

Full Length Research Paper

Understanding the mediating effect of cognitive and emotional satisfaction on customer loyalty

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Studies have proven that businesses have to incur new and additional cost in order to attract new customers as compared to retaining existing customers. Retaining loyal customers are crucial as they eventually contribute to the increase in business organization's revenue and are more likely to occur in a form of word-of-mouth (WOM). In the compound and vibrant Malaysian home computer retail market today, customer loyalty (CL) through word-of-mouth marketing tends to occur very slowly and is limited geographically but is a very potent method of marketing. The influence of cognitive and emotional satisfaction on the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and CL through intention to promote by WOM is vital. This will then lead to increased benefits for the organization in the form of CL. The cognitive evaluation of customer satisfaction (CS) was found to explain CL in a retail setting more than the emotional reaction. This finding holds importance to those retailers who have been able to generate high expectations in the eyes of their customers.

Key words: Adaptive selling skills, sales presentation skills, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

As competition deepens, products and services become more indistinguishable, and markets become established, it is becoming increasingly tougher for companies in retailing industries to distinguish themselves from other stores. Simply offering customers with technical solutions to problems does not be sufficient anymore to be competitive and obtain and retain market share. Various value-added services, which commence before the actual operation begins, had gone far beyond it, so as to stay competitive and develop customer loyalty (CL). Research and business customs have shown that upholding

customers through value-added services costs less than obtaining new ones (Ramanathan, 2011). Studies conducted by Vesel and Zabkar (2009); Yau et al., (2000) have found that loyalty in customers eventually will lead to a long-term relationships that comes is a form of recurring purchase.

Prior researchers have found that the cost of attracting new customers is much higher than the cost of retaining old customers. Thus, the issue of keeping customer's loyalty is crucial in any business industry (Liu et al., 2011; Athanasopoulou, 2009; Lin and Wang, 2006; Rauyruen and Miller, 2007; Hu and Hwang, 2006; Athanasopoulou, 2009).

A prevailing belief holds that an essential key to performance rests with the ability to sustain customer relationships (Vesel and Zabkar, 2009). Correspondingly, as relational value continues beyond price, customer bond are particularly effective when involved in long-term relationships (Yuksel et al., 2010).

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Abbreviations: CL, customer loyalty; WOM, word-of-mouth; CS, customer satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Salesperson Behavior Performance

In recent years, a number of authors have been confronted with this issue of the changing role of the sales force. Up-and-coming trends of the extent and scope recorded above require a re-evaluation of the activities that salespeople must execute in order to successfully build and manage CL. Marshall et al. (1999), interviewed a diversity of professional salespeople to give evidence for 49 new sales activities that were not pointed out in Moncrief's (1986) original list. These latest activities fall into the following main categories: communication technology, selling technology, activities related to adaptive and consultative selling, and team-oriented activities. Many of the specific activities within these categories involve skills and content knowledge dissimilar from those traditionally observed in the past as key salesperson success factors.

This study therefore will consider how cognitive and emotional satisfaction mediates the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and customer's intention to word-of-mouth (WOM). These situational factors have not been considered in prior research and provide new avenues for examining salesperson presentation skills in Malaysian market and its consequences. Additionally, as most studies have considered salespeople as their unit of analysis, this study will add to the small but imminent body of research that investigates performance and effectiveness relationships at the customer's level.

Formation of loyalty through satisfaction

It is by and large believed that satisfaction leads to repeat purchase and positive WOM recommendation, which are the main indicators of loyalty. Previous studies have establish satisfaction to be an extensive reaction which is exaggerated through good quality of service, good quality product, price perceived by customers and the relative and personal elements that is projected by the business provider (Liu et al., 2011). Marketing literature has paid much attention to the relationship between customer satisfaction (CS) and CL (Chi, 2005). A number of studies have confirmed a significant positive relationship between CS and CL /retention (Chi, 2005). If consumers are satisfied with the product or service, they are more likely to carry on purchasing, and are more willing to spread positive WOM.

