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CUSTOMER CARE SERVICE MANAGEMENT IS MOVING FORWARD TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE CUSTOMER RETENTION IN EVERY INDUSTRY. DOES IT PLAY A ROLE TO INCREASE BRAND RETENTION?

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ABSTRACT

To increase the sustainable brand retention level of consumer, service quality plays a key role as the first consideration in the service or manufacturing industry. Our study reveals that consumer-friendly customer-care service is the only prime factor to grab higher brand retention at a competitive level. The study findings show that individuals having experience of customer-care service has a positive relationship with the study variable (brand retention interest) at a significant level. We also found significant correlation between using a product or service and the brand retention interest of consumer. Companies operating in either service industry or manufacturing industry focus on upper-grade customer-care service but actually deliver semi-grade services to customers especially those living in developing countries. Having such a practicable technique, the service delivery process remained the same, instead of continuous flexi development except for some developed countries like Japan and Malaysia. Therefore, the consumer gets excellent experience in developed countries and poor experience in underdeveloped or developing countries and retention interest of the same brand slides down and is identified as a strategic customer service gap by this study. Although we faced some unavoidable study limitations, the study findings and recommendations would be helpful especially for managers, decisions makers, and market planners to redraw implementable strategic plans for customer-care service management systems to achieve sustainable competitive advantages in the long run.

Contribution/Originality: This is the first study that covers up the existing researcher gap between the retention-choice of consumers and the actual service facilities available for consumers. By conducting this study, we have concluded that a sustainable competitive advantage could be achieved by enhancing promised and acknowledgeable service to consumers because a balanced service delivery system would increase the retention level of consumers to stick with the same brand in the long-term.

1. INTRODUCTION

In every industry, customer care service is becoming a sustainable strategic choice since the seventeenth century (Kantsperger and Kunz, 2005). Enhancing their competitive advantage, lots of companies have started developing and introducing innovative green services instead of offering regular things already available in the market. Having such activities dramatically increases the retention level of the final consumer through customer care and therefore the company achieves a sustainable financial stability (Kantsperger and Kunz, 2005). The expectations of the final consumer can remain the same or change in their next purchase decision or consumption because of the satisfaction gained from the last time they purchased services or goods (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). In doing so, there is a research gap between their retention choices and the actual service delivery that they receive (Bhattacharjee *et al.*, 2018).

2. QUALITY

The quality of a product or service is the first consideration to retain the same brand in the long-term (Bhattacharjee *et al.*, 2018). In the hyper market, the quality of products or providing services changes rapidly due to high competition in the short-term. Quality makes the product or service unique to achieve a competitive advantage compared to a competitor's offer in the market (Davis *et al.*, 2003). The realization and assumption of quality might not be the same to all consumers because they would experience quality in different ways (Davis *et al.*, 2003). Such as receiving product or service information from other consumers, or the occasional pre-use of a product or service before the actual purchase or continuous purchase (Bhattacharjee *et al.*, 2018).

Nowadays, assuring the quality of product or service is a mandatory strategic context for competing with external competitors which hits the customer's purchase intention regarding long-term retention (Polas *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, the continuous purchase intention might be changed by the actual quality received and value paid for. Furthermore, quality is about mostly satisfying the expectations of consumers and needs to be developed continuously to enhance the over edge quality degree perfectly in the market (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Bansal and Taylor, 2015).

3. CUSTOMER CARE SERVICE

In achieving competitive advantages in long-term, every entity has been developing consumer friendly customer care service (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). Accordingly, B2C based customer care service has been getting more known amongst consumers daily. Therefore establishing a company's own service center is now an increasing concern among companies (Gronroos, 1988). As indicated by Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) consumers contemplating service quality relies upon prior experiences of a product or service or current utilizations that reflect the supposition of value of it.

Some researchers describe two different qualities namely technical and functional ways in relation to customer care service. Technical way refers to the way of getting service whereas functional means the way service provider provides a service to the customer (Bhattacharjee *et al.*, 2018).

