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Theoretical Examination of Mobile Phone Brand Loyalty

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Abstract

Mobile phone industry is growing at a rapid pace. Hence, customers' mobile phone brand loyalty is the keys to a mobile phone manufacturer's survival in this highly competitive market. Surprisingly, little research has been done to address customer loyalty toward mobile phone brands. This conceptual paper therefore contributes to the knowledge base of customer mobile phone brand loyalty by systematically investigating the predictors of mobile phone brand loyalty from the standpoint of Oliver's four stage loyalty model (1997), cognitive, affective, conative and action theorization of loyalty. In this paper, extensive literature review is the approach adopted for the development of research model. In the proposed research model, a sequential process of loyalty develops through utilitarian value and hedonic value (cognitive), brand satisfaction (affective), brand trust (conative) and mobile phone brand loyalty (action loyalty). The proposed model helps mobile phone manufacturers devise proper strategies to build customer's mobile phone brand loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

The mobile phone industry is one of the vibrant and fastest growing industry of this century due to the latest smartphones boasting breakthrough features available in the market with rapid succession (Rowinski, 2014). In Malaysia, many world's top mobile phone manufacturers such as Apple, Samsung and Nokia frequently release new models in the constant battle for customer attention (Euromonitor International, 2014). The strong competition among the mobile phone manufacturers have made the mobile phone manufacturers face a great challenge to ensure whether the customers will repeat their purchase within the same brand or not when it is time for customers to replace their mobile phone. A latest report on mobile phones in Malaysia by Euromonitor International (2016) reported that market share of mobile phone manufacturers in Malaysia are in fluctuating and declining nature. For instance, market share of Samsung, Nokia and LG were fluctuating from 2012 till 2015 whereas market share of HTC, Motorola, Sony and Blackberry strongly decline from 2012 till 2015 (Euromonitor International, 2016). The fluctuating and decline nature in market share reflects that mobile phone manufacturers fail to sustain their market share because brand switching among customers are very high. As a matter of fact, study by Stremersch, Muller and Peres (2009) also indicated that mobile phone industry exhibits high level of brand switching among the customers. Therefore, it is vital for mobile phone manufacturers to know the factors that affect customer's loyalty toward their mobile phone brand. In fact, recent studies (e.g. Lam & Shankar, 2014; Petzer, Mostert, Kruger & Kuhn 2014; Lee, Moon, Kim & Yi, 2015) pointed out that mobile phone manufacturers should build brand loyalty and engage their customers in order to establish a long term

customer brand relationship. The researchers further indicated that the best core marketing strategy for highly competitive mobile phone market would be to try retain their existing customers via strengthening customer's brand loyalty. Thus, there is a strong need for brand loyalty study in mobile setting in order to enhance mobile phone manufacturers' knowledge in developing their long term customer retention strategies.

As far as the mobile phone brand loyalty studies are concerned, there is apparently little literature to suggest that research has been conducted on customer loyalty toward mobile phone brands (Petrucellis, 2010). Recent study by Lin, Huang and Hsu (2015) also surprisingly indicated that limited research has been done to understand customers' repetitive same- brand purchasing regarding mobile phones. Correspondingly, Lam and Shankar (2014) pointed out that prior researchers have extensively examine the determinants of brand loyalty in general but not particularly in mobile phone setting. The researchers further explained that prior research on mobile phone brand loyalty investigates only one or two key determinants of mobile phone brand loyalty (e.g. brand trust and brand satisfaction) in isolation rather than offering a comprehensive set of determinants in an integrated manner. Hence, this situation represents one of the gap in the current literature in explaining the determinants or formation of mobile phone brand loyalty. This clearly shows that understanding the determinants or formation of mobile phone brand loyalty is of utmost important and it is the major purpose of this conceptual paper faced with lack of studies on mobile phone brand loyalty formation phenomenon in the prior literature.