Salesperson presentation skills

Churchill et al. (1997) define selling skill as a salesperson's "learned proficiencies at performing job activities," and describe Salesperson presentation skills as the skills that are associated to successfully conducting the personal selling process (that is, the series of interconnected steps that salespeople generally use to link with the

influence customer).

Recognizing the importance of salesperson presentation skills (Plouffe et al., 2010; Williams and Plouffe, 2007; Marshall et al., 2003) gathered and ranked sales manager perceptions of "success factors" that contribute to salesperson job performance. They report that managers feel that six specific salesperson presentation skills: listening, adaptive selling, handling objections, closing, negotiating, and prospecting (in descending order of perceived importance) are highly important to salesperson performance (Johlke, 2006). Accordingly, this group of salesperson presentation skills will be used at the heart of the hypothesized model.

Customer satisfaction

The importance of CS to the success of consumer goods manufacturers (Burns and Neisner, 2006) and to the success of retailers (Darian et al., 2001) has been well documented. CS is regarded as a primary determining factor of repeat shopping and purchasing behavior. The greater the degree to which a consumer experiences satisfaction with a retailer, for instance, the greater the probability the consumer will revisit the retailer (Burns and Neisner, 2006; Wong and Sohal, 2003).

In summary, we note the distinction between transaction-specific and overall satisfaction, and for this study, we adopt the broader definition of satisfaction whereby the overall measure is an aggregation of all previous transaction-specific satisfaction, and involves both cognitive and affective components. Recently, the overall measure has been shown to be a better predictor of repurchase intentions (Jones and Suh, 2000).

Research framework and hypotheses

Based on the review of literatures concerning the study variables on salesperson presentation skills, CS, and customer's intention to, the theoretical framework for this study was developed based on Oliver's (1997) Cognitive-Affective-Conative Behavior pattern model. This research model has been adapted and used in this study.

Relationship between salesperson presentation skill and Intention to WOM

Although a customer's personality and the employee's customer orientation were considered an important antecedent to relationship strength, salesperson presentation skill rather than his/her personality would perform a greater part in determining relationship strength (Seo et al., 2008). Salespersons are social actors who learn behaviors that are appropriate to the positions they take up (Kassim and Abdullah, 2008). In other words, salesperson can be motivated to adapt their behavior to situational requirements in spite of personal preferences

(Deng et al., 2010).

To date, there is a lack of studies investigating the numerous aspects of service that are imperative to customer retention (Maznah et al., 2009)? Furthermore, the different outcomes (i.e. attitudinal and behavioral) of relationship strength are left predominantly unexplored in the relationship marketing literature. In addition, there is a lack of studies that explore the impact of factors such as salesperson presentation skill on customer's intention to WOM.

Conclusively, there is little empirical work investigating customer relationship economies, which is the link between attitudinal measures (that is, salesperson presentation skill, CS) and behavioral measures (that is, CL, intention to repurchase, intention to WOM, and long-term customer relationship profitability), Wong and Sohal (2006). Therefore, in line with the above reasoning's and findings, it is conjectured that:

H₁: There is a direct positive relationship between salesperson's presentation skills and intention to WOM.

Relationship between CS and customer's intention to WOM

CS is important to marketers because it is usually assumed to be a significant determinant of recurring sales, positive word-of-mouth, intention to repurchase, and CL. It is worthy to consumers because it reflects a positive outcome following the outlay of limited resources and/or the positive accomplishment of prior needs. As a consequence, maximizing satisfaction is seen as a significant objective, collectively for both the firm and the consumer (Mouri, 2005).

Likewise, theory suggests that satisfaction feeds back into the system to influence ensuing intentions and behaviors (Wallace et al., 2004; Deng et al., 2010). CS with the shopping experience should reflect well on the retailer. An increase in satisfaction has been shown to result in increased CL (Donio et al., 2006). From the above arguments, it is hypothesized that:

H₂: There is a direct positive relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to word-of-mouth.

