

Research Article**A STUDY - WHAT DETERMINES CUSTOMER LOYALTY AMONG KUALA LUMPUR'S MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANIES?****Tan Cheng Man, Masri Abdul Lasi and *Nurun Najah Tarmidzi**

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Abstract

The research team behind this project hopes to draw conclusions about how improving customer service can help boost loyalty among Malaysian mobile phone users. The influx of new companies into the market has increased competition by lowering entry barriers and raising standards across the board, including pricing, advertising, and network performance. A total of 80 respondents took part in the survey. Responsiveness and Brand Image are found to have a positive relationship on Customer Loyalty, out of the five variables tested (Service Quality, Pricing, Switching Cost, and Brand Image). Since the scope of this investigation is limited to the greater Kuala Lumpur area, there are caveats to be found in the results. Due to the relatively small size of the study's sample, its results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population of hand phone users in Malaysia. Ultimately, businesses in the service industry need to comprehend the connection between contented clients and continued business. Service providers will face a significant challenge in developing a strategy that encourages customer retention while also attracting new business.

Keywords: Mobile Telecommunication, Customer Loyalty, Service Quality.

INTRODUCTION

Not only do sales play a role in a company's ability to provide a quality service and win customer loyalty, but so do other metrics associated with product, service, and support. The final decade of the twentieth century saw the rise of relationship marketing as the dominant strategy in the business world (Gabbianelli & Pencarelli, 2019). There was a significant shift in the marketing and management industries during this time period towards an emphasis on building and maintaining relationships. The ultimate goal of relationship marketing is to increase customer loyalty (Alves *et al.*, 2019). This is achieved by ensuring that all parties involved in the relational exchanges benefit from the interactions. This research looks into the deciding factors that lead to acceptance of the purchase price, satisfaction with the product's use, and continued loyalty to the service provider among prospective subscribers of telecommunications services (Lasi, 2020). Service & Support Professionals Association (SSPA) reports that many service providers consider an 80% satisfaction rate to be a reasonable score. However, research shows that at 80% perceive that is consider an average and the service has no point of differentiation, and that it is the "very satisfied" customers who are truly loyal when everyone else feels indifferent about the provider service and will switch to another provider if they see a cost advantage (Ghazalle & Lasi, 2021). The mobile telecommunications market in Malaysia has reached maturity, and as the net return on investments in mature markets may be significantly higher for retention strategies than for strategies to attract new customers, particularly for companies with an established customer base, retention strategies may be the most effective way for these businesses to grow (Ariffin *et al.*, 2021). As a result of technological standards and government regulation, the nature of mobile telecommunication services is relatively standardized.

Companies in the mobile service industry still strive to innovate their products and services in the hopes that consumers will view them as the best and most innovative. Commission for Federal Communications (FCC, 2022). One of the most crucial aspects of any successful marketing strategy is the loyalty of the target demographic (Masri Bin Abdul Lasi & Sallina Salim, 2020). On top of that, loyal customers will spread good word of mouth, which is invaluable to businesses because it amounts to free advertising. According to studies conducted by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC, 2017), customer satisfaction has increased from 4.09 percent in 2012 to 4.12 percent in 2015. This is because of strategic shifts focused on meeting individual client needs through tailor-made services and strong emphasis on building and maintaining customer relationships. The telecommunications industry relies heavily on customer relationship marketing. It necessitates a client-centric approach to advertising (Medberg & Grönroos, 2020). Services providers can better meet the needs of their customers by learning about and identifying their profiles. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to establish how various aspects of mobile telecommunications service providers in Malaysia, including Service Quality, Pricing, Switching Cost, and Brand Image, influence Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW**The connection between superior service and customer loyalty**

Compared to tangible goods, services are unique. When compared to tangible goods, services are often seen as immaterial, diverse, produced, and consumed simultaneously, non-stockable, etc. According to Grönroos's 1990 proposal, "a service is a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interactions between the customer and service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems

