

Customer Satisfaction Without Loyalty: Exploring Behavioral Switching Factors

Kepuasan Pelanggan Tanpa Loyalitas: Menjelajahi Faktor-Faktor Pengalihan Perilaku

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Article history

Received :

(DD-MM-YYYY)

Revised :

(DD-MM-YYYY)

Accepted :

(DD-MM-YYYY)

ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction has long been considered one of the primary predictors of customer loyalty in marketing literature. However, contemporary consumer markets demonstrate that satisfied consumers do not always remain loyal to brands. The increasing availability of alternatives, digital exposure, aggressive promotional activities, and dynamic consumer preferences have contributed to a growing phenomenon known as the satisfaction-loyalty gap. This study aims to explore behavioral switching factors that explain why satisfied consumers still switch brands despite positive consumption experiences. The study employs a qualitative literature review approach by synthesizing previous studies related to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, switching behavior, and consumer behavior. The findings indicate that behavioral switching factors are multidimensional and involve psychological, economic, emotional, and situational mechanisms. The dominant factors identified include variety-seeking behavior, price sensitivity, promotional attractiveness, low switching costs, weak emotional attachment, social influence, and digital consumer environments. The study suggests that customer satisfaction alone is insufficient to ensure long-term loyalty in highly competitive markets. Companies therefore need to develop stronger emotional engagement, relational strategies, and customer experiences beyond merely achieving functional satisfaction.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Satisfaction-Loyalty Gap, Switching Behavior, Consumer Behavior.*

ABSTRAK

Kepuasan pelanggan telah lama dianggap sebagai salah satu prediktor utama loyalitas pelanggan dalam literatur pemasaran. Namun, pasar konsumen kontemporer menunjukkan bahwa konsumen yang puas tidak selalu tetap loyal kepada merek. Meningkatnya ketersediaan alternatif, paparan digital, aktivitas promosi yang agresif, dan preferensi konsumen yang dinamis telah berkontribusi pada fenomena yang berkembang yang dikenal sebagai kesenjangan kepuasan-loyalitas. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor peralihan perilaku yang menjelaskan mengapa konsumen yang puas masih beralih merek meskipun memiliki

pengalaman konsumsi yang positif. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan literatur kualitatif dengan mensintesis studi-studi sebelumnya yang berkaitan dengan kepuasan pelanggan, loyalitas pelanggan, perilaku peralihan, dan perilaku konsumen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa faktor-faktor peralihan perilaku bersifat multidimensional dan melibatkan mekanisme psikologis, ekonomi, emosional, dan situasional. Faktor dominan yang diidentifikasi meliputi perilaku mencari variasi, sensitivitas harga, daya tarik promosi, biaya peralihan yang rendah, keterikatan emosional yang lemah, pengaruh sosial, dan lingkungan konsumen digital. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa kepuasan pelanggan saja tidak cukup untuk memastikan loyalitas jangka panjang di pasar yang sangat kompetitif. Oleh karena itu, perusahaan perlu mengembangkan keterlibatan emosional yang lebih kuat, strategi relasional, dan pengalaman pelanggan di luar sekadar mencapai kepuasan fungsional.

Kata Kunci: Kepuasan Pelanggan, Loyalitas Pelanggan, Kesenjangan Kepuasan-Loyalitas, Perilaku Beralih Pelanggan, Perilaku Konsumen.

INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction has traditionally been regarded as one of the most important determinants of customer loyalty in marketing theory and practice [1]. Satisfied consumers are generally expected to repurchase products, maintain long-term relationships with brands, and engage in positive word-of-mouth communication [2]. Consequently, many companies prioritize customer satisfaction as a central strategic objective to improve customer retention and strengthen competitive advantage [3].

However, contemporary consumer markets increasingly demonstrate that customer satisfaction does not always translate into customer loyalty [4]. Many consumers who express positive experiences with products or services still switch to competing brands for various reasons, including promotional attractiveness, lower prices, product curiosity, convenience, and social influence [5]. This phenomenon reflects what is commonly described as the satisfaction-loyalty gap, where consumers may feel satisfied but remain behaviorally disloyal [6].

The relationship between satisfaction and loyalty has become more complex due to rapid technological development, digital commerce expansion, and increasingly dynamic consumer behavior [7]. Digital platforms and social commerce environments provide consumers with easier access to product comparisons, online reviews, promotional campaigns, and alternative brands, reducing dependence on a single product or service provider [8]. As a result, consumers are becoming more flexible and experimental in their purchasing decisions [9].