It is also common that many products or services fade away because of the lack of proper customer service implementation at the right time (Grönroos, 1984; Zaibaf *et al.*, 2013). In such context, service provider or manufacturer should have their own customer service center (Zeithaml, 2000; Chu *et al.*, 2012). One such factor would be how effective the service center or customer care center is in providing the right service to customers (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Nowadays, consumers for, almost, every single product or service are very conscious about retaining the same brand which often depends on the CS facilities and the service offered (Berry, 1995; Setó-Pamies, 2012). Online customer care service facilities, may be enough to satisfy initial customer care services across the globe (Bhattacharjee *et al.*, 2018). In our study, we used a five dimensional SQ model acknowledged by Gronroos (1988) to measure customer care service.

3.1. Professionalism and Skills

As indicated by Gronroos (1988), professionalism implies productively doing the specific exercises where the practical factor blends with the hypothetical factor significantly and it is improved through developing work related skills. It is reasonable that an employee would be unable to convey the best or desired customer service until they have enough skills (Gronroos, 1988). Along these lines, Grönroos (1984) proposes that service providers should invest in their employees to convey best quality service to customers. In such system, new or fresh employed should work with gifted employees, where new employee initially work express way while talented employees function as certain approach to convey customer alluring customer care service that additionally improves the professionalism of service staff or service providers (Gronroos, 1988).

Hp1: There is a significant relationship between "professionalism and skills" towards brand retention (BR).

3.2. Reputation and credibility

Reputation refers to when customers could easily find the service provider which might happen when the service provider or manufacturer has enough credibility for providing selected services (Gronroos, 1988). In the second hypothesis, we proposed that there is a significant relationship between "reputation and credibility" towards brand retention (BR). Reputation is when the trademark or name of service organization or brand name ends up prominent among customers or a target group and a good reputation is desirable (Grönroos, 1984).

Hp2: There is a significant relationship between "reputation and credibility" towards brand retention (BR).

3.3. Behavior and attitudes

In the third hypothesis we predicted that there is a significant relationship between "behavior and attitudes" towards brand retention (BR). Behavior is the usual or regular basis acts of service providers towards customers while attitudes clarify certain periodic acts or situational acts of service providers with customers (Gronroos, 1988). In addition, service providers or service organizations provide service to customers through employees. In doing so, the service provider or manufacturer may not generally improve the quality of customer care service because of the various conduct variables of personnel (Gronroos, 1988). In such circumstances, the service provider would be better off if employees have a humble conduct and could take weight meaning factional frame of mind.

Hp3: There is a significant relationship between "behavior and attitudes" towards brand retention (BR).

3.4. Accessibility and flexibility

Accessibility clarifies how easily and swiftly a customer could get customer care service from service provider or manufacturer while flexibility describes service facilities based on the customer's choice (Gronroos, 1988). In the fourth hypothesis, we assume that there is a significant relationship between "accessibility and flexibility" towards brand retention (BR). Literature on customers' psychological thinking demonstrates that customers dependably want to get access to a service center, which they could visit or contact easily and for the most part could get access to from wherever they are located (Gronroos, 1988). That is the motivation behind why mobile operator companies have a few CC service centers in several key locations. Nationwide, management in companies are now progressively concerned about improving submitted service facilities like ATMs, courier services and so forth (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990).

Hp4: There is a significant relationship between "accessibility and flexibility" towards brand retention (BR).

3.5. Reliability and trustworthiness

In the fifth hypothesis, we predicted that there is a significant relationship between "reliability and trustworthiness" towards brand retention (BR). Ordinarily, any service provider may give an equivalent service, which is the reason why service providers should upgrade the same dimension of service conveyance thought about the estimation of service paid by customers (Grönroos, 1984). As per Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) customers may hope to re-do the business with such organizations, who value and promote customers for staying faithful to their obligation. Service organizations ought to have capacity to satisfy promised service, which may build the customer value (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996; AbuKhalifeh and Som, 2012). Customers hope to get support from the servers of the organization and unquestionably the method for giving service must be trustworthy to customers with the goal that they can depend on the level of service provided and know that they will get a level and quality of service that is above what they have previously experienced or desired (Gronroos, 1988).

