

## **Brand Loyalty of Smart Phones via Customer Satisfaction in Nepal**

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**Abstract:** *This research examines the factors affecting the brand loyalty of smartphones via customer satisfaction in Nepal. A descriptive and causal research design was used. Two hundred samples were collected through structured questionnaires. Survey research was administered to gather responses. The research confirmed brand experience, brand image; consumer product involvement has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. PLS-SEM is done using Smart PLS 2.0. Consumer product involvement is the primary domain for customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in smartphone markets in Nepal. This research gives marketers insights that they should enhance product involvement activities to generate brand quality for customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.*

**Keywords:** *Perceived Brand Quality, Brand Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Consumer Product Involvement, PLS-SEM.*

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### **Introduction**

Brand loyalty is the critical subject of interest for marketing researchers. The previous research on brand loyalty shows that spending loyal buyers' expenses is higher than non-loyal buyers. So, brand loyal customers are considered a company's most precious group (Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000). Dick and Basu (1994) argued that customer loyalty is a mixture of attitude and behavior loyalty. Brand loyalty is a consumer connection to a high value of the brand (Aaker, 1996). A consumer will deliver loyalty, trust for the brand concerning their beliefs and expectation.

Brand loyalty is essential for marketers because it helps retain customers and often requires less marketing resources than acquiring new ones (Riesen, & Herndon, 2011). It also has positive implications on brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Uncles, Dowling & Hammond, 2003; Chaudhuri, 1995). Consumers' purchase behavior is greatly influenced by increasing competition reflected in the proliferation of brands in the packaged product categories and the consumer's thirst for variety (Choong, 1998). Further, it has also been pointed out that not all consumers are created equal (Hallberg, 1995), and their relationships with brands are also not alike either in strength or character (Fournier & Yao, 1997).

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

#### **Brand Loyalty**

Brand loyalty is the critical subject of interest for marketing researchers. Brand loyalty can be termed as profoundly held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, causing the same repetitive brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior (Son, 2010).

#### **Brand Image**

Brand image is a significant factor for the organization to launch their products and services effectively in the market (Coulter & Zaltman, 1994). Brand image is defined as "perceptions about a brand as replicated by the brand association held in consumer memory" (Lee, Lee & Wu, 2011). Lazarevic (2011) illustrates that brand image is the most impressive measure to spread brand loyalty. Therefore, a positive brand image indicates that firms deliver their brand value to their customer, reinforcing brand loyalty.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Luo and Homburg (2007) elucidate that customer satisfaction has a positive influence on the firm's profitability. Most of the studies are carried with the relationship with the customer business pattern. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) outline customer satisfaction as "the extent to which a product's (whether goods or services) perceived performance matches a buyer's expectations". The loyalty of the customer increases with an increase in customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction supports to customer loyalty (Ahmed, Rizwan, Ahmad, & Haq, 2014).

### **Perceived Brand Quality**

Aaker (1991) states that consumers' perceived quality has a significant influence on the loyalty of the brand and company accomplishment. It plays a vital role in maintaining a warm relationship and belief inside the customers. The perceived brand quality enhances the company's profitability due to the influence on brand loyalty and the increase of satisfied customers (Aperia & Back, 2004). The consumer examines product quality from their past knowledge and experiences, which results in consumer subjective judgment in product quality (Holbrook & Corfman, 1985).

### **Brand Experience**

The brand experience is the primary motivating factor for brand repurchases (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). The brand experience reinforces positive feelings and sentiments of their customers towards the brand, so it is considered a valuable driving factor for brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). The consumers having a positive brand using experience, acknowledge the brand and supplier, and these favorable factors may lead to the re-consumption of the same brand (Goodson, 2011). The importance of brand experience is that it not only increases the willingness to consume the brand again but also influences the willingness to try for its brand line extensions (Kim & Sullivan, 1998). The customer will remind a customer to have a healthy and positive brand experience, resulting in the repurchase of the brand (Hoch & Deighton, 1989). Brand experience influence customer brand loyalty differently (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Ong, Lee & Ramayah, 2018). Brand loyalty is also mediated by customer satisfaction (Saputra & Dewi, 2016).

