The effect of brand image, perceived quality and brand experience on customer loyalty: an empirical investigation in the telecommunication industry in Vietnam

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Abstract

This paper analyses the effect of brand image, perceived quality, perceived uniqueness on loyalty of customers in the mobile telecom industry. The data for this study were gathered through face-to-face questionnaires that were distributed to target participants, who reported their consumption experience with mobile telecom services. The survey was conducted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city with the sampling of 453 respondents. We used the Structured Equation Model to evaluate the suitability of the framework and examine the hypotheses. The results reveal that brand equity impacts directly customer satisfaction and has indirect effect on loyalty via customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Brand image, Perceived quality, Brand experience, Brand association, Brand loyalty

1. Introduction

In today's market, firms are not only interested in supplying quality services, but their primary issue is to keep customers in a long and profitable relationship (Tseng, 2007). Telecommunication companies are not an exception as the industry is highly competitive globally. Developing market relationships is not straight forward as consumers and firms' expected benefits may not be matched (Stone *et al.*, 2000). An unsatisfied consumer may transfer to another brand, thus, relational strategies are used to avoid these behaviors.

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Some researchers argue that service quality plays a key role as a competitive tool of firms (Gerzema and Lebar, 2008) because many firms are forced to reduce service quality in order to meet low-cost competition (Silverstein, 2006). Current business contexts show that it might be difficult to gain market share if firms' competitiveness is based solely on service quality. Empirical studies show that perception of the service quality can only explain the price at which customers are willing to pay for (Sethuraman, 2003). On the other hand, many researches address the value of brand equity, which are intangible assets in the service industry (Nam *et al.*, 2011; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013; Huang and Cai, 2015; Forgacs, 2003). Kim and Kim (2005) prove that brand equity has an impact on stock prices and financial performance. Specifically, studies on the dimensions of brand equity have emphasized two elements: 1) consumer perceptions, which include brand awareness, brand image and brand associations, perceived quality, and perceived uniqueness, and 2) consumer behavior (Aaker, 1991). In this study, the author investigates both sides of brand equity including consumer perceptions with brand awareness, perceived quality, and perceived uniqueness and consumer behavior.

Although previous research has examined the relationship between consumer satisfaction, brand loyalty (Brakus *et al*., 2009), and services (Nysveen *et al*., 2013), there has been limited investigation of the effects of brand image, perceived quality, and brand experience on customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry. Moreover, in the telecommunication industry, especially in the mobile market, companies are required to give their best efforts to satisfy their customers. In this case, marketing has a key role in meeting the customer's needs (Gronroos, 2004). In light of this, the paper aims at investigating the impact of brand image, perceived quality, and brand experience on customer loyalty.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Brand equity

After 1990, scholars began to study brand equity from different perspectives, which enriched theories in the field while generating many different opinions (Liyin, 2009). The total value of a brand is considered as an asset that can be separated when sold or included in the balance sheet (Feldwick, 1996). According to Washburn and Plank (2002), brand equity is defined from the customer's point of view and based on the consumer's knowledge, familiarity, and association with the brand.

Aspects of brand equity have been emphasized with two elements: consumer perception and consumer behavior. Given this, these components help company managers to continuously make improvements and, thereby, enhance brand equity (Óscar *et al*., 2019). Aaker (1996) suggests that there are four aspects of brand

equity that are customer-based: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. All of these aspects, which combine perceptive and behavioral dimensions, are widely accepted by scholars (Yoo *et al.*, 2000; Thu and Nhung, 2019; Nga and Thu, 2019). For this reason, this paper adds to the current literature on brand equity constructs, which include brand image, perceived quality, and brand experience, in the telecommunication industry.

2.2 Brand image, perceived quality, brand experience, customer satisfaction and loyalty

Keller (1993) identifies the association of brand image and brand awareness in the minds of customers. According to Dobni *et al.* (1990), the image of a brand in the consumers' memory is reflected in their responses. Gronroos (2000) argues that each side of branding produces a distinct brand in customer's mind and that the end result is the brand image. Marketing literature emphasizes only the linkage between a firm and its consumers. It also addresses the linkage between a brand and customers (O'Loughlin *et al.,* 2004).

Perceived quality is defined as the total superiority that primarily drives customers to buy a product (Aaker and Jacobson, 1994). According to Bernués *et al.* (2003), perceived quality is subject to quality attributes such as color, flavor, or appearance. In the telecom services industry, perceived quality is considered to be the physical and behavioral quality of employees. Quality is seen as a service image of telecommunications while employee behavior is an image expressed by usefulness and friendly telecom employees (Ekinci *et al.*, 2008).