Hp5: There is a significant relationship between "reliability and trustworthiness" towards brand retention (BR).

4. BRAND RETENTION

Customer retention at the same brand is tremendously expected by service provider in any long-term strategic plan. Managers working in the service or manufacturing industry are more concerned in boosting up sustainable consumer friendly CC (current customers) service to maintain brand retention (Guese, 2010). The economic history of the most recent couple of decades demonstrates that each service situated organization has been attempting to address their trademark esteem and selected product value (brand esteem) to increase their sustainable competitive facility. Such challenges signify the possibility of getting additional or an over edged piece of the overall industry as a strategy via improving their customer brand maintenance as entirety.

Following Kantsperger and Kunz (2005), CC or CU (current clients) brand retention is a strategy of outer promoting to hold current market share and settling on adequate decisions with the goal that competitors don't outdo them by any means. In other words, long term premise CC or CU brand retention is chiefly setting up hierarchical advertising and operational exercises to retain CC or CU and make them multi-buy purchasers (Munusamy *et al.*, 2010). Here, it is indicated that keeping up brand retention policy for a B2C based organization is certainly convoluted. Ideally, considering market judgment, a business' customer group is obviously faithful and there is a minor possibility of change to different providers yet lately retaining customers is exceptionally hazardous due to customers having multi-substitute alternatives to switch to (Guese, 2010). Hence, manufacturing organizations (MO) engage brand retention in the point of view of B2C based tasks. MOs provide needs based customer care service to retain CC or CU long term (faithful customer status). CC service refers to creating brand retention or expanding purchasing propensity at a similar brand for the long term (Kantsperger and Kunz, 2005).
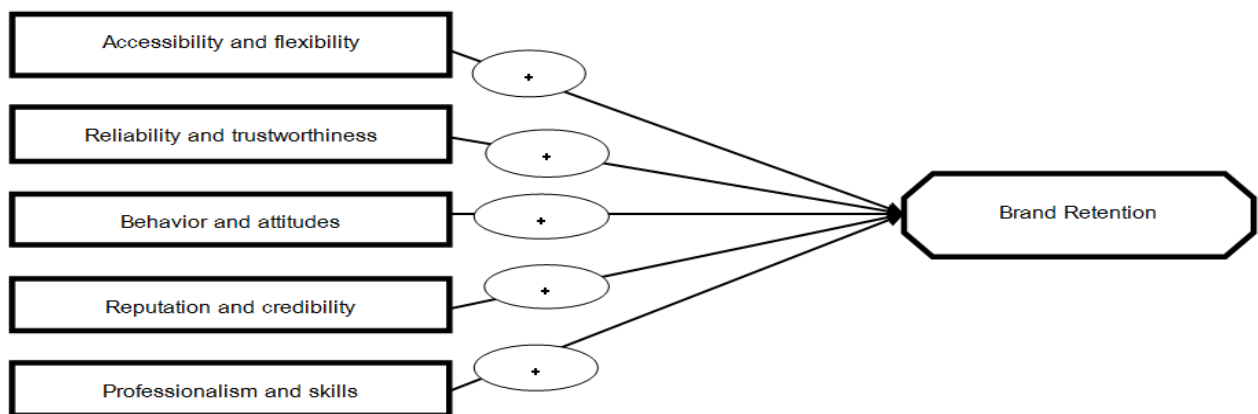

Figure-1. Theoretical model

Figure 1 shows a diagram of our assumption regarding the correlation between brand retention and the actual customer care service quality delivery system. Accordingly, we used Gronroos (1988)' service quality model to measure IV (customer service quality). This model has five dimensions: 'accessibility and flexibility'; 'reliability and trustworthiness'; 'behavior and attitudes'; 'reputation and credibility'; and 'professionalism and skills'. To evaluate our study variable, we developed eight items.