### **Social Media Marketing**

Social media are computer-mediated tools that permit people or companies to create, share, or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. Social media marketing is the procedure of social media to facilitate exchanges between consumers and organizations. It is valuable to marketers because it provides affordable access to consumers and various ways to interact and engage customers at different points in the purchase cycle (Tuten & Sollomon, 2014). Social media marketing is the effective utilization of resources and time that provides companies to build a platform for creating brand loyalty of customers rather than the traditional methods (Pollock et al., 2011). Social media marketing is an innovative and different marketing concept than traditional ones because it aims to influence brand image and loyalty through special attention and brand building strategies (Gordhamer, 2016). Solem (2016) posits that customer who engages in social media and positively participates in activities leading to brand satisfaction and loyalty. Social media has been important part of brand building and marketing activities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

### **Customer Product Involvement**

Customer product involvement is conceptualized as an individual customer's connection with the brand. Customers might think a specific product or brand is personally essential and essential. Customer perceptions determine a product involvement level rather than a product (Pascale & Lim, 2003). The brand might have different importance in different situations, and it influences customers' product involvement. Customers are incredibly involved in product selection when a product is considered very important, essential, and gives meaningful pleasure and desire (Pascale & Lim, 2003). A brand's essence for a customer's might influence information searching, processing, and decision-making (Riesen & Herndon, 2011).

Tabish, Hussain, and Afshan (2017) researched factors that affect brand loyalty as a study of Pakistan's mobile phone industry. The main objectives were to determine and evaluate the key factors which influence customers' loyalty toward the brand and the impact of brand loyalty affecting customers' decision making while choosing the brand. The research methodology is quantitative research, and the tool is used to collect and gather

the data is a questionnaire, and the sample size is 406. The significant findings were that trust is the worthiest element that affects brand loyalty. Since there was a high level of trust in Samsung smartphones, customer satisfaction was also high. . Poroduct involvement influences brand loyalty in business to business context (Ahmed et al., 2014).

