To Explore Customer Consciousness towards Brand Loyalty between Malaysian and International Students

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ABSTRACT

In the age of modern competitive market force, where traditional marketing system is not enough to capture the loyalty from customers, and the increasing consciousness toward the brand making the marketer more concern to survive and the competition are becoming more difficult. So, customers are more conscious about their choice and giving more priority on the right product with right features, conditions, images and quality at the right price. The aim of this study is to explore customer consciousness toward brand loyalty between Malaysian and International Students. Quantitative research method is being used to evaluate the outcome of the research where total survey respondents were 197 (140 Malaysian and 57 International students) and the scope of the research is limited to the respondent of University Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan. The result of regression linear and Pearson Correlation showed that except price-consciousness, brand-consciousness, quality-consciousness and social-consciousness have positive significant relationship toward brand loyalty.

Keywords: Price-consciousness, brand-consciousness, quality-consciousness, social-consciousness, brand loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

Research Background
Brand loyalty is one of the desired objectives of every marketing professionals which deliver benefits in the form of tangible and intangible (Parida & Sahney, 2017). In this age of globalization, where competition is very high, maximizing profits and retaining market shares are very difficult for marketers as they are struggling for it. Recently, the development of marketing environment is shifting gradually and becoming very multifaceted and more competitive (Gillani, 2013). Moreover, the empowerment of customer and increasing competition forcing marketing professionals to find out creative modes and methods to gain the advantage of competition and get consumer attention (Rajumesh, 2014). Consequently, the necessity of looking for a new way to gain and maintain loyalty by building customer believes and gives a personal identity to brand loyalty is essential for businesses. Customer of modern are getting more conscious about the products they are using because of the level of their consciousness is increasing with the rapid change of lifestyle. The attitude towards a particular brand is now not only depending on the necessity and the utility of that products, but also it reveals a customer's personality and their social status. On the other hand, Campbell (1991) mentioned that, sometimes customers might not act as a consequence of conscious choice but as the consequence of unconsciousness habits as well as emotions. Consequently, one might perceive that customer having problem of behaving consciously might experience a same problem of consciousness about brand loyalty as well (Akın, 2012).

Malaysia as a multiracial country, where culture has a great power to control the market, it is very tough for marketers to gain the loyalty of the young generations just by providing the same kinds of product. Because, every culture has different core values, beliefs and norms. Culture is influencing customer to be more conscious about their perception to the products. Besides, Malaysia has a huge number of international students and workers who are coming from different region like South Asia, Middle East, Europe and they might have different perception because of their different culture. It can be said that, these large number of foreign people also have an effective impact towards the Malaysian marketplace. These dynamic scenarios make companies more concern about marketing their products to the target markets where customers are conscious about brand, price, quality and social value of the products. Based on the examination, the intention of this current study is to establish and test a model of a better understanding of the relationship of customer consciousness toward brand loyalty between Malaysian students and international students.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this research was to explore the relationships of customer consciousness towards brand loyalty between Malaysian and international students of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. And the specific objectives were:

1. To analyze a relationship between price-consciousness and brand loyalty.
2. To analyze a relationship between brand-consciousness and brand loyalty.
3. To analyze a relationship between quality-consciousness and brand loyalty.
4. To analyze a relationship between social-consciousness and brand loyalty.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding the significance of consumer behaviour in buying specific products and services is very important. However, it can be explained by a consumer behavioural adoption theory, Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). This theory was developed for the purpose of explaining the consumer's purchasing behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Moreover, this theory describes the numbers of antecedent variable of buying behaviour such as the consciousness toward the behaviour, the subjective norm and the behavioural intention where intention acts as a moderator. The conceptual framework is developed to identify the relationship between the customer conscious and brand loyalty between Malaysian and International students. The dependent variables are- price-consciousness, brand-consciousness, quality-consciousness and social-consciousness. On the other hand, the dependent variable used in this framework is the brand loyalty. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework.
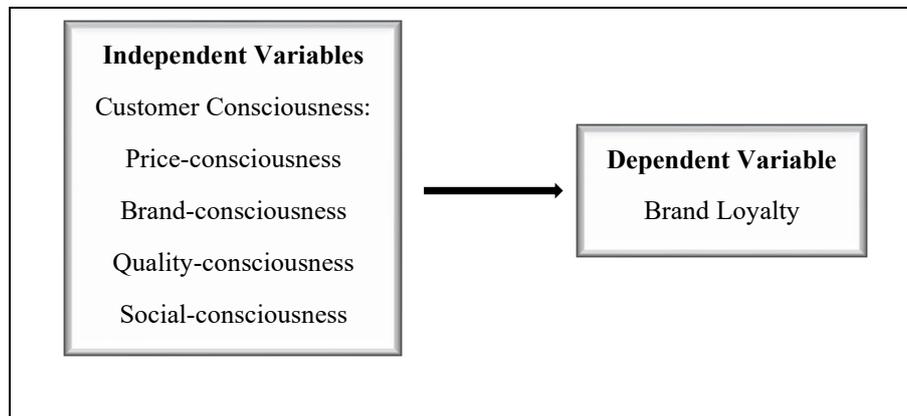

