSTRACT

The foremost purpose of this paper is to unearth imperative factors that upkeep to enhance retail advocacy. This will help companies to be more focused and make them able to communicate with retailers more effectively. The aim of retail advocacy is to convey right message through interacting with target consumers inside the retail outlet. It brings closer the company and retailer in order to achieve conjoint beneficial business relationships. Self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data from 214 retailers. Stratified sampling technique was used and retailers were divided into three categories. Data was collected from eight cities of Pakistan. Correlation and regression were used for data analysis. This study has found that consumer retailer relationship is more prominent factor for retail advocacy whereas retailer background, consumer resistance, and incentive schemes are insignificant factors for retail advocacy. Outcomes of retail advocacy could not be explored like trial generation, brand availability/visibility, entry barriers for new entrants, achievement of desired business results, competitive edge, and loyal business relations. Consequently, these outcomes can be probed in future studies. Retail advocacy is relatively a newfangled concept particularly in Pakistani business environment. Tobacco companies are currently been actively involved in generating retail advocacy. Rudimentary purpose of this study is to make retailer as an advocate primarily for those companies' brands whom cannot directly communicate their messages to consumers.

**KEYWORDS:** Retail advocacy, merchandising material, consumer retailer relationship, FMCG sector

**Paper type:** Research paper

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Retail advocacy is relatively a novel phenomenon particularly for Pakistani business environment. This concept was originated when government of Pakistan embargo the tobacco advertising. Except retail outlets, consumers' touch points are diminished after this restraint. Tobaccos companies emphasized to trained and motivate retailers to play a role as a brand ambassador. Majority companies are currently been actively involved in generating retail advocacy. The rudimentary purpose is to convince retailers for their favorable attitude pertaining companies' brand. Due to this they may able to communicate the message to right consumer in an effective way. The reason for choosing tobacco industry is that this industry has initiated the concept of retail advocacy first time in Pakistan.

At present, companies are facing strong challenges for the need of continuous growth and profit. Marketing environment is changing rapidly and expectations of both stakeholders as well as consumers are becoming more demanding. In the shadow of ever-increasing consumers' expectations it is evident that retail environment plays a vibrant role in one to one communication. There are many tobacco companies those deemed as socially irresponsible or getting darker due to regulatory constraints. This has made it difficult for these companies to communicate with their consumers in an effective manner. Same as for other fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) where consumers have lost their trust and interest in advertising campaigns and they rely more on retailer's communication.

In today's competitive arena, when there is fierce competition among different FMCG companies, it has become imperious to make retailer as an advocate of brands. This will enable companies to have better understanding about consumer needs and develop marketing programs accordingly. Hereafter, basic purpose is to transform retailer into company's ambassador. Trained retailers advocate companies 'brands with updated knowledge are key element of retail advocacy.

This is relatively new concept that has not been addressed formerly it will help in achieving following benefits for companies: achieve desired business results, improve retail relationships, address out of stock or brand availability issues, curb illicit trade, implement trade loyalty programs, win consumer loyalty, placement of merchandising material and some others. Companies can meet their needs in a better way than competitors by building long-lasting relationships with consumers that increases the likelihood of creating loyal consumer base.

Retail advocacy is two way interactions between retailer and target consumer to create a measurable impact on consumer loyalty.

Indeed there is need to focus on right consumers with right brand portfolio at right outlets by utilizing the most efficient communication channels to enhance business success particular in FMCG sector. The purpose of this research is to excavate antecedents of retail advocacy as well as to check relative impact of these factors on retail advocacy.

This study comprised of eight sections. In which next second section is related to literature review. Third section is pertinent to research methodology and fourth is related to data analysis & results. Furthermore, hypotheses' discussion is in fifth section as well as sixth section is encompassed of managerial and academic implications. In addition to this, limitations and future directions of this study are discussed in seventh section along with conclusion in last section.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Retail advocacy:** Retail advocacy is primarily enforcing positive buying recommendations to consumers for certain products and services [23,22]. It revolves around the retailers' skills and wills. Communicating positive word of mouth for suppliers of products/services is a unique area for investigation [1]. It is all about communication for the purpose of products and services evaluation from supplier to customer in retail store settings [14,49,57]. The conspicuous results of advocacy are customer's loyalty and repurchase decision [32,47]. It is essential where all consumers and manufacturers touch points are diminished except retailers. There are certain factors that predict the strength of retail advocacy including merchandising material, incentive schemes, consumers' resistance, customer services, retailer background, and consumer retailer relationship.