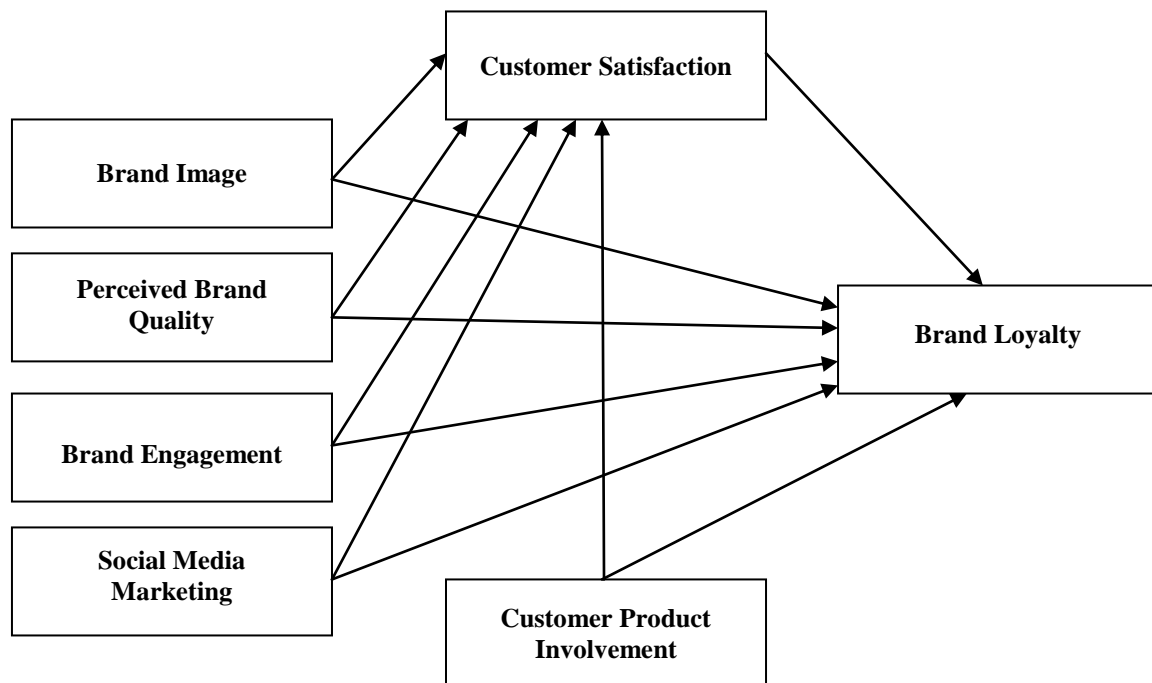
Singh (2016) researched on Factors Influencing Brand Loyalty for Samsung Mobile Users in Nepal. The main objective is to examine the factors influencing brand loyalty for the Samsung mobile users in Nepal. The quantitative method is used to meet the purpose of this study. The causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables is presented by using multiple regression mathematical models through SPSS. One hundred twenty respondents were selected. The key findings were that Samsung smartphone offers products with excellent features and are fashionable and elegant. Samsung is one of the top brands among smartphones and is well known and prestigious. Using Samsung smartphones creates positive feelings and sentiment among users, making them believe as a part of the smart community. The content on the Samsung smartphone page group, websites are up to date and attractive, which meets the user's overall need, and they are very much satisfied using or owning it.

The literature regarding the brand loyalty of smartphones in Nepal's context is still not sufficient despite several studies conducted in the context of developed and even some undeveloped countries. Research objectives of the study were as follows,

- To examine the factors of brand loyalty.
- To test mediation effect of customer satisfaction to brand loyalty.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Research framework is explained in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**

Figure 1 shows brand image, perceived brand quality, brand engagement, social media marketing and customer product involvement is exogenous constructs. Customer satisfaction is mediating construct and brand loyalty is endogenous construct. Researcher has drawn following causal hypothesis as,

- H1: Brand image has effect on brand loyalty.
- H2: Perceived brand quality has quality has effect on brand loyalty.

- H3: Brand engagement has quality has effect on brand loyalty.
- H4: Social media marketing has quality has effect on brand loyalty.
- H5: Consumer product involvement has quality has effect on brand loyalty.
- H6: Customer satisfaction has effect on brand loyalty.
- H7: Customer satisfaction mediates brand image to brand loyalty.
- H8: Customer satisfaction mediates perceived brand quality to brand loyalty
- H9: Customer satisfaction mediates brand engagement to brand loyalty
- H10: Customer satisfaction mediates social media marketing to brand loyalty.
- H11: Customer satisfaction mediates consumer product involvement to brand loyalty

### **Methods**

Quantitative methodology was used to satisfy the purpose of this study. There are three reasons for the choice of quantitative methodology for this study. First, quantitative approaches are most appropriate in cases where there are framed hypotheses (Creswell, 2009). Second, meeting the objective demanded using a representative sample, and this, like things, would have to be large. Qualitative research with large samples is not practicable. Third, the quantitative methods of data collection and analysis applied in this study are widely used and tested. A survey was conducted using self-administered questionnaires to satisfy the use of the positivist methodology. (i.e., cause and effect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypothesis and questions, use of instrument and observation, and theories).

The descriptive and causal research design (quantitative research design) has been applied to deal with the issues associated with the relationship between brand loyalty and its independent variables for this study. The descriptive research design is adopted for fact-finding and searching for adequate information about its impact on Samsung smartphone's brand loyalty. The accurate results and further description of the characteristics of the sample are illustrated in this study.