According to Richard L. Oliver, customer loyalty refers to a deeply held commitment to repurchase or consistently support a preferred product or service despite situational influences and marketing efforts from competitors [10]. In contrast, customer satisfaction refers to the consumer's evaluative judgment regarding whether

product performance meets or exceeds expectations [11]. Although satisfaction is widely recognized as a prerequisite for loyalty, previous studies suggest that satisfaction alone may not be sufficient to sustain long-term consumer commitment [12].

Several scholars argue that modern consumers often demonstrate variety-seeking tendencies and switching behavior despite experiencing satisfaction with previous products [13]. The abundance of competing alternatives and the increasing influence of digital marketing campaigns intensify consumers' curiosity toward alternative products and brands [14]. This condition is particularly visible in industries characterized by high competition and low switching barriers, such as food and beverage products, fashion, digital services, and online retail [15].

Furthermore, emotional attachment toward brands has become increasingly important in determining loyalty behavior [16]. Consumers who experience only functional satisfaction without emotional connection are more likely to switch brands when competitors offer better incentives or experiences [17]. This indicates that customer loyalty involves not only rational evaluations but also emotional, relational, and psychological dimensions [18].

Previous studies have extensively discussed the positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty [19]. However, limited studies specifically explore the behavioral factors underlying the inconsistency between these two constructs, particularly within contemporary digital consumer environments [20]. Most traditional marketing studies tend to assume a linear relationship in which satisfaction automatically leads to loyalty, while contemporary consumer behavior suggests a more dynamic and fragmented pattern [21].

Understanding the satisfaction-loyalty gap is important because relying solely on customer satisfaction may no longer be adequate for maintaining long-term customer retention in highly competitive markets [22]. Companies need to recognize behavioral switching mechanisms and develop more comprehensive customer engagement strategies that strengthen emotional attachment and relational value [23]. Based on these explanations, this study aims to explore behavioral switching factors contributing to the phenomenon in which satisfied consumers still switch brands despite positive consumption experiences.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the consumer's evaluation of whether a product or service fulfills expectations and needs [11]. Satisfaction occurs when consumers perceive that product performance matches or exceeds their expectations, while

dissatisfaction emerges when expectations are not achieved [24]. According to Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, customer satisfaction reflects feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing perceived performance with prior expectations [25]. Satisfaction is considered an essential outcome in marketing because it contributes to positive customer experiences and influences post-purchase behavior [26]. In highly competitive markets, companies continuously seek to improve customer satisfaction through product quality, service excellence, convenience, and personalized experiences [27]. However, contemporary consumer behavior demonstrates that high satisfaction levels do not necessarily guarantee repeated purchasing behavior [28].

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to a customer's commitment to repurchase or continue using a preferred brand consistently over time [10]. Loyalty is considered one of the most valuable marketing outcomes because loyal consumers contribute to stable revenue, lower acquisition costs, and stronger brand advocacy [29]. Griffin explains that loyal consumers demonstrate repeat purchasing behavior, resistance to competitors, and willingness to recommend products to others [30]. Meanwhile, Dick and Basu distinguish loyalty into attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty [31]. Attitudinal loyalty reflects emotional attachment and positive attitudes toward a brand, whereas behavioral loyalty refers to actual repeat purchasing behavior [31]. This distinction suggests that consumers may demonstrate favorable attitudes toward brands without consistently engaging in repurchase behavior [32]. Therefore, satisfaction alone may produce temporary positive evaluations without necessarily generating long-term behavioral commitment [33].

Satisfaction-Loyalty Relationship

The relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty has been widely discussed in marketing literature [19]. Traditional marketing theories generally assume that satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal and engage in repurchase behavior [34]. Satisfaction positively influences trust, perceived value, and relationship quality, which are important antecedents of loyalty formation [35]. Several studies also suggest that higher satisfaction increases customer retention and reduces the likelihood of switching behavior [36]. However, other scholars argue that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is often nonlinear and context-dependent [37]. Jones and Sasser explain that satisfied customers may still defect when competitors provide attractive alternatives, lower prices, or more convenient experiences [38]. This inconsistency creates the phenomenon known as the satisfaction-loyalty gap [39]. In modern consumer markets, consumers are exposed to continuous marketing stimuli and abundant alternatives, making loyalty more

unstable and situational [40]. Consequently, companies must move beyond functional satisfaction and focus on emotional engagement and relational value creation [41].