5. METHODOLOGY
5.1. Sample and Data Collection

A group of individuals selected for scrutinizing to identify a specific issue is considered a target population (Keller, 2009). Even a chosen small portion of a large population may be enough to bring out versatile facts of investigations (McDaniel, 2001). In this study, we selected individuals who are using electronic brand products who also have had experience in getting customer care service for the study sample. Our respondents were only those customers because only they can deliver expected feedback regarding our study. We distributed standardized questionnaires among two hundred and twenty one (221) respondents living in Japan and Malaysia but only one hundred and fifty nine (159) completed the survey and provided feedback. Following a back translation method, the survey questionnaire was translated to Japanese to conduct the survey in Japan. In Malaysia, the questionnaire was written in English was used to conduct survey. Before conducting the actual survey, our questionnaire was pre-tested by few individuals and following those results a few changes were made. Following the results come out, few changes were done.

5.2. Measurement

In the survey questionnaire, we used seventeen (17) items to evaluate independent variables such as accessibility and flexibility (four items; Re. = 0.892), reputation and credibility (four items; Re. = 0.740), professionalism and skills (three items; Re. = 0.753), reliability and trustworthiness (three items; Re. = 0.753), behavior and attitudes (three items; Re. = 0.753). Every item was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale stated from Strongly Disagreed to Strongly Agreed. Eight items were used for brand retention and each item was evaluated on a five-point Likert-type scale stated from Strongly Disagreed to Strongly Agreed. The reliability of brand retention items was found as 0.820. As per other similar studies, we also included a few individual-level control variables to find if they had any significant impact on brand retention. In regression and correlation analysis we looked at the respondent's age, gender, nationality, profession, monthly income, usage of the brand product and their experience of customer care service.

6. RESULTS

The mean, standard deviation and correlation of the study variables are presented in the Table 1. Following the results, there are positive and significant correlations between study variable (brand retention) and all independent variables (p < .05 or 0.01). We controlled seven control variables to find the actual correlations between main study variables. Correlation results in Table 1 shows that only nationality (at .223** level), product (at .502** level) and experience (at .241** level) are significantly correlated and have a positive relationship with brand retention.

The correlation point of one control variable namely product is slightly higher but it still remained out of the problematic range (equal or above 0.75 or 75%) of correlation scale. We also conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on every item of study variables (all IVs and brand retention). Six factors were extracted by considering results found from this analysis. The results of these factors presented eigenvalues higher than value '1'.

The research hypotheses were tested by five steps through conducted regression statistics. The statistical results indicated that the level of brand retention would not be changed significantly while the accessibility and flexibility (β = 0.143; p>0.05) of the service increased. To test the first hypothesis, we entered control variables, and independent variable namely "accessibility and flexibility" while brand retention was treated as dependent variable

as per Model 1 of Table 2. Model 2 denoted that among the control variables, only product (β = 0.336; p>0.01), and experience (β = 0.324; p>0.001), were positively influenced the brand retention level of consumers. It indicates that the expected product or service category and having experience on same product or service would have significant impact on increasing or decreasing the brand retention level.