H_{2a}: There is a direct positive relationship between cognitive satisfaction and intention to word-of-mouth.

H_{2b}: There is a direct positive relationship between emotional satisfaction and intention to WOM.

The mediating effect of CS on salesperson presentation skill and customer's intention to WOM relationship

Overall satisfaction with an experience does lead to CL (Vesel and Zabkar, 2009). Deng et al. (2010) argue that CS is imperative to the marketer because "it is generally assumed to be significant determinant of repeat sales,

positive WOM, intention to repurchase, and CL". Similarly, Yuksel et al. (2010) have also argued that "satisfaction can be thought of as an important determinant of CL", while Omar et al. (2007) argue that it is satisfaction with a brand or service that leads to CL. Maznah et al. (2009) have established in their study that there is a significant association linking cognitive satisfaction with WOM. Cognitive satisfaction in due course will lead to positive WOM and thus maintaining CL.

This view is also supported by Han and Back (2008). Back (2005) empirically show that brand and service loyal customers had a lower probability to substitute brands or service due to higher levels of satisfaction. On the basis of the aforementioned findings, CS is indicated as having a function and acting as a mediator in the link between salesperson presentation skills and CL (Deng et al., 2010). Therefore, in line with the above reasoning's and findings, the following were hypothesized:

H₃: CS mediates the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM.

H_{3a}: Cognitive satisfaction mediates the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM.

H_{3b}: Emotional satisfaction mediates the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling design

To have a representative finding, the sampling technique used must be objective. This is an important effort adopted by most researchers in order to furnish a finding pertinent to the general. To choose the sample for this study, probability random sampling was used.

A probability sample is necessary if the sample is to be representative of the population (Pallant, 2005). Therefore, a two-stage systematic sampling technique is employed in this study.

Population and sample size

In determining the sample size for this study, sample size selected was based on the criteria set according to Sawyer and Ball (1981). According to Sawyer and Ball (1981), it is estimated that a proportion of 13% of the explained variance to effect size values is a medium effect size for regression analysis. One common measure of effect size is eta squared. Eta squared represents the proportion of variance of the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable (Pallant, 2005).

According to Cohen (1988), the strength of the effect size are interpreted as follows; 0.01 = small effect size, 0.06 = moderate effect size, and 0.14 = large effect size. Thus five independent variables were used and using the statistical significance of 0.05 (95% confidence level) and an effect size values of .13 is found to be truly sufficient and not by chance.

Goodness of measure

In determining the goodness of data for the study, factor analysis

Table 1. Reliability coefficients for the variables in the study.

Construct/Variable	Number of item	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Standard deviation
Sales presentation skill/knowledge	3	0.75	3.78	0.72
CS/ Emotional satisfaction	4	0.84	4.10	0.64
Cognitive satisfaction	4	0.76	3.85	0.58
Customer loyalty/WOM	2	0.70	3.93	0.59

Note: All items used a 5-point Likert scale. 1, Strongly disagree; 5, strongly agree.

and reliability analysis were performed. Factor analysis was used to assess the convergent validity of the items used in the questionnaire while Cronbach's alpha was performed to examine the internal consistency of the factors obtained. The result of the reliability test are presented in Table 1.

The result of the reliability analysis sum up in Table 1 confirmed that all the scales shown, reveal a high internal consistency and reliability with Cronbach's alpha values higher than the minimum perimeter, (Cronbach's alpha > 0.60).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Hypotheses testing

Multiple regression tests were conducted in order to test the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variable. Respondents' demographic variables such as salesperson are younger or older than the customers, gender, and ethnicity were statistically controlled (Connel et al., 2003; Hemdi, 2006). Hence, these variables were entered into the regression equation in the first step. The predictor variables were entered in the second step. The following Table's below summarizes the result of the analyses.

Regression analysis with control variables

The relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM

From Table 2, salesperson presentation skills have positive and significant association with intention to WOM; salesperson presentation skills ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), and thus, the results provide evidence that H_1 is fully supported.