**Merchandising material:** Merchandising material is the advertising material that companies are using for promotional efforts. The advantage of merchandising material is to convey brand message easily and efficiently that provides an indication about product availability at retail store. Merchandising material enhances image of retail store that entertain, inform, and educate consumers [6]. It substantially helps to retailers for brand message communication to consumers. Retail outlets' sponsored by manufacturers to encourage and accommodate authorized retailers, are being considered as an important factor contributing to image-building of retail store [6]. Moreover, merchandising material considerably facilitate retailers while convincing consumers toward a particular brand.

H<sub>1</sub>: Merchandising material significantly enhances retail advocacy.

**Incentive schemes:** Retailer plays an indispensable role as a selling agent on the behalf of manufacturer. Incentive schemes introduced by manufacturer are significant factor to enhance retailers' efforts for their products [33]. Retailer communicate to consumer that salespeople are providing unbiased support to manufacturers' products and services [9]. Incentive schemes are momentous stimulator for sales push in retail settings. These enforce retailers to give brand message on primacy basis. Financial incentives motivate retailer's behavior and intentions to push sales up [15]. Consequently, incentive scheme is overriding factor towards retail advocacy.

H<sub>2</sub>: Incentive schemes significantly enhances retail advocacy

**Retailer background:** Retailer background is referred as: retailers' education, knowledge, experience, attitude, and communication. These characteristics collectively determine retailers' willingness to market the manufacturers' products in which they are dealing. Frontline personals must equip with an ample knowledge and skills to listen consumers more keenly and handle their problems wisely [7]. This can only happen when retailers have sound interpersonal skills. Additionally, frontline personnel should have neat and clean appearance [36]. On the other hand, effective and vibrant brand message communication is vital for easy consumer understanding. Positive retailer attitude develops a comfort zone for consumer as well as attracts them to revisit. Retailers' polite behavior and appropriate knowledge put resilient positive impact on retailer consumer communication. Retailer background collectively examines retailer's personality that further leads toward retail advocacy.

H<sub>3</sub>: Retailer background significantly enhances retail advocacy

**Customer services:** Customer services play a vigorous role in attracting and retaining customers. In this study customer services reveal those services that provided retailers through manufacturers. Quality customer services involve an understanding of what a customer wants and buys as well as determine how additional values can be added in products and services being offered [6]. Customers whom experience high level of service satisfaction become loyal customers[46] that eventually enhance brand advocacy [5]. Providing inconsistent services resented customers that will enhance intension to leave [45]. Services provided by suppliers are enhancing their motivation towards positive word of mouth.

H<sub>4</sub>: Customer services significantly enhances retail advocacy

**Consumer resistance:** According to Bearden *et al.* [8], some consumers keep their own protective behavior to stay with own opinion while selection of any product and dislike to listen retailer point of view about certain goods or

service. Consumer resistance arises from certain factors including: usage barriers, value barriers, image barriers, and traditional barriers. With these barriers consumers do not even think out of the box to protect their individual stance [48]. Some consumers do not even bother to hear retailers point of view and discourage them when they spread brand message. As a result, retailers do not willingly convince consumers toward a particular brand where resistance is prevailing.

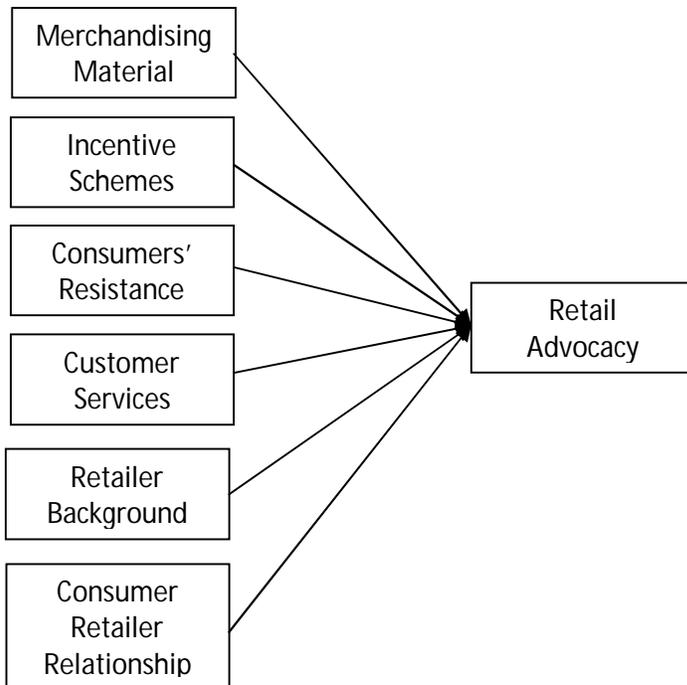
H<sub>5</sub>: Consumer resistance significantly decreases retail advocacy