Oliver's four stage loyalty model has been widely used in understanding customer loyalty due to the fact that these model is the most comprehensive theoretical approach to study loyalty issues (Harris & Goode, 2004). Moreover, a theoretical disagreement occur in determining loyalty either attitude or behavioral base. Early researchers focused on re-purchase/behavioral frequency to capture loyalty (Tellis, 1998; Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003). However, there were also researchers (e.g. Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Amine, 1998; Mellens, Dekimpe & Steenkamp, 1996) asserting that customer's attitude build the main segment of the loyalty. According to Steven, Gary and Timothy (2006), loyalty concept are well established in more capitalized way in the Oliver's (1997) four stage loyalty model because Oliver's model adequately captures both attitudinal and behavioral approaches. More importantly, Oliver's (1997) four stage loyalty model has been pillar of many past studies in investigating customer's loyalty in various research setting such as restaurant service (Han & Hyun, 2012), hotel industry (Han, Kim and Kim, 2011; Back & Parks, 2003), tourism destination (Yuksel et al, 2010), online flights (Harris & Goode, 2004), DIY retailing (Blut, Evanschitzky, Vogel & Alert, 2007; Sivadas & Prewitt, 2000; Yeng & Nik Mat, 2013) and apparel industry (Matthews, Son & Watchravesringkan, 2014). Hence, it is fair to say that Oliver's four stage loyalty model is dominant model in brand loyalty studies. Therefore, this study is grounded in relation to Oliver's four stage underpinning theory. Oliver's four stage loyalty model forwards a detailed framework of loyalty that involves attitudinal phase and behavioral phase that has four main stages. According to Oliver (1997, 1999) loyalty development in each stage depends on different factors. In fact, study by Han et al., (2011) call for an approach that studies on Oliver's (1997) four stage loyalty model should investigate the roles of the major components of each loyalty stage in order to fully understand the determinants or formation of brand loyalty among the customers. In other words, the researcher postulates that future research based on Oliver's four stage loyalty model should consider the major components of all the stages. Therefore, to the best of researcher's scope of search, this is the first paper to investigate the determinants of the brand loyalty by considering the major constituents of each loyalty stage in Oliver's (1997) model in mobile phone industry.

On the whole, the present paper appear to be important and worthy of investigation as this conceptual paper would provide a valuable knowledge to the mobile phone manufacturers on factors that influence customer's mobile phone brand loyalty. Furthermore, present paper seeks to contribute the existing body of knowledge about the determinants and formation of mobile phone brand loyalty by proposing a comprehensive research model that incorporates the major constituents of each loyalty stage in Oliver's (1997) model in the context of mobile phone and then developing a series of propositions that demonstrates the relationship between the determinants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This brief literature review will be discussed on several insights from utilitarian value and hedonic value (cognitive loyalty), brand satisfaction (affective loyalty), brand trust (conative) and mobile phone brand loyalty (action loyalty).

Brand loyalty stages

Brand loyalty is defined as a profoundly held commitment to repurchase a desired product or brand continuously in the future, regardless of situational obstacles and competitor's marketing efforts to convince

purchasers to switch brands (Oliver 1999). According to Oliver (1997, 1999), loyalty involves both attitudinal phase and behavioral phase. The attitudinal phase of loyalty has three key stages namely cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty and conative loyalty. These stages of loyalty emerge consecutively rather than simultaneously (Oliver, 1999). In other words, customer's brand loyalty towards a particular brand or product develops via cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty and action loyalty in sequence. Figure 1 presents Oliver's (1997) four stage loyalty model.

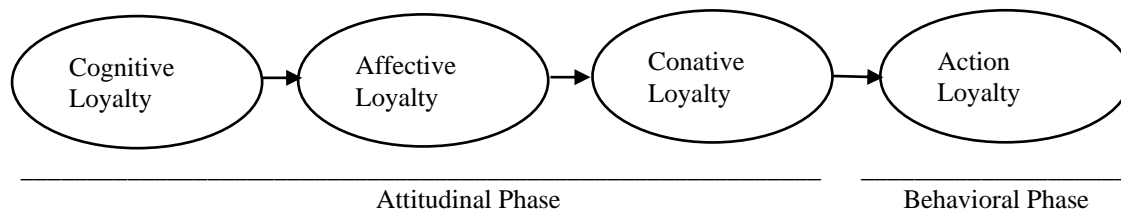


Figure 1. Four Stage Loyalty Model (Oliver, 1997)

Oliver (1997) further pointed out that loyalty development in each stage depends on different factors. Given Oliver's (1997) model has four stages of loyalty, therefore this conceptual paper will be organized based upon the major factors of cognitive (utilitarian value and hedonic value), affective (brand satisfaction), conative (brand trust) and action (mobile phone brand loyalty). Based on this categorization, the literature will be reviewed in this manner.