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework. Source: Adopted with modification from Akin, (2012).

Research Hypothesis

Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer (1993) described the price-consciousness as the scale of measurement used to measure the customer decision towards price in the negative way. In different way, "customer who has price consciousness is not willing to pay a higher price for a product or he only centers on searching for low price products" (Lee, 2008). The purchasing intention of customers for a product or service is reflected by their willingness to pay. Customers' perception of high price, low price or mutual usually influence his/her purchasing behavior and loyalty (Ahmad & Vays, 2011; Suki, 2013). As a result, product with higher price- other things remain constant- led to lower purchasing possibility by the customer. The unwillingness commonly represents the customers' sensitivity about pricing. This price sensitivity has been converted as the perception of price consciousness in literature. Based on above research, it is considered as the first hypothesis to be examine in this study.

H1: Customer's price-consciousness will have a significant relationship towards brand loyalty.

Customers who give more consideration to brand names and interested in buying the renowned branded products are called brand-conscious customer (Yaşin, 2009). Therefore, the consciousness of a brand can be explained as "an intellectual direction to choose brand-name, services and products that are renowned and extremely promoted" (Sprotles & Kendall, 1986). Besides, brand conscious people will appreciate updated information about latest trends and fashions involved in brand media as well as the celebrities (Keum, Devanathan, Deshpande, Nelson & Shah, 2004). Therefore, customer who has high brand-consciousness, consider brand as the sign of image,

identity as well as their status, to represent their personality (Lee, 2008). High conscious customers believe that their prestige and personal status are symbolized by brands, as the result they prefer to buy recognized, branded and expensive products (Liao & Wang, 2009). On the other hand, brand conscious consumers consider brand as a symbol of quality (Eastman & Eastman, 2011). Besides, it should be also emphasized that trust level is the other important point of attention for customers that a brand delivers to them. Based on above research, it is considered as the second hypothesis to be examine in this study.

H2: Customer's brand-consciousness will have a significant relationship towards brand loyalty.

 "Consumers who always tend to discover the products of high quality and make their decision of preference over quality, without comprising from quality for price" are defined as quality-consciousness (Ailawadi, Neslin & Gedenk, 2001). Customers' justification on overall quality or advantage of the products or services can be defined as a perceived quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Rowely (1998) defines perceive quality in the service sector as a type of attitude but different from the satisfaction, happens as perception of performance from their expectations. Gurbuz (2008) mentioned perceived quality as the main dimension of brand loyalty. High satisfaction of a brand or product indicates the high quality of the brand or product and low satisfaction of a brand or product indicates low quality of product or brand. Customers who have experience on specific brand or branded product usually behave positively towards the brand thus increase the quality-consciousness of that brand or branded products. Based on above research, it is considered as the third hypothesis to be examine in this study.

H3: Customer's quality-consciousness will have a significant relationship towards brand loyalty.

According to Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999) social-consciousness is "the process of motivation to improve customer's social standing through exposed consumption of consumer products that deliberate or symbolize status for both customers and their surrounding". To maintain the social status, customers want to develop their status so their decisions in purchasing is highly dependent on the product attributes. When customers get satisfied by getting their necessity to achieve a specific lifestyle, they tend to develop a repeat purchasing behaviour towards the same brand. Moreover, a personal attachments formed when customer's desired lifestyles reflected by the consumption of the brands (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). In recent times, consumers share their reviews and opinions on social media and their friends and families can get information about the products which makes them more conscious to behave positive towards brand (Mangold & Foulds, 2009; Stileman, 2009). Based on above research, it is considered as the third hypothesis to be examine in this study.