**Consumer retailer relationship:** Consumer-retailer-relationship is a triangle among company’s product-retailer-consumer. Brand message communication is easy for retailers where friendly and loyal relations between retailer and consumer are subsisting. Retailers ensure attractive ways to build strong relationship with consumers [21]. Consumer loyalty enriched the relationship to stay with company’s products. Frequent buying of particular company products from certain retailer make consumers more valuable for retailers that make consumers less prices sensitive. It brings new shoppers with positive word of mouth. Retailers can easily and effectively communicate brand message if they have good relations with consumers.

H<sub>6</sub>: Consumer retailer relationship significantly enhances retail advocacy

H<sub>7</sub>: Retail advocacy is significantly vary on the basis of retailer education and their position/designation

**Research Model**



**3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research designs vary in terms of researcher interference level[51].Research design is needed since it facilitates smooth sailing of various research operations for making research as efficient as possible that yield maximum information with minimal cost of efforts, time, and money.

**Instrument development:** Questionnaire was used for data collection. Scale for one dependent and six independent variables were self-developed. Instrument was developed on five point Likert scale (strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree=5). It was comprised of 54 items in which five are related to demographics of respondents and rests are allied with seven constructs. For the development of instrument, took help from academic and industrial experts as well as extensive literature review was employed. Three face to face interviews and three focus groups were conducted for developing the instrument from people whom are practicing retail advocacy.

In validity, a particular measure would be considered as valid if it measures what is supposed to be measured [4]. Content validity is measured through domain experts or practitioners [28, 29]. For content and face validity two practitioners were selected whom practically working in retail advocacy. Furthermore, three academicians: two PhD doctors and one assistant professor of marketing were selected for this purpose. In face validity, formatting, sentence

structure, spelling mistakes, and language errors were observed. The purpose of content validity is to examine that up to what extent items are addressing the dimensions of a particular construct [13].

**Data collection methods:** Primarily 300 questionnaires were distributed, from which 214 were collected and used as a suitable sample. Response rate for this study was 71%. It was fewer since most of retailers are uneducated as well as they do not show willingness in giving their opinions due to less knowledge and their busy schedule. Sample size of 214 was calculated by employing population proportion formula [2]: 95% confidence interval was employed with 50% probability of successive event and 4.8% margin of error [11].

Stratified sampling technique was used for data collection as data was collected from eight cities of Pakistan in which retailers were divided into three categories (see table 1). As population frame for this study are those retailers whom selling cigarette products. Furthermore, retailers were classified into big grocery stores (A-category), general stores (B-category), and small local stores (kiriyana stores; C-category). Unit of analysis for this cross sectional study is individual retailer. Demographics of respondents presented in table 1. Data normality was checked through skewness and kurtosis; as values of all variables are within suggested range that is  $\pm 1$  [30].

**Table 1 Demographic Analysis**

Variable	Categories	Percent	Variable	Categories	Percent
<b>Retailer's status</b>	Owner	45.8	Location	Faisalabad	11.3
	Partner	9.4		Gujranwala	29.2
	Manager	26.9		Sialkot	12.3
	Salesman	17.9		Gujarat	10.8
<b>Education</b>	Middle	12.7	Classification	Wazirabad	7.1
	Matric	30.2		Lahore	5.7
	Intermediate	20.8		Islamabad	2.4
	Graduate	31.1		Rawalpindi	21.2
<b>Business Exp.</b>	Average	6-years	Grocery Store	20.4	
			General Store	31.4	
<b>Staff</b>	Average	8-people	Local Store	48.2	

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

**Reliability, factor analysis and validity:** Beforehand formally conducting data analysis there is indispensable to examine either instrument is used for data collection is reliable and free from errors or otherwise [41]. To examine this, different methods were carried out i.e. validity (discussed in previous section), reliability, and factor analysis.