Descriptive research designs are more formalized studies that describe the phenomena or characteristics associated with the variables of interest. It helps in findings the fact (Cooper & Schindler, 2009). Additionally, causal research design has been applied to analyze the cause and effect relationship between brand loyalty and its independent variables. It is useful in understanding the directions, magnitudes, and forms of the observed relationship. The variables like brand experience, brand image, customer satisfaction, perceived brand quality, social media marketing, and customer product involvement of brand loyalty are analyzed and interpreted.

### **Nature and Sources of Data**

Primary data is the core source of the data. Primary data is developed from survey questionnaires. Primary data are collected through observation, interviews, and questionnaires (Hair, Babin, Money & Samouel, 2003). Primary data required for the study is collected from those respondents who have been using Samsung smartphones only.

### **Population and Sample**

The people who were using Samsung smartphones inside Kathmandu City are the population of this study. Hence, from the entire population, a sample of 200 people was taken. A non-probability sampling, convenience sampling was applied in selecting the sample respondents. The respondents were selected non-randomly visiting the local shops, retail outlets of Samsung smartphones, and people's houses. This sampling is applied for personal convenience and is the most suitable method.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

The data has been collected by formulating a set of self-administered questionnaires and includes structured, classification, rankings, single response, and 5 point Likert scale questions. The respondents were clarified about the study's purpose and then briefly and clearly explained on the fill-up of the questionnaires in the hard copy form.

### **Instruments**

Questionnaires are the main instruments to collect primary data. So, structured questionnaires were used. The questionnaire has been personally administered on a sample of 200. The questionnaire has been distributed to all the respondents. The questionnaires of the research consist of different sections. The initial

question is about the demographic information of the respondents. This question helps to accumulate information such as gender, age, profession, and monthly income. The other questions were related to the survey topic, i.e., brand loyalty of Samsung smartphones. Hence, questions on brand preference, duration, and rankings of smartphones were included. The questionnaire was designed to collect the necessary information.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The final output of the analysis of demographic data is obtained with the help of SPSS software. Partial least square structural equation modeling is done with Smart PLS 2.0 is used for psychometric and econometric aspects of the research model.

### **Respondents' Profile**

Forty-three percent are male, and 58 percent of respondents are female. A significant portion of respondents lies under 20-30 years age group, which comes 56%. The second-largest respondent's age group is below 20 years of age group with 19%. The majority of the respondents are from an employee with 47 percent. It is followed by the student with 32 percent and businessperson with 15 percent. Twenty-nine percent of respondents lie between monthly incomes of NRs.10000-20000. It is followed by respondents having monthly incomes of NRs. 20000-30000 and less than NRs. 10000 with 21 percent and 11percent respectively.

### **Results and Discussion**

The research is conducted to measure the brand loyalty of smartphones in Nepal. Smart PLS 2.0 is used for partial least square structural equation modeling. The model is evaluated in two steps as the outer model or inner model. The outer model tests the reflective measurement model, and the inner model is called testing structural model.

### **Measurement Model**

**Table1: Evaluation of Outer or Measurement Model**

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Brand Experience	BE1	0.798	0.853	0.594
	BE2	0.704		
	BE3	0.842		
	BE4	0.730		
Brand Image	BI1	0.728	0.876	0.587
	BI3	0.766		
	BI4	0.758		
	BI5	0.800		
	BI6	0.777		
Brand Loyalty	BL2	0.840	0.93	0.727
	BL3	0.859		
	BL4	0.888		
	BL5	0.865		
	BL6	0.810		
Customer Product Involvement	CPI1	0.831	0.886	0.66
	CPI5	0.834		
	CPI6	0.852		
Customer Satisfaction	CS2	0.830	0.884	0.718
	CS3	0.854		
	CS4	0.857		

Perceived Brand Quality	PBQ1	0.775	0.833	0.833
	PBQ2	0.874		
	PBQ4	0.717		
Social Media Marketing	SMM4	0.724	0.767	0.524
	SMM5	0.674		
	SMM7	0.771		

Table 1 shows all the loadings of the constructs are greater than 0.7. Composite reliability is greater than 0.7, and AVE is greater than 0.7. Also, composite reliability is greater than AVE. So, convergent validity is confirmed.