Our proposed second hypothesis, reliability and trustworthiness (β = 0.219; p>0.05) was shown to have a significant ability to change brand retention level among consumers. So, the second hypothesis was fully supported. Likewise the third, fourth and fifth hypotheses were tested in the same pattern. The results of Model 3 shows that behavior and attitudes (β = 0.317; p>0.01) were significantly and positively related to brand retention. Therefore, hypothesis three was accepted. Finally, Model 4 and 5 disclose that the fourth IV (β = 0.255; p>0.05)' and the fifth IV (β = 0.219; p>0.05)' had a positive influence on brand retention, and were even found to be significant. Thus hypotheses four and five were truly supported.
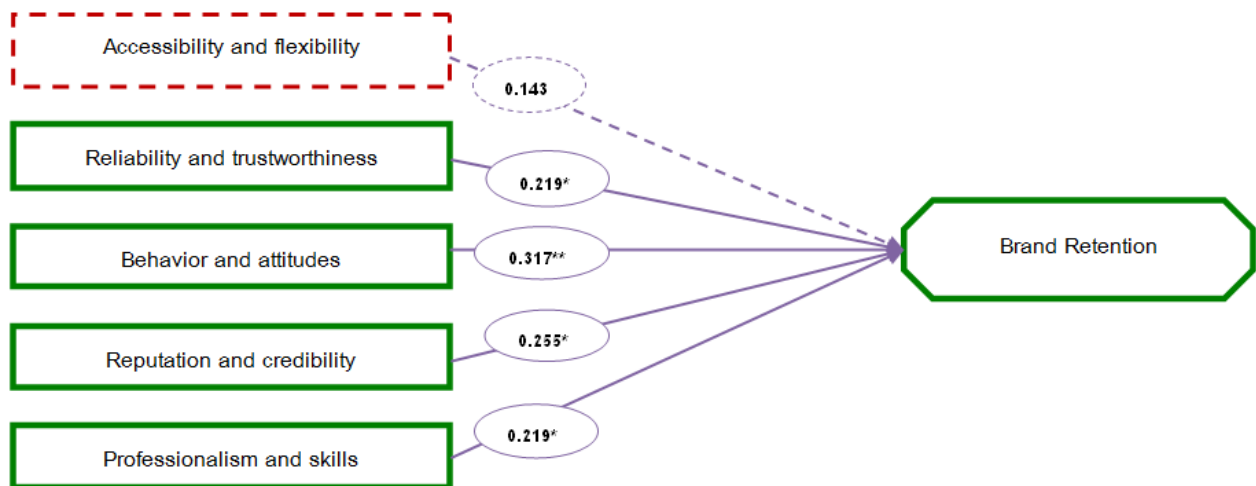

Figure-2. Significant model of the study.

Figure 2 shows the significant level of correlations between the study variables and the independent variables. It shows that brand retention had a positive and significant correlation with all the independent variables except accessibility and flexibility.

7. DISCUSSION

Easy access to service with maximum flexibility expected by consumers doesn't always remain at the same level (Gronroos, 1988; Guese, 2010). In this study, we did not find any significant relationship between accessibility and flexibility towards brand retention. Although it is not significant but the impact of accessibility and flexibility on brand retention was found to be positive.

Our study results showed that long term brand retention of consumers is highly influenced by behavior and attitudes, which is also found to be significant. Good behavior satisfies customers instantly. Such an impact might be considered as strategic role by service providers in the market.

Increasing trust in using a brand's product or service is also positively correlated with brand retention. This assumption is counted as reliability and trustworthiness. Providing service within the promised time and committed priority would create long-term brand bonding between consumers and company.

Table-1. Descriptive statistics and correlation.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	1.28	0.45	1											
2. Age	27	4.34	.057	1										
3. Nationality	4.42	2.94	.108	.294**	1									
4. Profession	1.4	0.65	.091	.163	.171	1								
5. Income	1903.92	532.68	.097	.228*	.267**	.340**	1							
6. Product	1.72	1.3	.123	.126	.289**	-.162	-.123	1						
7. Experience	18.86	14.49	.122	-.066	.051	.327**	.164	.004	1					
8. Accessibility and flexibility	4.01	0.82	.127	.187	.199*	.158	.114	.102	.168	1				
9. Reliability and trustworthiness	4.45	0.84	.228*	.194*	.181	.159	.188	.056	.194*	.316**	1			
10. Behavior and attitudes	4.45	0.84	.217*	.194*	.141	.176	.198	.056	.194*	.524**	.420**	1		
11. Reputation and credibility	4.4	0.73	.204*	.221*	.169	.184	.149	.075	.160	.432**	.537**	.598**	1	
12. Professionalism and skills	4.45	0.84	.227*	.194*	.141	.155	.098	.056	.194*	.503**	.291**	.522**	.637**	1
13. Brand retention	3.78	0.81	.122	.147	.223*	.320	.240	.502**	.241**	.245*	.333**	.333**	.337**	.333**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table-2. Regression analysis to find the effects of brand retention.