Inter item consistency (cronbach's alpha) was applied to check either all items are internally consistent [51]. Literature suggested that scores of cronbach's alpha must be greater than 0.60 [38, 39] but some studies suggested that scores greater than 0.50 are also acceptable and satisfactory [26,42,50]. In table 2, retailer background has middling degree of common factor i.e. vale of cronbach's alpha is 0.735 whereas all other factors has mediocre degree of common factor that is 0.514 to 0.684.

**Table 2 Reliability Analysis (Internal Consistency)**

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	No. of items
Retail advocacy	0.677	3
Merchandising material	0.658	7
Incentive schemes	0.514	4
Consumer's resistance	0.684	3
Customer service	0.682	6
Retailer background	0.735	6
Consumer retailer relationship	0.608	6

Exploratory factor analysis is simply trying to mathematically derive a relative small number of variables used to convey as much of the information in the measured variable as possible [30]. Two assumptions for factor analysis: KMO and Bartlet. KMO tells the sampling adequacy i.e. number of items that measure a construct are sufficient and bartlet test examine either all items of a particular construct are correlated. The suggested value of KMO is greater than 0.60 and bartlet test should be significant at 5% [43]. Factor analysis was carried out with the extraction of principal component analysis along with verimax rotation and factor loads on the basis of eigen value. In table 3, KMO values are greater than 0.60 and bartlet test is significant for all constructs.

Variance explained show that how much variance is explained by a particular factor. Scores of variance explained for all variables in beneath table are greater than 33% in which retail advocacy carry 61% that is

reasonable good. In last step, variation explained by items of respective variables was examined that how much each items loaded on their respective factor. Literature suggested that loading scores of every item should be greater than 0.40[31,18, 24]. Loading scores of all items in underneath table are greater than 0.40 that lies in acceptable range.

**Table 3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (Loading Scores)**

S. No.	RA	MM	IS	CR	CS	RB	CRR
1	0.813	0.627	0.727	0.742	0.596	0.613	0.610
2	0.735	0.595	0.612	0.789	0.642	0.613	0.559
3	0.792	0.607	0.583	0.804	0.699	0.634	0.581
4		0.684	0.636	0.508	0.694	0.656	0.438
5		0.548			0.621	0.732	0.679
6		0.512			0.484	0.687	0.614
7		0.426					
<b>KMO</b>	0.654	0.679	0.604	0.690	0.751	0.767	0.719
<b>Bartlet</b>	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Variance Explained</b>	60.94%	33.25%	41.20%	51.96%	39.29%	43.20%	34.07%

Note. (MM= Merchandising material, IS= Incentive schemes, CR=Consumer resistance, CS= Customer services, RB= Retailer background, CRR= Consumer retailer relationship)

AMOS 16.0 was used to carry out the confirmatory factor analysis. It examines the relationship between manifest and latent variable [52, 44]. Previous studies suggested that loading scores of every item should be significantly greater than 0.40[17] as well as greater than 0.30 is also acceptable [26]. In table 4, loading scores of all items are significantly greater than 0.40 except few items those having values significantly less than 0.40 but greater than 0.30.

**Table 4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Loading Scores)**

S. No.	RA	MM	IS	CR	CS	RB	CRR
1	0.729	0.540	0.660	0.640	0.471	0.499	0.475
2	0.545	0.472	0.469	0.701	0.542	0.492	0.415
3	0.661	0.466	0.332	0.698	0.620	0.668	0.454
4		0.611	0.388	0.351	0.627	0.604	0.317
5		0.452			0.485	0.542	0.583
6		0.411			0.359	0.574	0.493
7		0.316					

For construct validity, variable should be uni-dimensional [35]. According to [25], construct consider as uni-dimensional if value of GFI is 0.90 or greater. In table 5, scores of GFI for all constructs lies within suggested range. Consequently, construct validity has achieved for all constructs. Convergent validity was examined by using NFI scores that should be closed to 0.90 [12] as well as greater than 0.80 is also considered reasonable good since it is near to 0.90 [3]. In beneath table 5, scores of NFI for all constructs are closed to 0.90 or greater except merchandising material. Therefore, convergent validity was achieved for all constructs except merchandising material. According to Guroy *et al.*[19], discriminant validity was examined by using CMIN/df and CMIN (p-value). The value of CMIN/df should be closed to three and p-value of Chi-square should be significant. Values of all constructs in given table lies within acceptable range that exhibit discriminant validity has achieved.