**Table2: Discriminant Validity**

	<b>BE</b>	<b>BI</b>	<b>BL</b>	<b>CPI</b>	<b>CS</b>	<b>PBQ</b>	<b>SMM</b>
<b>BE</b>	<b>0.770</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>BI</b>	0.528	<b>0.766</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>BL</b>	0.583	0.497	<b>0.853</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>CPI</b>	0.623	0.493	0.816	<b>0.839</b>	0	0	0
<b>CS</b>	0.628	0.573	0.649	0.613	<b>0.847</b>	0	0
<b>PBQ</b>	0.634	0.601	0.559	0.527	0.53	<b>0.791</b>	0
<b>SMM</b>	0.559	0.360	0.495	0.555	0.38	0.445	<b>0.724</b>

Table 2 shows the diagonal values are the square root of AVE, and this is greater than values lies in rows and columns. So, Discriminant validity is achieved.

**Structural Model**

The structural model tests the relationship between constructs. Hypothesis testing is done here to check the impact of exogenous constructs on the endogenous construct.

**Table 3: Evaluation of the Inner or Structural Model**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Path Coefficients</b>	<b>T Statistics</b>	<b>Decision</b>
H1: BI -> BL	-0.000	0.006	Not Accepted
H2: PBQ -> BL	0.199	1.906	Not Accepted
H3: BE -> BL	-0.037	0.573	Not Accepted
H4: SMM -> BL	0.033	0.558	Not Accepted
H5: CPI -> BL	0.625	11.546	Supported
H6: CS -> BL	0.209	3.736	Supported

From table 3, it was confirmed that customer product involvement and customer satisfaction influences brand loyalty. So, H5 and H6 were accepted. But, brand image, perceived brand quality, brand engagement and social media marketing did not influence brand loyalty. So, H1, H2, H3 and H4 were not supported.

**Mediation Analysis**

**Testing Relation between Brand image to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

It is explained in Table 4.

**Table 4: Mediation Analysis of Brand Image to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

Effect	Beta Coefficient	Sig.		Mediation	VAF
<b>Total Effect</b> BI→BL	0.501	Sig.		Partial Mediation	$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}}$ = 0.310/.501 = 61.88% Since it is greater than 30%, Partial Strong mediation is seen.
<b>Indirect Effect</b> BI→CS CS→BL	0.570 0.544	Sig. Sig.	=0.570×0.544 =0.310		
<b>Direct Effect</b> BI→BL	0.188	Sig.			

Table 4 shows, customer satisfaction proves strong partial mediation between brand image and brand loyalty (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). Ho, H7 is accepted.

**Testing Relation between Perceived Brand Quality to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

**Table5: Mediation Analysis of Perceived Brand Quality to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

Effect	Beta Coefficient	Sig.		Mediation	VAF
<b>Total Effect</b> PBQ→BL	0.561	Sig.		Partial Mediation	$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}}$ = 0.0.258/0.561 = 46% Since it is greater than 30%, moderate partial mediation is seen.
<b>Indirect Effect</b> PBQ→CS CS→BL	0.526 0.491	Sig. Sig.	=0.526×0.491 =0.258		
<b>Direct Effect</b> PBQ→BL	0.301	Sig.			

Table 5 shows, customer satisfaction proves moderate partial mediation between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty (Hair et al., 2016). Ho, H8 is accepted.