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of the service provider, which are provided to solve customer problems," this definition has since become widely accepted. Consider service quality, say Farida and Ardyan (2018); it's a key differentiator and the most potent competitive weapon all service organizations seek. The outcome of an evaluation in which customers compare their own expectations for a service with their own perceptions of the service they will receive is contained within definitions of service quality (Jonkisz & Karniej, 2021; Edeling, 2021). Several studies have characterized customers' long-term impressions of service providers as a function of the quality of the service they receive. It is generally agreed that service quality and attitude are conceptually interchangeable. A positive or negative attitude towards something is a learned disposition. SERVQUAL was developed by Jonkisz and Karniej (2021) to assess the multiple facets of service quality. Accordingly, in the service industry, there exists a near-relationship between client and business, which can serve as the foundation for advertising (He & Sun, 2020). According to Medberg and Grönroos (2020), service quality is defined as customers' evaluations of a company's overall performance. Customers' impressions of a company's service quality are formed during their interactions with the company. Customers' perceptions of the service's quality are heavily influenced by their experiences during the interaction (Varonen, 2020). There are more moving parts involved in determining service quality than there are in determining product quality because of the unique nature of services (Satti *et al.*, 2020). Many different approaches to gauging service quality have been proposed in the literature and academic journals.

A look at the connection between cost and repeat business

A product's price is the amount of money that a buyer must part within order to acquire it. It's the main factor that decides whether a customer will make a purchase. When deciding on a service provider, consumers often place a premium on lowest price. Since consumers' wants and needs vary, so do their willingness to pay. Therefore, different people may assign different values to the same service products. Consumers' willingness to pay more for a product may decrease if they perceive a rise in prices (Wince *et al.*, 2022). According to Oliver (1997), customers' perceptions of price in relation to service quality can either generate satisfaction or dissatisfaction, depending on whether the service meets their expectations. Consumers' reactions to price changes can be broken down into two categories, price fairness and price acceptance, as stated by Satti *et al.* (2020). Kim's research lends credence to this theory (2019). A product's price is the amount of money that a buyer must part within order to acquire it. It's the main factor that decides whether a customer will make a purchase. When deciding on a service provider, consumers often place a premium on lowest price. Since consumers' wants and needs vary, so do their willingness to pay. Therefore, different people may assign different values to the same service products. Consumers' willingness to pay more for a product may decrease if they perceive a rise in prices (Wince *et al.*, 2022). According to Oliver (1997), customers' perceptions of price in relation to service quality can either generate satisfaction or dissatisfaction, depending on whether the service meets their expectations. Consumers' reactions to price changes can be broken down into two categories, price fairness and price acceptance, as stated by Satti *et al.* (2020). Kim's research lends credence to this theory (2019).

Customer loyalty and the opportunity cost of changing suppliers

When a customer exhibit switching behaviour, they break off their contract with a service (Kang, 2022). The term "switching cost" was coined by Yin *et al.* (2021) to describe the expenses that may prevent consumers from making a switch to a competitor's offering. Customers may exhibit churn for a variety of reasons. Kim (2020) suggested that customers may switch service providers due to factors such as cost, lack of availability of relevant information, and personal preference. It also suggested key factors that will cause switching behaviour, such as competition's appeal, inappropriate employee response to service failures, pricing issues, failures in the core service, failures in the service encounter, inconvenience, ethical problems, and changes in the situation (Lasi *et al.*, 2021). Switching cost incurred when a customer switches from an existing service provider to a new one. It is barriers that influence customer's decision to change service provider. Tseng *et al.* (2021) mentions the way of marketing information and the interactive atmosphere of the travel apps could affect the experiential satisfaction among generations Z consumers. Sánchez García & Curras-Perez (2020) argues that the perceived costs of switching can be depending on the type of service. For utilitarian service, factor would be post-purchase regret, whereas for the hedonic service, factor for switching behavior would be past switching behavior and anticipated regret.