Cognitive Stage: Utilitarian Value and Hedonic Value.

The first loyalty stage is cognitive stage which derives from explicit knowledge about a product/service (Oliver, 1999). Customers in this stage build loyalty by comparing between a preferred product/service with alternatives based on information obtained through earlier knowledge about the offering, product/service attributes, performance level or current information gained via experiences (Oliver, 1999; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Back & Parks, 2003). In accordance with prior studies in consumer behavior and marketing, cognition consists of perceive value based on psychological / functional aspects (Han & Hyun, 2012; Harris & Goode, 2004; Han et al., 2011). In this study perceive value will be discussed in a dimensional approach namely utilitarian value and hedonic value because in mobile phone context, perceive value comprise of utilitarian value and hedonic value (Lam & Shankar, 2014; Lin et al., 2015; Montero Arruda Filho, Chaves Lima, & Lennon, 2014). In fact, Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann (2003) suggested that utilitarian value and hedonic value are experienced at cognitive level. Therefore, a multidimensional approach of perceive value namely utilitarian value and hedonic value will be incorporated as the major constituents of cognitive loyalty. Utilitarian value is instrumental and concerned with the more functional and practical usefulness or benefits derives from a product whereas hedonic value is aesthetics, experiential, or sensory benefits that customer gain from using a product (Voss et al., 2003). According to Oliver (1999), cognitive loyalty is very weak and shallow because it is often directed at the cost and benefits (value) of an offering, not the brand, thus manufacturers desire a greater level of loyalty among the customers.

Affective Stage: Brand Satisfaction

Second stage of loyalty is affective loyalty which is stronger form of loyalty than cognitive loyalty. According to Oliver (1999), loyalty at this stage is obtained from cognitive loyalty and loyalty in this stage is based on customer's pleasurable fulfillment which reflects pleasure dimension of the satisfaction or customer's favorable attitude towards a specific product or brand. Researchers in prior studies indicated that affective loyalty mainly consist of customer's satisfaction toward a brand (Han et al., 2011; Oliver, 1999). Brand satisfaction is customer's overall evaluation of pleasure with a brand and viewing it as a cumulative experience (Oliver, 1999). Therefore, the major component of affective loyalty is brand satisfaction. Prior studies have tested and proposed the linkage between cognitive loyalty and affective loyalty (Sivadass & Baker-Prewitt, 2000; Yuksel, Yuksel & Bilim, 2010; Back & Parks, 2003). Similarly, Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt (2000) verified the significant influence of cognitive loyalty on affective loyalty in retail department. Yuksel et al (2010) also found significant and positive relationship between cognitive loyalty and affective in tourism destination loyalty. Back and Parks (2003) further identified the positive and significant relationship between cognitive loyalty and affective loyalty in the hotel context. Additionally, previous researches indicated that utilitarian value and hedonic value (major factors of cognitive loyalty) are direct determinants of affective loyalty factors (e.g. Mouakket & Al-Hawari, 2012; Chang, 2013; Park, Snell, Ha & Chung, 2011). Particularly, Mouakket and Al-Hawari (2012) identified that utilitarian value and hedonic value has positive relationship with affective loyalty factors (satisfaction) in

developing E-loyalty intention. Chang (2013) identified that satisfaction is positively influenced by utilitarian value and hedonic value in context of social network games. In M-services context, Park et al., (2011) verified the positive influence of utilitarian value and hedonic value on satisfaction. These studies verify that affective loyalty is outcome of cognitive loyalty. However, customers' loyalty in affective stage is not strong enough where it can be weakened by the enhancement of attractiveness of alternative brand/products. Therefore, manufacturers push all their customers into next stage which is conative loyalty stage.