The relationship between CS and Intention to WOM

To test for hypothesis 2a, another set of regression analysis was performed. The purpose of this analysis is to test for the effect of cognitive satisfaction on intention to WOM. The predictor variable was cognitive satisfaction. The criterion variables relates to intention to WOM. Salesperson's demographic variables such as younger or older than the customers, gender, and ethnicity were statistically controlled. Hence, these variables were

entered into the regression equation in the first step. Cognitive satisfaction was entered in the second step. Table 3 summarizes the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. These results provide evidence that H_{2a} is accepted.

Additionally, to test for H_{2b} , another set of regression analysis was also performed. The purpose of this analysis is to test for the effect of emotional satisfaction on intention to WOM. The predictor variable was emotional satisfaction. The criterion variables relates to intention to WOM. Salesperson's demographic variables such as younger or older than the customers, gender, and ethnicity were statistically controlled. Hence, these variables were entered into the regression equation in the first step. Emotional satisfaction was entered in the second step. Table 4 summarizes the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. These results provide evidence that H_{2b} is accepted.

The mediating effect of cognitive satisfaction on the relationship between salesperson presentations skills and intention to WOM

H_{3a} posits that cognitive satisfaction mediates the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM. Results in Table 4 shows that none of the control variables had significant influence on intention to WOM in step 1, however, salesperson presentation skills ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$), were found to significantly influenced intention to word-of-mouth in the second regression equation. Additionally, the third regression equation resulted in sales presentation skill to be insignificant after the third regression. Thus it indicates that cognitive satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between sales presentation skills on intention to WOM. The comparison can be seen in Table 5. These results provide evidence that hypothesis H_{3a} is supported.

The mediating effect of emotional satisfaction on the relationship between salesperson presentations skills and intention to WOM

H_{3b} posits that emotional satisfaction mediates the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM. Results in Table 6 shows that none of the control variables had significant influence on intention

Table 2. Results of hierarchical regression analysis of salesperson presentation skills on intention to WOM.

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2
	Std. β	Std. β
Step 1: Control variables		
Younger or older	-0.05	0.01
Gender	-0.01	-0.01
Ethnicity	0.09	-0.02
Step 2:		
Sales presentation skills		0.16**
R ²	0.01	0.43
Adj. R ²	0.01	0.42
R ² Change	0.01	0.42
F-Change	1.09	68.19**

Note. Significant levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3. Results of hierarchical regression analysis of cognitive satisfaction on Intention to WOM.

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2
	Std. β	Std. β
Step 1: Control variables		
Younger or older	-0.05	-0.04
Gender	-0.01	-0.02
Ethnicity	0.06	0.02
Step 2		
Cognitive satisfaction		0.64**
R ²	0.01	0.41
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.40
R ² Change	0.01	0.40
F-Change	0.70	303.91**

Note: Significant levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4. Results of hierarchical regression analysis of emotional satisfaction on Intention to WOM.

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2
	Std. β	Std. β
Step 1: Control variables		
Younger or older	-0.05	0.01
Gender	-0.01	-0.02
Ethnicity	0.12	0.10
Step 2:		
Emotional satisfaction		0.54**
R ²	0.01	0.30
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.29
R ² Change	0.01	0.29
F-Change	1.10	188.57**

Note: Significant levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 5. Summary of mediating effects of cognitive satisfaction on the relationship between Salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM.

Predictor	Criterion variable				Result
	Significant level and beta before mediating (Regression Equation II – DV on IV)		Significant level and beta after Mediating (Regression Equation III – DV on IV and MV)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	
Control					
Younger or older	-0.05	0.02	-0.05	-0.00	
Gender	0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	
ethnicity	0.10	-0.01	0.06	0.01	
Independent					
Salesperson presentation skills		0.25**		0.07	Full mediation
Mediating					
Cognitive satisfaction				0.31**	
R ²	0.01	0.43	0.01	0.49	
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.42	-0.00	0.48	
R ² Change	0.01	0.42	0.01	0.49	
F change	1.09	68.19**	0.70	70.39**	

Note: Significant levels: *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Table 6. Summary of mediating effects of emotional satisfaction on the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM.