According to Calvo-Porrall & Otero-Prada (2020), switching cost is the cost involved in changing from one service provider to another. In addition to measurable monetary costs, switching costs also include time and psychological effort involved in facing the uncertainty of dealing with a new service provider. According to Barnes *et al.* (2021), it is the sum of economic, psychological cost, and physical costs. It includes the psychological cost of becoming a customer of a new firm, and the time effort involved in buying new brand. Hence, switching cost varies from customer to customer (Amami *et al.*, 2022). According to Parasuraman *et al.* (2021) and Shava (2021), switching cost gives firms some advantage as follows:

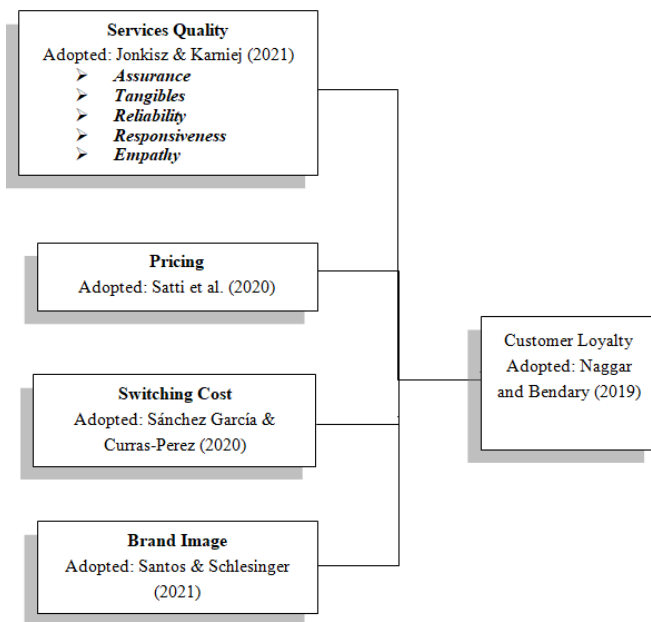
- Customers' price sensitivity and dissatisfaction are diminished because of the cost.
- Consumers have the impression that all brands are essentially the same in terms of how they work.
- To rephrase, customers have stayed loyal despite having access to comparable alternatives.

The connection between company reputation and customer loyalty

"A name, term, sign, symbol, or design or combination thereof that identifies the maker or seller of a product or service," is how the Oxford English Dictionary defines a brand. A brand's image was defined as "consumers' perceptions of the brand as reflected by the brands' associations in their minds" (Sharma and Jain, 2019). Think of it as the mental image or impression of a brand that a consumer forms and retains because of their reaction to the brand, whether logical or emotional. A company's brand is not created before consumers form an opinion about it. Consumers place a high value on brands, and effective branding can increase sales (Song, 2019).

A consumer's impression of a brand is based on the memories associated with that brand. One definition of "brand" or "corporate image" is "an accumulated attitude towards the company, whether based on experience or not" (Santos & Schlesinger, 2021). According to Bigne *et al.*, one's perception of a brand's quality serves as an indicator of that brand's reputation (2020). "Perceptions of an organisation reflected in the associations held in consumer memory," is how one definition of a company's "image" puts it. Customers' positive associations with a brand are said to increase its equity in the eyes of consumers (Yu *et al.*, 2019). One-to-one connections between service providers and their clients, as well as between clients and the brands they use, are highlighted by the concept of relationship marketing in the context of these services (Naggar and Bendary, 2019). Multiple brand interactions are crucial to the formation of a loyal customer base (Singh *et al.*, 2020). One of the primary focuses of product and brand management is the development of formidable brands. Profits can be generated both immediately and in the future by building a strong brand. Civelek and Ertemel (2019) defines brand loyalty as a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK



Hypotheses

Affecting factors such as service quality, price, switching cost, and brand image are identified, and the impact of customer satisfaction on loyalty is determined. An organization's ability to keep customers happy and earn their loyalty may depend on several factors, some of which are outside the control of the service's providers. "The consumer's fulfillment response, the degree to which the level of fulfillment is pleasant or unpleasant" (Lepistö *et al.*, 2022) is what is meant by "overall satisfaction" in this context. Customer loyalty in the mobile industry is driven in large part by customers' sense of community and satisfaction with their service. According to numerous studies (see, for example, the Harvard Business Review), customer satisfaction is a strong indicator of brand loyalty (Tang, 2019). For a business to successfully maintain a

long-term relationship with its clientele, customer satisfaction must be high (Wantara and Tambrin, 2019). When customers feel good about the company, they're doing business with, they're more likely to stick with them and even spread the word (Mntande *et al.*, 2022). This study's hypothesis is thus summed up as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

Hypothesis 1(a): There is relationship between Assurance and Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 1(b): There is relationship between Tangibles and Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 1(c): There is relationship between Reliability and Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 1(d): There is relationship between Responsiveness and Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 1(e): There is relationship between Empathy and Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 2: There is relationship between Pricing and Customer Loyalty.