Brakus *et al.* (2009) argue that brand experience refers to sensations and perceptions, which are described in various ways when a customer interacts with service. Other studies also suggest that brands certainly deliver a differentiated experience by functional and emotional elements of service delivery (Haeckel *et al.*, 2003; Morrison and Crane, 2007). According to Brakus *et al.* (2009), the concept of brand experience, which is internalized by the consumer, is a part of the brand's design and identity, packaging, communication, and environment. Therefore, brand experience is about delivering brand promise and delivering consistent actions (Brodie *et al.*, 2009).

According to Tse and Wilton (1988), satisfaction is viewed as consumer's feedback to assess services. Kim (2005) also reveals that satisfaction acts as post-activity metrics measuring the internal state of customers' perceptions of past purchases and experiences. Therefore, a satisfied customer is a main antecedent of a business's loyalty.

Brand loyalty is the main ingredient (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty is mentioned as the extent to which an individual is followed to a certain image represented by internal attitudes depicted in a long-term bias towards a particular brand, as well as the behaviors that exhibit externalities such as the acquisition of a certain brand (Odin *et al*., 2001). Jing *et al.* (2014) argue that brand loyalty shows the consumer commitment to the brand, which reflects an intangible asset and describes the price of a firm's products or services.

2.3 Hypothesis development

Keller (1993) argues that brand image has a stronger impact on the next buying option, if the novel product meets the expectations of the consumer. Several studies have investigated the link between image of and satisfaction from using the telecommunication's services. For example, Ahmad and Hasshim (2010) examine the impact of brand awareness on satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction also mediates the linkage between brand perception and loyalty in the service field (Nam *et al.,* 2011). Therefore, brand image positively influences satisfaction and, thus, a hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: Brand image has a positive impact on satisfaction.

Many studies have proposed empirical and conceptual models about the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction. Quality becomes the premise of satisfaction (Oliver, 1993). On the other hand, Gera (2011) studies the relationship between service quality, value, satisfaction and behavioral intent in a public bank in India and claims that service quality was found to have a significant impact on customer satisfaction and perceptions of value. Therefore, we advance the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived quality is positively linked with satisfaction.

There are many studies about the influence of customer experience on the brand (Brakus *et al.,* 2009; Khan and Rahman, 2015). These studies indicate that brand experience enhances customer satisfaction. For example, the research on retail conducted by Khan and Rahman (2015) confirms the impact of customer experience with the brand on their satisfaction. In particular, the recognition about the linkage between brand experience and brand satisfaction has also been investigated (Ha and Perks, 2005). Therefore, the following hypothesis is going to be tested in this study:

H3: Brand experience has a positive impact on satisfaction.

In services, studies about the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty have been attempted by a number of researchers (Cronin *et al*., 2000). According to Zhang and Dran (2000), dissatisfaction affects the user's behavior and rating about

a service, thus affecting loyalty. From another perspective, Brakus *et al.* (2009) study the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty and find that consumers often choose brand repeatedly. Therefore, customer satisfaction leads to loyalty (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Oliver, 1999). According to Dong *et al*. (2011), brand satisfaction and brand loyalty may differ between various customers. Furthermore, many other studies have explained the positive effects of customer satisfaction on brand loyalty in the telecommunications industry (Nassar, 2017). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed for testing:

H4: satisfaction is positively associated with loyalty.
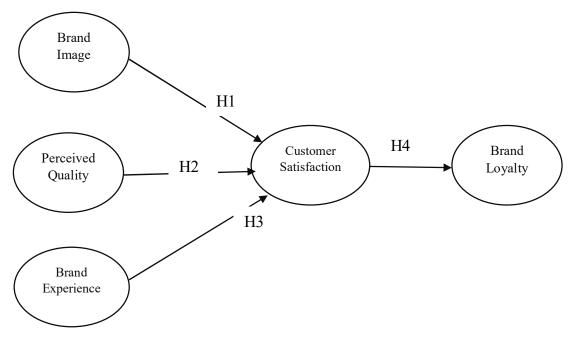
The proposed model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The proposed conceptual model

Source: Proposed by author

3. Research method

3.1 Survey instrument

Twenty-three items compiled from the literature were employed in this study. A five item Likert-scale was used in this study. Six components of image were taken from previous work of Yoo and Donthu (2001). Service quality dimensions were employed to measure perceived quality of telecommunication brands (Nam *et al.,* 2011). Five components were adopted in evaluating quality of a telecommunication service. Four items related to brand experience were employed from the work of Aaker (1996). Customer satisfaction with five items was adapted from the work of Oliver (1980) to measure customer satisfaction after using the service of the

telecommunication brand. Lastly, brand loyalty with four items was evaluated by using scale items adapted from Zeithaml *et al.* (1996).