Satisfaction-Loyalty Gap

The satisfaction-loyalty gap refers to the phenomenon in which satisfied consumers still demonstrate switching behavior and weak brand commitment [39]. This condition challenges traditional assumptions that satisfaction automatically results in loyalty [42]. Several factors contribute to the satisfaction-loyalty gap, including: 1) Variety-seeking behavior, 2) Price sensitivity, 3) Promotional attractiveness, 4) Weak emotional attachment, 5) Low switching costs, 6) Social influence, 7) Digital exposure to alternative brands. These factors indicate that loyalty is multidimensional and influenced not only by rational satisfaction evaluations but also by emotional, situational, and social mechanisms [43].

Variety-Seeking Behavior

Variety-seeking behavior refers to consumers' tendency to seek novelty and alternative experiences despite satisfaction with previous products [44]. Consumers often switch brands not because of dissatisfaction but because they desire new experiences and product stimulation [45]. According to Sela et al., variety-seeking behavior is particularly common in product categories characterized by low risk and frequent consumption [46]. In contemporary consumer culture, consumers increasingly value exploration and experimentation, making brand loyalty less stable [47].

Price Sensitivity

Price sensitivity refers to consumers' responsiveness toward price changes and economic incentives [48]. Even satisfied consumers may switch brands when competitors offer lower prices, discounts, or greater perceived value [49]. In digital commerce environments, consumers can easily compare prices across multiple platforms, increasing their tendency to pursue economically advantageous alternatives [50]. This condition weakens long-term loyalty and encourages more transactional purchasing behavior [51].

Promotional Attractiveness

Promotional attractiveness significantly influences switching behavior among consumers [52]. Discounts, cashback offers, free shipping, and limited-time promotions encourage consumers to experiment with competing brands [53]. Research in digital marketing environments suggests that promotional stimuli trigger impulsive

and heuristic decision-making processes, reducing consumers' deliberative evaluations [54]. Promotional attractiveness therefore acts not only as an economic incentive but also as a psychological trigger encouraging brand switching [55].

Weak Emotional Attachment

Emotional attachment plays an important role in maintaining long-term customer loyalty [16]. Consumers who lack emotional bonds with brands are more likely to switch when competitors offer similar products or better incentives [56]. According to Susan Fournier, strong consumer-brand relationships involve emotional connections, trust, and identity congruence [57]. Functional satisfaction without emotional engagement often produces only temporary customer relationships [58].

Digital Consumer Environment

Digital consumer environments intensify switching behavior by exposing consumers to continuous information, advertisements, influencer recommendations, and alternative products [59]. Social commerce platforms and e-commerce systems enable consumers to compare brands instantly and switch more easily than in traditional retail settings [60]. The digital marketplace also promotes impulsive and exploratory consumption behavior through algorithmic recommendations and personalized advertising [61]. Consequently, loyalty becomes increasingly fluid and influenced by situational digital stimuli [62].

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to explore behavioral switching factors underlying the satisfaction-loyalty gap in consumer behavior [63]. A literature review approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to synthesize and critically discuss previous theories and empirical findings related to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and switching behavior [64].

The study used secondary data obtained from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous empirical studies discussing consumer behavior, relationship marketing, customer retention, and brand switching [65]. Relevant literature was collected from academic databases and scholarly publications focusing on contemporary marketing and digital consumer behavior studies.

The analysis technique used in this study was descriptive thematic analysis [66]. The researcher identified recurring themes and behavioral mechanisms frequently associated with the satisfaction-loyalty gap, including variety-seeking behavior, price sensitivity, promotional attractiveness, emotional attachment, and digital consumer exposure [67]. The synthesized findings were then interpreted to develop a broader conceptual understanding of why satisfied consumers may still switch brands despite positive consumption experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Variety-Seeking as a Behavioral Driver

One dominant theme identified in the literature is the role of variety-seeking behavior in explaining why satisfied consumers continue switching brands [44]. Consumers often pursue novelty and alternative experiences even when previous products have met their expectations [45]. This behavior is increasingly common in modern markets characterized by abundant product alternatives and rapidly changing consumption trends [47]. Consumers may perceive trying new brands as enjoyable, stimulating, or socially rewarding, particularly in low-risk product categories [46]. The findings suggest that satisfaction alone cannot eliminate consumers' intrinsic desire for exploration and experimentation. Consequently, brand loyalty becomes more unstable in markets where novelty and variety are highly valued [68].