Hypothesis 3: There is relationship between Switching Cost and Customer Loyalty

Hypothesis 4: There is relationship between Brand Image and Customer Loyalty

Research Design

This study takes a descriptive approach to its research to describe the factors that contribute most to customer loyalty for Mobile Telecommunication service providers in Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur users. The research in this study is based on a cross-sectional survey of customers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, regarding their loyalty to and satisfaction with their mobile service provider.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Multiple Regression Findings

HYPOTHESES 1 (H1): Customers are more likely to remain loyal if they receive high-quality service.

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Confidence and Customer Loyalty go hand in hand.

An assurance value of $p = 0.00$ ($p > 0.05$) in a multiple regression table indicates a correlation between assurance and customer loyalty. Since assurance and customer loyalty are significantly linked, 1a is accepted.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Customers are more loyal to businesses that provide them with tangible benefits.

As the tangibles value $P = 0.051$ ($p > 0.05$) in the multiple regression table indicates that there is no relationship between tangibles and customer loyalty, we can conclude that H1b is false.

Hypothesis 1c (H1c): Keeping customers happy is directly tied to how dependable a company is.

Multiple regression table results show no correlation between Reliability and Customer Loyalty ($P=0.072$, $p>0.05$), so the null hypothesis H1c is rejected.

Hypothesis 1d (H1d): Customer loyalty is correlated with a company's responsiveness.

The above table shows that the combination of variables is statistically significant at the $p=0.132$ level ($p>0.05$). It demonstrates that speed of response has emerged as a crucial factor in retaining customers' faith in a company's offerings. Customers are more likely to remain loyal to a company if they receive prompt and helpful responses from the company's customer service team. Based on the results of the multiple regression analyses, it can be concluded that the null hypothesis H1c (that there is a correlation between Responsiveness and Customer Loyalty) is not supported.

Hypothesis 1e (H1e): The ability to empathise with a customer's situation is linked to increased loyalty.

The results of the multiple regression table show that there is no correlation between empathy and customer loyalty (indicated by the tangibles value $P=0.268$; $p>0.05$); consequently, the null hypothesis H1d is rejected.

HYPOTHESIS 2 (H2): Pricing has an effect on customer retention.

The multiple regression table supports the acceptance of H2 as there is a significant relationship between pricing and customer loyalty ($P=0.00$; $P>0.05$).

HYPOTHESIS 3 (H3): There is a correlation between Customer Loyalty and Switching Expense.

We accept H3 since there is a significant relationship between Switching Cost and Customer Loyalty, as indicated by the multiple regression table, where we find a relationship between these two variables with a tangibles value of $P=0.01$ ($P>0.05$).

HYPOTHESIS 4 (H4): Having a positive brand image is directly related to having loyal customers.

Because there is no statistically significant correlation between Brand Image and Customer Loyalty (as measured by the tangibles value $P=0.017$; $p>0.05$), we reject H4.

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey's female respondents made up 47.4% of the total, while the male respondents made up 52.5%. Although the target demographic ranges in age from 18 to 47, 71.2% of the total responses came from people aged 18 to 24. Malay people make up 46.3% of the sample, followed by those of other ethnicities at 45.0%, Indians at 5%, and Chinese at 3.8%. Sixty-seven percent of the population identifies as Muslim, followed by twenty-two and a half percent who identify as Christian, five percent who identify as Hindu, three and a half percent who identify as Buddhist, and one and a half percent who identify as some other religion. Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia

and Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (high school diplomas) account for 38.8 percent of the respondents with the highest level of education, followed by Diploma (22.5 percent), Degree (18.8 percent), Postgraduate (2.5 percent), and Certificate or Others (7.5 percent) respondents. About half (45%) of respondents are employed in the private sector; another 31% are students; 15% are self-employed; and 8.8% work for the government. Seventy-three-point eight percent of respondents make less than RM1000 per month on average.