To observe the fitness of measurement model plethora of indices are available but most common global fits are presented in given table. All global fits lies within acceptable range excepting few ones. The suggested scores for all global fits are:CMIN/p>0.05, CMIN/df close to 3, GFI>0.90, AGFI>0.90, NFI>0.90, CFI>0.90, RMR<0.05, RMESA<0.10 [27,24, 12]. Model cannot be considered optimal fit if all global fit indices do not lie within suggested range but contemplated an acceptable model [26].

**Table 5 Measurement model fit indices**

Construct	CMIN (P-value)	(P-)	CMIN/df	RMR	GFI	NFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
<b>RA</b>	0.002		0.918	0.019	0.980	0.930	0.972	1.000	0.060
<b>MM</b>	0.000		3.271	0.045	0.944	0.759	0.888	0.812	0.104
<b>IS</b>	0.013		4.330	0.026	0.979	0.856	0.900	0.887	0.126
<b>CR</b>	0.010		4.604	0.051	0.978	0.940	0.892	0.951	0.131
<b>CS</b>	0.031		2.043	0.032	0.972	0.900	0.934	0.942	0.070
<b>RB</b>	0.001		3.225	0.047	0.957	0.877	0.901	0.910	0.103
<b>CRR</b>	0.242		1.279	0.024	0.982	0.900	0.958	0.974	0.036

**Correlation and regression analysis:** Indeed correlation tells the strength and direction among variables [2]. In table 6, correlation among all variables is presented. Correlation of all independent variables with dependent variable is significantly weak positive except consumer resistance. Consumer resistance is negatively related with retail advocacy but insignificantly.

**Table 6 Correlation Analysis**

	M	S.D	RA	MM	IS	CR	CS	RB	CRR
<b>RA</b>	4.25	0.47	1.00						
<b>MM</b>	4.11	0.45	0.45**	1.00					
<b>IS</b>	4.18	0.45	0.34**	0.52**	1.00				
<b>CR</b>	2.98	0.77	-0.12	-0.38**	-0.28**	1.00			
<b>CS</b>	4.15	0.51	0.44**	0.68**	0.61**	-0.29**	1.00		
<b>RB</b>	3.95	0.57	0.26**	0.58**	0.38**	-0.29**	0.51**	1.00	
<b>CRR</b>	4.12	0.45	0.45**	0.53**	0.41**	-0.20**	0.49**	0.40**	1.00

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . (MM= Merchandising material, IS= Incentive schemes, CR=Consumer resistance, CS= Customer services, RB= Retailer background, CRR= Consumer retailer relationship)

**Assumptions of ordinary least square model:** Before developing ordinary least square (OLS) model there is need to check the imperative assumptions since OLS cannot be applied if some of the assumptions are not fulfilled. As this study is based on cross sectional data, all assumptions for this type of data have examined. Before applying OLS following assumptions have checked and results are found satisfactory; linearity in the parameters, covariance/correlation between error term and X's is zero, zero mean value of disturbance term ( $\mu$ ), number of observations must be greater than estimated parameters ( $n > k$ ), variance of explanatory variables are not equal to zero, no specification bias, multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity [20].

After examine all the assumptions of OLS, next step is to run regression analysis by using SPSS 19.0. Regression analysis is presented in underneath table 7. Merchandising material significantly enhances retail advocacy that supports the first hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.238$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ). Beta coefficient demonstrates that by increasing one unit in merchandising material retail advocacy would be significantly enhanced by 0.238 units. Incentive schemes insignificantly enhances retail advocacy ( $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $p$ -value  $> 0.05$ ). Consequently, this result leads to rejection of second hypothesis. Consumer resistance enhances retail advocacy but insignificantly that leads to rejection of third hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.040$ ,  $p$ -value  $> 0.05$ ). Moreover, customer services significantly enhances retail advocacy that supports fourth hypothesis of this study ( $\beta = 0.165$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ). Retail advocacy insignificantly decreases by retailer background that leads the rejection of fifth hypothesis ( $\beta = -0.057$ ,  $p$ -value  $> 0.05$ ). In addition to this, consumer retailer relationship significantly enhances retail advocacy ( $\beta = 0.278$ ,  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ). Consumer retailer relationship is more influencing factor for retail advocacy among all other constructs.