H4: Customer's social-consciousness will have a significant relationship towards brand loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
Quantitative method was used in this research to get all the required information by conducting survey with the respondents. Because, it is possible to conduct the research for locating and obtaining correct data about customer consciousness and its relationship with brand loyalty. Therefore, a list of questions is use to collect data from the respective respondents who joined this study by using quantitative method.

Population and Sample
In this research, the targeted population are the students of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), located in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia. UNIMAS has 17,628 people including postgraduates, undergraduates, pre-university, local and international students and staffs. Questionnaire method was used to gather all the information for analyzing the relationship of customer-consciousness towards brand loyalty between Malaysian and International students. However, only 200 respondents were targeted to conduct this research from the population of UNIMAS and non-probability sampling technique was used and applied.

Data Collection Method
As this study is conducted based on quantitative data collection, questionnaires about the relationship of customer-consciousness towards brand loyalty between Malaysian and International students, especially in UNIMAS. Moreover, the existing information available for Malaysian and international students was gathered from different websites and all related researches and theories are reviewed carefully to come up with a primary framework. A set of a close-end questionnaire had been used as the research instrument for this study. A structured questionnaire is subsequently developed in English languages only with the inclusion of both Malaysian and international student respondents. In this study, majority of the items in the questionnaire are from a pre-existing questionnaires with a little modification applied towards the items in the questionnaire. Likert Scales is used to measure the degree of

importance in Section B & C of the questionnaire. The responses were weighted from 1 to 5 with higher values indicating the greater agreement (Kamri & Radam, 2013). The level of importance is based on the following score:

1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree.

The data that which has been collected will be analyzed based on the descriptive statistics analysis. Descriptive analysis enables this study to use percentage analysis in response to each variable distributed and enable us to understand more about the results. On the other hand, SPSS is the most widely used software program for the analysis of a survey data as it offers a wide range of data analysis products from data collection, analysis and modelling to the report presentation. Thus, SPSS v23.0 was chosen for this study to analyse all the data collected from the survey.

Statistical Analysis

In the first place, reliability test is important to ensure validity and reliability of instruments used in the research in order to obtain good results from the analysis. Reliability test refers to the degree to which a data collection method or methods will yield a consistent finding, One of the most common tests used to measure reliability of the research using survey questionnaire is the Cronbach Alpha test. Based on this test, a reliable study should have Cronbach's alpha score exceed 0.7. Besides, Pearson's Correlation analysis will be used to test the hypotheses and confirm the conjectured relationships among the specified variables.

RESULTS

Reliability Test

Results of the Cronbach Alpha test on the dataset are presented in Table 1. All the variables price-consciousness, brand- consciousness, quality-consciousness, social-consciousness and brand loyalty are reliable for this study as reported by the Cronbach Alpha's values greater than 0.7.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha Values for the study variables (N= 197)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Price-Consciousness	.834	4
Brand- Consciousness	.848	4
Quality- Consciousness	.795	4
Social- Consciousness	.875	4
Brand Loyalty	.793	5

Hypothesis Testing

In this study, Pearson's Correlation analysis is used to find out the specific hypothesis of the selected variables. A hypothesis can be defined as a logically conjectured relationship between two or more variable expressed in the form of a testable statement (Sekaran, 2000). By testing the hypotheses and confirming the conjectured relationships, it is expected that the solution can be found to correct the problem encounter.

In Table 2, four very useful indicators of the data were summarized. One is Pearson Correlation also known as R-value. This value indicates the strength of the relationship between the variables. Another important indicator is the significance value, also known as P-value. To indicate a significant relationship, P-value has to be 0.05 or less. Moreover, t-value and B-value also indicate the indirect relationship between any two variables. However, according to Table 2, the R-value for price-consciousness, brand-consciousness, quality-consciousness and social-consciousness are -0.050, 0.587, 0.491 and 0.627 respectively. Meanwhile, the P-values are respectively 0.487, 0.000, 0.000 and 0.000. Based on this result, it can be said that the brand-consciousness, quality-consciousness and social-consciousness have a positive significant relationship toward brand loyalty except for the price-consciousness. The t-value and B-value also further supported the result. Therefore, only hypothesis 1 is rejected and rest of the hypothesis are accepted.