Economic Motivation and Price Sensitivity

Another dominant factor contributing to the satisfaction-loyalty gap is price sensitivity [48]. Many consumers prioritize economic value and are willing to switch brands when competitors offer more attractive prices or promotional benefits [49]. Digital commerce environments strengthen this behavior by allowing consumers to compare prices instantly across multiple platforms [50]. Consumers therefore become increasingly rational and transactional in evaluating purchasing alternatives [51]. The literature indicates that consumers may remain satisfied with a brand while simultaneously perceiving competing alternatives as economically more beneficial [69]. This condition weakens the stability of long-term loyalty relationships.

Promotional Attractiveness and Switching Behavior

Promotional attractiveness also plays a significant role in encouraging switching behavior among satisfied consumers [52]. Temporary discounts, cashback offers, flash sales, and free shipping create urgency and stimulate impulsive purchasing decisions [53]. Studies in digital consumer behavior demonstrate that promotional cues often reduce deliberative cognitive evaluation and accelerate spontaneous decision-making [54]. In many cases, consumers switch brands not because of dissatisfaction but because promotions create perceptions of superior value or limited opportunities [55]. This finding indicates that contemporary consumers are

highly responsive to short-term marketing stimuli, particularly in digital shopping environments where promotional competition is intense [70].

Emotional Attachment and Relational Weakness

The literature further highlights the importance of emotional attachment in sustaining customer loyalty [16]. Functional satisfaction without emotional engagement often produces weak relational commitment [56]. Consumers who do not develop emotional bonds with brands are more vulnerable to switching behavior because they perceive products primarily from utilitarian and transactional perspectives [57]. Emotional attachment therefore serves as a psychological mechanism that stabilizes long-term loyalty despite market competition [71]. These findings suggest that companies should focus not only on product performance but also on emotional branding, relational experiences, and identity-based marketing strategies [72].

Digital Consumer Environment and Consumer Flexibility

The digital consumer environment significantly intensifies switching behavior and weakens traditional loyalty patterns [59]. Social media platforms, influencer marketing, algorithmic recommendations, and e-commerce systems continuously expose consumers to competing alternatives [60]. Consumers in digital environments tend to demonstrate more flexible and exploratory purchasing behavior because information accessibility reduces uncertainty regarding alternative products [61]. Furthermore, digital platforms encourage impulsive consumption through personalized advertisements and social influence mechanisms [62]. The findings collectively demonstrate that loyalty in contemporary consumer markets is increasingly situational and dynamic rather than stable and permanent [73]. Satisfaction therefore represents only one component of loyalty formation rather than a guaranteed predictor of long-term commitment.

CONCLUSION

This study explores behavioral switching factors underlying the phenomenon in which satisfied consumers still switch brands despite positive consumption experiences. The findings demonstrate that customer satisfaction alone is insufficient to guarantee customer loyalty in contemporary consumer markets. The literature identifies several dominant behavioral switching factors, including variety-seeking behavior, price sensitivity, promotional attractiveness, weak emotional attachment, and digital consumer environments. These factors indicate that loyalty is multidimensional and influenced by psychological, emotional, economic, and situational mechanisms beyond functional satisfaction.

The study contributes to consumer behavior literature by emphasizing the existence of the satisfaction-loyalty gap and challenging traditional assumptions that satisfaction automatically leads to loyalty. In increasingly competitive and digitally connected markets, consumers demonstrate more flexible, exploratory, and situational purchasing behavior. Practically, the findings suggest that companies should move beyond conventional satisfaction-oriented strategies and focus on building emotional engagement, relational value, personalized experiences, and stronger consumer-brand relationships to sustain long-term loyalty.

SUGGESTION

Companies are encouraged to strengthen emotional branding strategies and customer relationship programs rather than relying solely on customer satisfaction initiatives. Businesses should also create differentiated experiences and stronger relational engagement to reduce switching tendencies among satisfied consumers. Future studies are recommended to explore additional dimensions such as trust, digital engagement, fear of missing out (FOMO), self-control, and cultural influences to enrich understanding of the satisfaction-loyalty gap in contemporary consumer behavior.

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