Conative Stage: Brand Trust

The third stage is conative stage. Oliver (1999) indicates conative loyalty is intention to rebuy the brand and it is more akin to motivation. Customer's loyalty in this stage is deeper than in the affective stage. However, repeated product failure will reduce conation and build customer's intention to shift to competitor's product (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006; Yuksel et al., 2010). On the other hand, trust can enhance a customer's commitment towards a relationship by minimizing the level of perceived risk, uncertainty and complexity associated with the exchange partner's opportunistic behaviors (Aurier & Sere de Lanauze, 2012; So, King, Sparks & Wang, 2014). According to Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán (2005), trustworthy brand consistently keep its promises even in bad times when some kind of brand crises arises. Therefore, it can be concluded that trust could enhance conation by building customer's commitment towards a particular brand or product even though there is complexity and by keeping its promises even there is unexpected problems with the product arise. In fact, Jumaev, Kumar and Hanaysha (2012) indicated that conative loyalty mainly involves customer's trust towards a particular brand or product. Therefore, conative loyalty stage mainly consist of brand trust. Numerous studies in prior literature have identified the positive association between affective loyalty and conative loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2012; Yuksel et al., 2010; Blut, Evanschitzky, Vogel & Alert, 2007). In the restaurant industry, Han and Hyun (2012) found that affective loyalty has a significant and positive linkage on conative loyalty. Further, Yuksel et al (2010) found that affective loyalty about a specific place increases travelers' conative loyalty. In retail industry, Blut et al (2007) verified the positive and significant relationship from affective loyalty to conative loyalty. Particularly, Lee et al (2014) empirically verified that satisfaction enhances customer's brand trust toward their mobile phone and finally build brand loyalty. Consistently, Lam and Shankar (2014) demonstrated that brand satisfaction is important predictor of brand trust in developing mobile phone brand loyalty. Similarly, Ercis, Unal, Candan and Yildirim (2012) identified that brand satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on brand trust in developing loyalty and repurchase intention among mobile phone users. Employing a more comprehensive approach, in mobile phone context, brand satisfaction (affective factor) is highly associated with brand trust (conative factor). Therefore, conative loyalty is outcome of affective loyalty.

Action Loyalty: Mobile Phone Brand Loyalty

In order to accomplish Oliver's four stage loyalty process, it is vital to move beyond attitudinal phase of loyalty which consist of cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty and conative loyalty. According to Oliver (1997), true loyalty only can be achieved at the last stage of loyalty which is action loyalty. Firstly, customers become cognitively loyalty with utilitarian value and hedonic value, secondly affectively loyal with brand satisfaction, thirdly conatively loyal with brand trust and finally action loyalty (mobile phone brand loyalty), overcoming all the obstacles in order to achieve an action. Many studies in consumer behavior and marketing postulate that conative loyalty is essential in regulating action loyalty (Han & Hyun, 2012; Han et al., 2011; Blut et al., 2007; Yuksel et al., 2010; Harris & Goode, 2004). These studies support conative loyalty is obtained from cognitive and affective loyalty, and finally induces behavioral/action loyalty, verifying the sequential process of loyalty development. Additionally, numerous studies have identified that brand trust (conative factor) is direct determinant of brand loyalty (action loyalty). For instance, study by Lee et al., (2014) indicated that brand trust has significant relationship with brand loyalty in mobile phone context. Similarly, Ladhari and Leclerc (2013) revealed that brand trust strongly influence brand loyalty. Sahin, Zehir and Kitapci (2011) also found that the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty is significant and positive in automotive context. These studies supported the action loyalty is outcome of conative loyalty (brand trust).

Overall, based on the preceding discussion above, this conceptual paper proposes the following propositions:

- P1. Utilitarian value has a positive impact on brand satisfaction.
- P2. Hedonic value has a positive impact on brand satisfaction.
- P3. Brand satisfaction has a positive impact on brand trust.
- P4. Brand trust has a positive impact on mobile phone brand loyalty.