**Testing Relation between Brand Engagement to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

**Table6: Mediation Analysis of Brand Engagement to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

Effect	Beta Coefficient	Sig.		Mediation	VAF
<b>Total Effect</b> BE→BL	0.583	Sig.		Partial Mediation	$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}}$ = 0.295/.583 = 50.6% Since it is greater than 30%, moderate partial mediation is seen.
<b>Indirect Effect</b> BE→CS CS→BL	0.628 0.470	Sig. Sig.	=0.628×0.470 =0.295		
<b>Direct Effect</b> BE→BL	0.288	Sig.			

Table 6 shows, customer satisfaction proves moderate partial mediation between brand engagement and brand loyalty (Hair et al., 2016). Ho, H9 is accepted.

**Testing Relation between Social Media Marketing to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

**Table7: Mediation Analysis of Social Media Marketing to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

Effect	Beta Coefficient	Sig.		Mediation	VAF
<b>Total Effect</b> SMM→BL	0.494	Sig.		Partial Mediation	$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}}$ $= 0.204/.494$ $= 41.3\%$ Since it is greater than 30%, moderate partial mediation is seen.
<b>Indirect Effect</b> SMM→CS CS→BL	0.377 0.540	Sig. Sig.	=0.377×0.540 =0.204		
<b>Direct Effect</b> SMM→BL	0.293	Sig.			

Table 7 shows, customer satisfaction proves moderate partial mediation between social media marketing and brand loyalty (Hair et al., 2016). Ho, H10 is accepted.

**Testing Relation between Customer Product Involvement to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

**Table 8: Mediation Analysis of Customer Product Involvement to Brand Loyalty via Customer Satisfaction**

Effect	Beta Coefficient	Sig.		Mediation	VAF
<b>Total Effect</b> CPI→BL	0.818	Sig.		Partial Mediation	$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}}$ $= 0.159/.818$ $= 19.4\%$ Since it is lower than 30%, low partial mediation is seen.
<b>Indirect Effect</b> CPI→CS CS→BL	0.237 0.671	Sig. Sig.	=0.237×0.671 =0.159		
<b>Direct Effect</b> CPI→BL	0.613	Sig.			

Table 8 shows, customer satisfaction proves low partial mediation between customer product involvement and brand loyalty (Hair et al., 2016). Ho, H11 is accepted.

Customer satisfaction is the mediator for brand image, perceived brand quality, brand engagement, social media marketing and customer product brand involvement to brand loyalty. Customer satisfaction is stronger mediator for brand loyalty.

Consumer product involvement has the highest effect on brand loyalty ( $\beta=.315$ ). Brand experience, brand image, perceived brand quality, and social media marketing does not affect brand loyalty. Consumer product involvement and customer satisfaction affect brand loyalty.

**Conclusion**

The study's purpose was to examine the brand loyalty of smart phones via customer satisfaction in Nepal. Consumer product involvement is considered an essential factor for enhancing customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in Nepal's smartphone segments. This research in line with Ahmed et al. (2014) that product involvement affects loyalty (Ahmed et al., 2014). This research supports as Ahmed et al. (2014) that customer satisfaction supports to customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction is stronger mediator for brand loyalty. This research is in aligned with Saputra and Dewi (2016) that customer satisfaction mediates brand loyalty.

Brand experience and the brand image do not contribute to brand loyalty, even if customers are satisfied. This study shows contrast result with Brakus et al. (2009) and Ong et al. (2018) that brand experience does not support to customer brand loyalty. Social media marketing is not considered an essential factor for customer satisfaction and brand loyalty of smart phones in the Nepalese context. . This research is in contrast with Solem (2016) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) that social media marketing does not support to loyalty. These people are mostly engaged in social media marketers must think about to attract a customer through social media. Perceived brand quality has not been considered mainly by customers for showing customer satisfaction



and brand loyalty. Customer product involvement must be aligned with perceived brand quality to generate brand value for the product. In conclusion, marketers must focus on brand image, brand experience, and consumer product involvement for customer satisfaction of smart phones, leading to brand loyalty.

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