Table 2. Summary of linear regression analysis of independent variables

Model	R	R²	Std. Er.	F	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	sig
					B	Std. Er.		
Price-consciousness (1)	-.050	.002	.73744	.485	-.042	.060	-.696	.487
Brand-consciousness (2)	.587**	.345	.59765	102.6	.564	.056	10.131	.000
Quality-consciousness (3)	.491**	.241	.64333	61.864	.628	.080	7.865	.000
Social-consciousness (4)	.627**	.393	.57521	126.30	.562	.050	11.238	.000

Dependent Variable: Brand loyalty
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

DISCUSSION

Price-consciousness and Brand Loyalty

"Customer who has price consciousness is not willing to pay a higher price for a product or he only centers on searching for low price products" (Lee, 2008). Study shows that, customer's price-conscious have a negative relationship toward brand loyalty (Kumar & Rajan, 2009). Customers' perception of high price, low price or mutual influence his/her purchasing behavior and loyalty (Ahmad & Vays, 2011; Suki, 2013). As a result, product with high price, other things obtain still same, possibility of purchasing a product by a customer is low. Moreover, based on the result from the Pearson Correlation test and regression analysis estimated, the relationship of price-consciousness and brand loyalty in nearly zero (R= -0.050) and there is no significant level between these two variables (p= .487). That is why the first hypothesis is rejected.

Brand-consciousness and Brand Loyalty

Liao and Wang (2009) stated that the high consciousness customers believe that their prestige and personal status are symbolized by brands, so they prefer to buy a recognized branded and expensive product. Because, brand conscious consumers consider brand as a symbol of quality (Eastman & Eastman, 2011). Customer who has high brand-consciousness, consider brand as the sign of image, identity as well as their status, to represent their personality (Lee, 2008). Previous study proved that brand name has positive relationship toward brand loyalty, (Wong & Sidek, 2008). Furthermore, based on the result from the Pearson Correlation and regression analysis, the brand-consciousness and brand loyalty have a significant positive relationship (R= 0.587) and there is a significant level between these two variables (p= .000). That is why the second hypothesis is accepted.

Quality-consciousness and Brand loyalty

Products' or services' performance is highly affected by the expectation of the consumer (Churchill & Brown., 1982) and performance of the brand depends on the attributes of the product that the buyer expects. "These features can be in the form of hardware, software, style or another functionality" (Churchill & Brown, 1982). Previous study proved that customer satisfaction perceived brand quality and experience has positive and significant relationship toward brand loyalty (Forsido, 2012). Furthermore, based on the result from the Pearson Correlation test and regression analysis, the quality-consciousness and brand loyalty have a significant positive relationship (R= 0.491) and there is a significant level between these two variables (p= .000). That is why the third hypothesis is accepted.

Social-consciousness and Brand Loyalty

Brands provide important meanings to identify the customer's identity and interact with other customers (Sirgy, 1982). Brand symbolism has a positive relationship with brand loyalty. Another study showed that, the brand community has a positive relationship with brand loyalty (Bennett, Härtel & McColl-Kennedy, 2005). Furthermore, based on the result from the Pearson Correlation test and simple regression analysis, social-consciousness and brand loyalty have a significant positive relationship (R= 0.627) and there is a significant level between these two variables (p= .000). That is why the fourth hypothesis is accepted.

Recommendations for Future Research

In future, the research can be conducted by determining a wider range of customer consciousness that may have relationship with a brand loyalty. One suggestion will be to study more deeply into all the characteristics of customer consciousness like health-consciousness, environment-consciousness, and safety-consciousness. For further research, the survey should be carried out on a bigger sample which would be more presentable. Moreover, some additional questions as well as statements regarding the demographic profile and characteristics of consciousness can be included in the survey questions. Unfortunately, in this research, the education level of the respondents is not included in the questionnaire. It is a very important factor for research to understand the education level as it can also be an indicator for consciousness. Education has effects on customer's consciousness. So, it should be included in survey question. For further research, more international student should be included from different institution as international respondents have a huge of impact on outcome of the survey.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to compare the customer consciousness toward brand loyalty between Malaysian and international students. The research question "What is the relationship between the customer consciousness and brand loyalty?" and "What are the relationships between the price-consciousness, brand-consciousness, quality-consciousness, and social-consciousness with the brand loyalty?" has been developed to answer it where a proposed conceptual framework had been leaded in this study. After the result evaluated from the survey of the research sample, it is found that, the price-consciousness does not have any significant relationship toward brand loyalty. However, the rest of the independent variables which are brand-consciousness, quality-consciousness and social-consciousness have a positive significant relationship with the brand loyalty.

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