Table 1. Multiple Regression on the Customer Loyalty

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Beta (B)	Sig.
Customer Loyalty	Assurance	.903	.000**
	Tangibles	.239	.051
	Reliability	.190	.072
	Responsiveness	.218	.132
	Empathy	.160	.268
	Price	.485	.000**
	Switching Cost	.279	.001**
	Brand Image	.208	.017
R2:		.221	
F Value:		22.082	
Sig. F:		.000	

According to Table 1 of the Summary Results of Regression Analyses, there are only three variables that significantly predict the independent variable of customer loyalty: service quality assurance, price, and switching costs ($p=.0001$). The significance of $F=22.082$ at the 0.000 level was determined using ANOVA. It's clear from the $p=.000$ significance level that these two variables work well together to predict the dependent variable. Table 4.11's model summary shows that 0.221 percent of the variance (R^2) in customers' loyalty was significant. Therefore, it appears that the predictors taken together have a strong correlation to Customer Loyalty. The findings reveal that Service Quality Assurance, Price, and Switching Cost all play a role in determining a customer's satisfaction with and loyalty to their telecommunications service provider. Loyalty is affected by age and by one's line of work. A whopping 44.59 percent of respondents fall into the 18–24 age bracket. Price, along with rising expectations from young adults, is another factor that contributes to loyalty and what ultimately convinces them to remain with a given service provider over another. The current fad shows that youth are dedicated to specific brands like Maxis, Celcom, DiGi, and U-Mobile. In part because of the brand's stellar reputation, they're completely devoted to it. According to Mntande *et al.* (2022), a customer's attachment to a brand is not always an indication of that brand's ability to evoke strong feelings in its target audience. A price war will drive customers away even if a service provider offers a more desirable package at a lower price than the competition. Also, when it comes to figuring out whether or not a customer will remain loyal, the service provider's advertising has more weight than the switching cost. Common method for classifying differences in tech uptake between multiple consumer groups. Prepaid was more popular among those aged 18 to 24 than postpaid was, the study found, so long as both were of high quality. The brand image as a status symbol is more important to millennials than any other age group. They're prepared to stick with the same company consistently. When it comes to the concept of brand attachment, customer delight is the affective component of satisfaction. If a customer sees that they can save money by switching to a different provider, even if only temporarily, then they will do so. In light of the recent introduction of mobile number portability services, customers can easily keep their

existing mobile number even after switching to a different service provider. Customers, especially younger customers, do not place a high value on the ability to switch service providers without incurring a significant financial penalty. This trend is on the rise because today's youth are less likely to make long-term commitments and more likely to shop around for the best deal on a product or service. It's more likely that professionals, corporations, and young adults will stick with the same service provider if the corporate package they're offered is a good one. Additionally, they need to pay significant commitment fees if they want to switch service providers.

Conclusion

The telecommunications industry in Malaysia is one of the country's most dynamic and rapidly developing fields. Customer attrition among service providers is significant, and one common cause is complaints about subpar network performance. The rapid expansion of the pre-paid mobile segment has also increased market competition due to the substantial advertising expenditures made by operators to gain market share and the struggle to acquire new subscribers. These services are now sold at a wider range of locations, such as petrol stations, banks, and retailers, rather than just by the service provider or their authorised dealers. It is well known that the pre-paid market is propelled by the desire for convenience, which has increased the logistical burden on service providers. The mobile industry in Malaysia undergoes rapid transformation, the industry's top players have been forced to reorganize. With the significant merger between Telekom and Celcom taking place, it is generating a lot of interest and the government has been a strong supporter in rationalization on the overcrowded market. Simultaneously, Maxis purchased the mobile division of Time dotcom. There was an effective reduction from five to three operators as a result of these modifications. Maxis Communications led the market in December 2008 with 11.1 million mobile subscribers; Celcom was in second place with 8.8 million; and DiGi rounded out the top three with 7.1 million. When it launched, the new operator's 3G service lagged the competition by a wide margin and counted fewer than 200,000 users. The telecommunications industry is becoming increasingly competitive as more and more businesses compete for customers' attention, particularly in the mobile sector. As a result, service providers must take the initiative to learn what factors customers find most important in order to ensure they continue to receive their services.

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