Coefficient of determination tells the model fitness as well as how much all independent variables collectively explain the dependent variable[2]. The value of  $R^2$  is 0.289 which demonstrate that model is best fitted at 28.9% or all independent variables collectively explain the dependent variable by mentioned percentage. The  $p$ -value of  $f$ -distribution exhibits the significance of model fitness.

**Table 7 Regression Weights**

	Estimate	S.E.	t	Sig.	Hypothesis
<b>Constant</b>	1.341	0.396	3.387	0.001	
<b>MM</b>	0.238	0.096	2.478	0.014	Support
<b>IS</b>	0.050	0.080	0.623	0.534	Not Support
<b>CR</b>	0.040	0.039	1.035	0.302	Not Support
<b>CS</b>	0.165	0.084	1.964	0.50	Support
<b>RB</b>	-0.057	0.061	-0.945	0.346	Not Support
<b>CRR</b>	0.278	0.075	3.692	0.000	Support

Note:  $R^2 = 0.289$ ;  $F(6, 205) = 13.911$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . (MM= Merchandising material, IS= Incentive schemes, CR=Consumer resistance, CS= Customer services, RB= Retailer background, CRR= Consumer retailer relationship)

**Analysis of variance:** Beforehand formally conducting ANOVA, two obligatory assumptions were examined i.e. normality and homogeneity of variance [34]. Normality is checked in previous section and homogeneity of variance is checked through leven test of statistic. This assumption is fulfilled if leven test result is insignificant. Scores of leven test for both educational background and retailer position are insignificant.

In table 8, one-way ANOVA test revealed that retail advocacy significantly varies according to retailer educational background. Results demonstrate that retailers having matric education are more advocate the brand

whereas retailers having middle educational background less advocate the brand as compared to those who have different educational background. Furthermore, sole outlet owners advocate the brands more but partners are less advocates the brands as compared with salesman and managers. Probability values reveal the significant difference among all categories of each variable. Therefore, last hypothesis of this study is accepted.

**Table 8** Retail advocacy - education and retailer position comparison

Variable	Category	RA (Mean)	Variable	Category	RA (Mean)
Education	Below Middle	4.16	Position	Owner	4.38
	Middle	4.01		Partner	3.99
	Matric	4.39		Manager	4.19
	Intermediate	4.31		Salesman	4.13
	Graduate	4.18		F-value	6.20
	Master	4.30		P-value	0.00
	F-value	3.20			
	P-value	.008			

Note: RA= Retail advocacy; 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree

## 5. DISCUSSION

In first hypothesis, positive impact of merchandising material on retail advocacy has investigated. This hypothesis is accepted through data analysis. It is known that retailer will be motivated towards advocacy as well as easily convince the consumers about that particular brand whose merchandising material is sufficiently displayed in retail outlet. Indeed, in the presence of merchandising material retailer feels comfortable during advocacy since environment is more favorable.

Incentive schemes significantly enhances retail advocacy is the second hypothesis of this study which is rejected. It is observed that in this competitive epoch every company gives lots of incentives to retailers in different forms to boost up their sales and to enhance visibility of their products. Moreover, incentive schemes are no more attractive for retailers as compared retrospectively. Benefits do not motivate retailers towards brand advocacy but it plays a role to do more displays. Advocacy cannot be engendered through ordinary incentives since it is painstaking activity and entails profound level of motivation. As a result, incentive schemes are not adequate motivators for retailers' advocacy.

In third hypothesis it is stated that customer resistance significantly decreases retail advocacy. It means retailer becomes more reluctant to speak about brands when consumer resistance is increased. Empirical analysis rejected this hypothesis. In contemporary era, retailers are more savvy and they have the skills that how to convey their messages to end consumers. Likewise retailers are motivated and try to persuade consumers even if someone does not listen eagerly. Consequently, resistance from consumers are not playing sufficient/significant role toward retailer advocacy.

Customer services significantly increase retail advocacy is fourth hypothesis of this study. The fourth hypothesis is substantiated through primary data analysis. It means retailer zealously advocates those brands which provide sufficient level of services. Retailers would be more satisfied and enhance their loyalty towards that particular brands whose they get more apt services.