RESEARCH MODEL

From the above literature review, the research model shown in Figure 2 is derived. The model proposes synchronous connections among utilitarian value and hedonic value, brand satisfaction, brand trust and mobile phone brand loyalty.

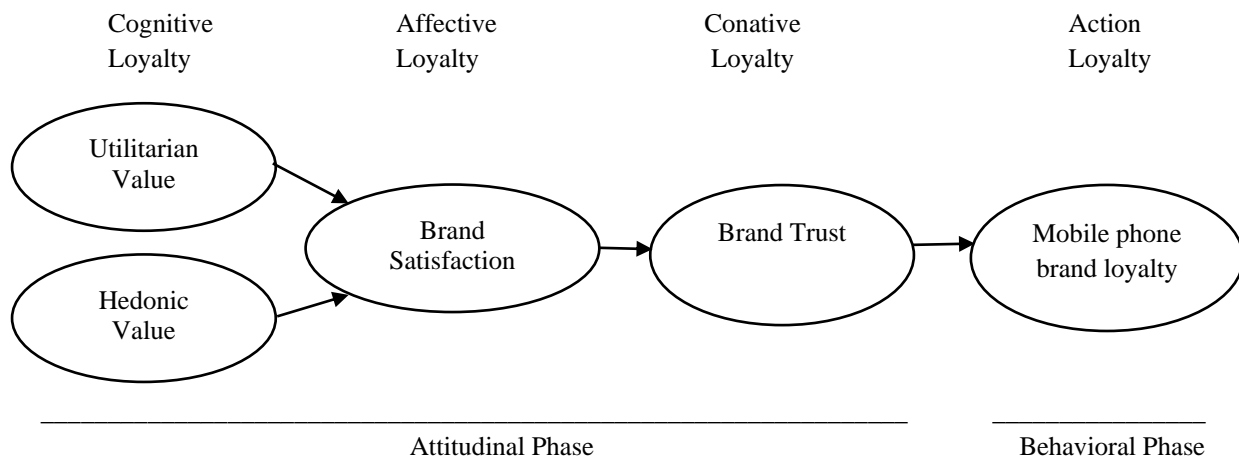


Figure 2: Proposed Research Model

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper provides a critical review of Oliver's (1997) four stage loyalty model and comprehensive review of previous literature that have tested the model. Based on this review, this conceptual paper discovers a comprehensive set of mobile phone brand loyalty determinants based on Oliver's four stage loyalty model and proposes a host of propositions for the relationship between those determinants. Moreover, this conceptual paper postulates a research model of mobile phone brand loyalty based on those propositions. In the proposed research model, loyalty develops through utilitarian value and hedonic value (cognitive), brand satisfaction (affective), brand trust (conative) and finally mobile phone brand loyalty (action loyalty).

The major theoretical implication of this paper is that it suggests a mobile phone brand loyalty research model by integrating the major constituents of each loyalty stage in Oliver's (1997) model in order to provide more refined understanding about the determinants of mobile phone brand loyalty in an integrated manner. To the best of researcher's knowledge, this was the first study to propose a mobile phone brand loyalty research model associated with Oliver's (1997) four stage loyalty model. With lack of previous studies on mobile phone brand loyalty, the proposed research framework can be useful tool for future researchers in the area of mobile phone brand loyalty. Practically, the proposed research model can assist mobile phone manufacturers to understand and identify the factors that affect customer's loyalty. After determining the factors, the mobile phone manufacturers could gain knowledge in developing customer retention strategy that is on the area where they should invest and put more resources. With this, mobile phone manufacturers will be able to maintain and prolong their market shares in this highly competitive industry. It should be noted that the main limitation of this paper is that this conceptual paper discusses a host of propositions concerning the relationships among the determinants of mobile phone brand loyalty yet those propositions were not empirically tested. Therefore, future research on the area mobile phone brand loyalty should consider those propositions and empirically test the research model.

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