Table 1. Measurement of proposed variables

Dimens-ion/Scale	Items	Source
Brand image (BM)	I quickly recognize this telecommunication brand	Yoo and Donthu (2001)
	I am familiar with the telecommunication brand.	
	I easily recognize this telecommunication brand among its competing brands.	
	This telecommunication brand is only one I want to choose.	
	This telecommunication brand evokes my mind first.	
	I am familiar with the telecommunication brand name	
Perceived quality (PQ)	This telecommunication brand has modern-looking equipment.	Nam *et al.* (2011)
	Materials associated with the service are visually appealing.	
	The telecommunication staffs are enthusiastic	
	The telecommunication staffs are friendly	
	The layout is attractive.	
Perceived experience (PE)	This brand is easy to recognize	Aaker (1996)
	The website is speedy for browsing	
	The website is always up-to-date.	
Customer satisfaction (CS)	I am satisfied with my decision to purchase service from the telecommunication brand	Oliver (1980)
	I feel satisfied with service quality of staff from the telecommunication brand	
	My choice to buy from the service was a wise one.	
	The overall quality of available physical features (facilities, equipment, room,…) satisfied me	
	I think I am right for choosing this telecom service	
Brand loyalty (BL)	In thinking about telecommunication service, the brand is my first choice	Zeithaml *et al.* (1996)
	As long as the present service continues, I can hardly consider changing to other telecommunication brand	
	I will promote the telecommunication brand to my close friends	
	In future years, I would still often purchase service from the telecommunication brand	

Sources: collected from Yoo and Donthu (2001), Nam *et al.* (2011), Aaker (1996), Oliver (1980), and Zeithaml *et al.* (1996)

3.2 Sample and data collection

Following Tabachnick and Fidell (1996), the minimum sample size is calculated by applying the formula n = 50 + 8 * m, where m is the number of independent variables, when conducting multivariate regression analysis. This means if a paper has five variables, the minimum sample size is 90 observations. The sample size is 400 in this study, which is more than the minimum requirement for valid regression analysis. The sampling method is convenience sampling. The unit sampling is for customers using mobile service.

The survey was conducted from October 2019 to December 2019 in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city. The reason for selecting Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city to collect data is that there is a large number of city consumers living and working in those locations. It is more convenient for authors to conduct the survey there. The distribution of questionnaires was done by the author, other colleagues and families. The distribution of questionnaires in Hanoi was done by the author while in Ho Chi Minh City it is done by colleagues and families. For getting 400 valid responses, 600 questionnaires were distributed. 473 answers were returned, in which 20 responses were invalid. The sample of 453 answers were finally used for the analysis, which makes the response rate of 75.5%. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of customers

Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	
Female	53.8
Male	46.2
Age	
20-30	9.6
31-40	23.7
41-50	35.3
Above 50	20.6
Job	
Student	14.8
Staff	19.1
Business	32.2
Other	21.7
Income per month (USD)	
Below 250	12.2
250-500	27.4
500-1000	25.3
1000-1500	17.0
Above 1500	18.1

Source: SPSS analysis

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The measuring model

Item-to-total correlations and exploratory factor analysis were employed to assess the scales. To examine the validity of constructs, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the measurement scale. The factor loadings of each item in the constructs were larger than 0.5, showing that the components in the first order construct obtained convergent validity. The Cronbach's Alpha and composite coefficients were larger than 0.7 and average variances extracted were larger than 0.3, indicating that the first order construct achieved reliability. The testing by the square root of average variance extracted coefficients compared to the correlation of the constructs shows that the constructs in the model reached discriminant validity. These findings are all presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Range of loadings (CFA)	Cronbach Alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (%)
BM	0.719-0.789	0.807	0.788	55
PQ	0.623-0.773	0.782	0.847	53
BE	0.694-0.704	0.744	0.823	54
CS	0.662-0.712	0.766	0.923	75
BL	0.664-0.701	0.720	1.165	54

Source: SPSS and AMOS analysis

4.2 Hypothesis testing

The structural equation models were employed for testing hypotheses proposed in the previous section. The four constructs as all these direct factors, and then SEM was conducted. The saturated framework results describe the good fit: Chi-square/df = 3.645; CFI = 0.921; TLI = 0.910; GFI = 0.931; and RMSEA = 0.051.