Predictor	Criterion variable				Result
	Significant levels and beta before mediating (Regression Equation II – DV on IV)		Significant levels and beta after Mediating (Regression Equation III – DV on IV and MV)		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	
Control					
Younger or older	-0.05	0.05	-0.05	0.01	
Gender	0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	
ethnicity	0.10	-0.01	0.06	0.02	
Independent					
Sales person presentation skills		18**		16**	Partial mediation
Mediating					
Cognitive satisfaction				0.20**	
R ²	0.01	0.43	0.01	0.48	
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.42	-0.00	0.47	
R ² Change	0.01	0.42	0.01	0.47	
F change	1.09	68.19**	0.70	65.45**	

Note: Significant levels: *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

to word-of-mouth in step 1, however, salesperson presentation skills ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$), were found to significantly influenced intention to word-of-mouth in the second regression equation.

Subsequently, the sales presentation skill was found to be significant after the third regression. Thus it indicates that emotional satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between sales presentation skills on intention to

WOM. The comparison can be seen in Table 6. These results provide evidence that hypothesis H3b is partially supported.

DISCUSSION

H₃ deals with the mediating role of CS in the relationship between salesperson presentation skills and intention to WOM.

Results of this study found that cognitive satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between sales presentation skills on intention to WOM. This implied that sales presentation skills have an indirect impact on customer's intention to WOM via cognitive satisfaction. This result suggests that salesperson who possess an overall sales presentation skill, plus an ability to applied these skills during their interaction with the customers is vital in enhancing customers intention to WOM.

The result of this study is consistent with the findings of previous study by Shemwell et al. (1998); Vesel and Zabkar (2009); Solomon et al. (2002); Bennett and Rundle-Thiele (2004); Oliver (1997); Yu and Dean (2001), which suggest that satisfaction is a more central construct which mediates the effect of service quality perceptions on behavioral intentions and other outcomes. The published research in the field of service marketing universally acknowledges a strong positive correlation between salesperson service quality and satisfaction, some early works depicted salesperson service is perceived as an antecedent of satisfaction (Levy and Weitz, 2009).

Thus the results of this study suggest that efforts to increase customer's loyalty should focus on enhancing customer's cognitive satisfaction during the salesperson/customers interaction, this is in line with research conducted by Egan (2000); McIlroy and Barnett (2000); Bennet and Rundle-Thiele (2004). Special attention should be given to the enhancement of sales presentation skills, which were found to have significant effects on customer's intention to WOM.

Limitations and future research

Future research may benefit if some limitations of this study are noticed. Although we have examined a number of important issues in this study, there are several limitations inherent in the study. Firstly, only computer retailers in the northern states of Malaysia were examined. As a consequence, and regardless of the fact that the customers of the firm represent a wide range of industries, the generalization of the findings to other retail organizations is limited. However, as noted by Foster and Cadogan (2000), the generalization of studies undertaken in a single firm must be viewed with some skepticism; the results are likely to have increased internal validity.

Clearly future research which provides more

information on the external validity of our study would be most welcome.

Conclusion

The present study confirms that cognitive satisfaction was able to explain customer's intention to WOM in a retail setting in the Malaysian market. The finding suggest that computer retailers whose customers possess high expectations on the salesperson's sales presentation skills may need to place explicit attention on their customers' cognitive evaluations since their customers' cognitive reactions to performance appear to contribute to their assessments of satisfaction.

Finding in this study shows that, loyalty defined by personal positive experience (that is, affective loyalty), is most associated with WOM. Because person-to-person communication is touted as "one of the most powerful types of media", and affective loyalty is the largest correlate to WOM, therefore, successful business strategies will have to include creating situations where emotional attachments to services provided by the salesperson are developed. Consumers who believe in the salespersons or are involved in the purchase process tend to participate in WOM because it enhances commitment to their own attitude.

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