Fifth hypothesis of this study is retailer background (communication skills and training) significantly enhances retail advocacy. Data analysis results did not support this hypothesis. Some retailers have got sound communication skills and can easily convince the consumers but some of these retailers do not agree towards advocacy. It means readiness toward advocacy may be playing moderating role between retail advocacy and retailer background which could not incorporated in this study. Consequently, there is imperative prerequisite to prepare/agree retailers headed for advocacy since in the absence of this; retailer background is not significantly playing any role towards advocacy.

Retail advocacy significantly enhances if consumer retailer have good relations. Sixth hypothesis of this study is upheld. Certainly, consumers listen and convince with retailers' suggestions if they have good relation with them. Retailer comfortably speaks about products if they have good relation with consumers. Furthermore, often consumers have blind trust on those retailers which they have got good relations.

Seventh hypothesis of this study is retail advocacy significantly varies on the basis of retailers' educational background as well as their position/designation. This hypothesis is validated through data analysis.

Professionals from the field have appreciated this relatively new concept and they hope that in coming years there will be strong focus on retail advocacy. Now they feel most effective consumer touch point is retailer and message communicated through retailer carries significance as well as helps in better business operations.

As per discussions with professionals, it is inferred that retail advocacy is playing essential role in communicating brand message to right consumers from retail outlets. This concept works very well particular for

tobacco companies as tobacco industry is moving towards grey market scenario i.e. ban on advertising, graphical health warnings, social pressures. Consumer touch points are diminishing that makes it more difficult for tobacco companies to communicate with consumers in an effective manner.

It is observed that category “A” retailers have got the opinion that customer services and training is essential for their businesses. Thus, companies should focus on giving them excellent customer services as well as training. Category “B” retailers are more inclined towards financial benefits as a result there is need to give incentives to these types of retailers for the sake to achieve desired business results. Category “C” retailers are also looking for financial rewards as well as merchandising.

## **6. MANAGERIAL AND ACDEMIC IMPLICATIONS**

Attracting, developing, and retaining retailers as a business partners is prime agenda of nearly all FMCG companies. Retail advocacy has an utmost important in order to make retailers more profitable for the company as well as for communicating brand message. Understanding the concept of retail advocacy is in its infancy stage and lot of work can be done on this phenomenon.

Retail Advocacy will help managers to communicate brand message to consumers through retailers in most effective way. Companies which will improve retail relations definitely get competitive advantage that improves profitability of the company. Apart from above mentioned, companies will able to win loyal consumers as a result of positive word of mouth from retailer. They will also be able to place their merchandising material at a prominent place that helps in brand availability and visibility.

Another important benefit of retail advocacy is to curtail out of stock situation in retail outlets. Although retail advocacy purely focuses on retailers but when message is communicated to consumers through retailer it will create positive impact on their loyalty.

As far as academic implications are concerned, this study will be helpful for those marketing students and researchers whom want to do research in the field of retailing. This is relatively new concept that will help them in discovering new horizons of research in this stream. Researchers will not only get the comprehension about retail advocacy but also get insight in other strong influential variables that have been identified through this study.

## **7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study is only limited to some antecedents of retail advocacy and did not address the outcome. Further studies can be conducted on the outcomes of retail advocacy like trial generation, brand availability & visibility, entry barriers to new entrants, achievement of desired business results, competitive edge, brand awareness, and loyal business relations. This study presented mix results of all retailer categories. Comparison about impact of these antecedents on retail advocacy among three categories of retailers would be conducted in future. This study has put foremost emphasis on those retailers whom are involved in retailing of tobacco products. Further research can be conducted on other types of retailers whom are not involved in tobacco retailing. Moreover, this study is only focused on FMCG sector/retailers but retail advocacy and its antecedents would be investigated on non-FMCG retailers. Through qualitative research more antecedents and outcomes of retail advocacy can be unearth.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

Retail advocacy is relatively a novel concept if we talk about Pakistani business environment. Tobacco companies are currently been actively involved in generating retail advocacy. Therefore, basic purpose is to make retailer advocate for companies’ brands so that they are able to communicate their messages to right consumer at right time in an effective way. From data analysis it is evident that merchandising has strongest impact on retail advocacy. Retailers become strong advocate and able to communicate message effectively of a particular brand if company investing on merchandising activities. After merchandising, customer services play a vital role in enhancing retail advocacy. Managers should also focus on providing excellent customer services to the retailers in order to achieve desired business results. Retailer background has a least positive impact on retail advocacy. This means companies should also seek to train and develop the retailers in lieu of current business situation so as to make them virtuous advocates of their brands.

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