Table 4. The path of effects

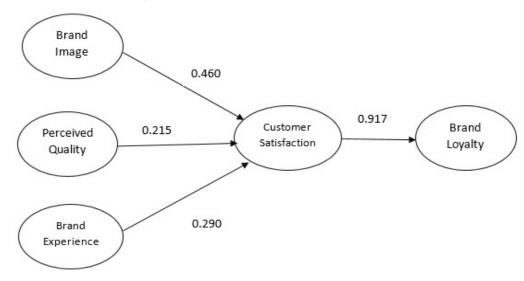|			Estimate	S.Estimate	C.R.	P
CS	<---	BM	0.469	0.052	7.864	<0.01
CS	<---	PQ	0.215	0.054	4.552	<0.01
CS	<---	PE	0.293	0.038	6.444	<0.01
BL	<---	CS	0.917	0.075	17.286	<0.01

Source: AMOS analysis

For examining the total effect of each variable in the proposed model, the direct, indirect and total impacts were employed. The findings of the study show that brand image has the highest direct impact on customer satisfaction in using the telecommunication service (0.496) and brand experience has the largest indirect effect on brand loyalty for the telecommunication service (0.431).

Table 5. The standardized effects

Dependent variable	Effect	BM	PQ	PE	CS
CS	Direct	0.293	0.215	0.469	0.000
	Indirect	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Total	0.293	0.215	0.469	0.000
BL	Direct	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.917
	Indirect	0.269	0.197	0.431	0.000
	Total	0.269	0.197	0.431	0.917

Source: AMOS analysis

Figure 2. The tested proposed model

Source: AMOS analysis

Figure 2 shows that brand image has the highest effect on customer satisfaction in using the telecommunication service. In addition, brand image, perceived quality and experience has a strong direct relationship with customer satisfaction and does not affect brand loyalty directly.

Overall, the current research finds positive effects of all proposed factors including brand equity and customer satisfaction on building brand loyalty in the

telecommunications industry. Nonetheless, in contrast to the idea of brand equity with brand image, brand experience, perceived quality is among the most important factors affecting brand loyalty (Chow *et al.,* 2017; González-Mansilla *et al.,* 2019). Customer satisfaction branding in this article plays an important role in mediating the effect of brand equity on brand loyalty.

The structures of image, the experience, and the perceived quality show a direct positive influence on the customer's brand satisfaction. Therefore, Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 were supported. Several previous studies have also confirmed the relationship between brand experience and satisfaction (Oppong and Phiri, 2018).

Similarly, González-Mansilla *et al.* (2019) point out that brand equity and perceived value have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction in the telecom industry. Lin (2015) examines the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction in the aviation industry. In the literature, the paper's finding on the direct effect of perceived quality on loyalty is also suggested by previous research (Pike *et al.*, 2010). In addition, similar to Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2018), the article affirms that brand-based customer satisfaction has a direct positive effect on brand loyalty. Therefore, Hypothesis H4 is supported.

5. Conclusion

This study offers an important theoretical contribution to the literature on the effect of brand equity, which includes brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand association, on brand loyalty through the mediating role of customer-based brand satisfaction in the telecommunication industry.

By combining the literature on the telecom industry and consumer brand satisfaction, this study identifies the important role of brand satisfaction of customers in building loyalty. The study applied a multi-disciplinary approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the telecom industry, creating the basis for further studies and concept building. The results show clear differences in a brand's personalities, which are previously unresolved differences in brand equity. In terms of management, it can be suggested that corresponding to the strategy between profitability and the revenue growth, many firms find challenges (Dodd and Favaro, 2006).

Therefore, it can be seen that this study has made a valuable contribution to the telecom industry and helps to understand a telecom brand. In the Vietnamese context, businesses should address perceived quality, brand experience, and brand image to develop customer loyalty through increased customer satisfaction. Building brand equity is helpful because it supports both specific recommendation for marketing strategies, as well as areas where research may be useful for grounding

decision-making process by the management board. From the findings, it makes sense for marketers and telecom managers to focus on customer satisfaction.

Nevertheless, this study has yet to compare the effectiveness of the two different measures, which are the emotional and cognitive items in the brand loyalty structure. Therefore, this study can be improved with future research. Furthermore, the demographic characteristics of clients in this study are not explored because gender differences can be viewed differently in the advertising analysis (Lin *et al.*, 2008). Thus, the effects of age and gender need to be studied in the future to look at results for different types of clients. Finally, the use of the SEM analysis can be considered as one limitation of this study. Further research might be conducted using linear regressions for analyzing results rather than employing SEM analysis for a simple proposed model.

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