Variables	Brand Retention Model 1	Brand Retention Model 2	Brand Retention Model 3	Brand Retention Model 4	Brand Retention Model 5
1. Gender	0.016	0.061	0.053	0.059	0.061
2. Age	0.003	0.001	-0.010	0.000	0.001
3. Nationality	0.032	0.029	0.028	0.029	0.027
4. Profession	-0.017	-0.023	-0.022	-0.023	-0.023
5. Income	-5.116	-5.326	-8.129	-7.173	-5.221
6. Product	0.282*	0.336**	0.331***	0.335***	0.329***
7. Experience	0.334**	0.324***	0.327**	0.289	0.319*
8. Accessibility and flexibility	**0.143**				
9. Reliability and trustworthiness		**0.219***			
10. Behavior and attitudes			**0.317****		
11. Reputation and credibility				**0.255***	
12. Professionalism and skills					**0.219***
R^2	0.315	0.340	0.430	0.342	0.340
Adj. R^2	0.256	0.282	0.383	0.285	0.282
F	**5.296****	**5.920****	**7.302****	**5.970****	**5.920****

*$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$; †$p<.10$

The brand or company reputation might come next but is not as important. Once experiences are received from using a brand's product or service, the brand or company reputation implicitly increases the consumer's self-motivation (Guese, 2010).

Finally, delivering perfect service the right way is supposed to refer to professionalism and skill considerations of the service provider. We found that low professionalism and skill might not improve any expected competitive advantage by improving brand retention. Therefore, service providers would have to consider improving professionalism to maintain an extra edge on gaining and retaining company market share.

8. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Through conducting this study, researcher has presented the means of target market-penetration and achieving sustainable growth by enhancing the retention level of customers. This study discloses the gaps between developing sustainable retention and customer care service in service as well as manufacturing industries. Conducting a single study does not however expose all possible and potential factors. There is a need and a scope for future research on this topic (Bhattacharjee *et al.*, 2018). This study also suggests the following further investigative or research possibilities.

A. 'How highly changing retention level affects customer care service in service industry',

B. 'How customer expectation affects customer brand retention in competitive or hyper market',

C. 'Purchase power of consumers changes brand retention in manufacturing industry',

D. 'Sustainable brand retention policy practices in developing countries and developed countries'.

These proposed investigations may unearth more factors affecting consumer brand retention in service and manufacturing industry.

9. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

As like other investigations, our study also faced time limitations considerably. Time restraint was one of this study's limitations. Covering the whole population was not possible in this investigation (Jahanshahi *et al.*, 2013), was another limitation of this study.

Study findings show that brand retention has a direct effect of change on expected customer care service. Today's competitive market dramatically changes customer expectations and interests of the same brand. This is why a monopoly on brand interest is only improved by proving promised customer care service to the final consumer. This is now mostly focused on by many large companies to gain competitive advantages through brand retention policy. Customer friendly-promised service comes as a first choice from customer side.

In the service industry now, most of the customer service chain is being changed in terms of existing service techniques. Having good personnel who are responsible to provide such services to customers is recommended right after friendly service. To achieve long term sustainable advantage, a company must make it a priority to improve their brand retention level of target customers.

10. CONCLUSION

Consumer retention level at the same brand can be retained by enhancing promised customer care service. Our study findings disclosed that behavior and attitudes have a significant impact on consumer BR. Therefore to grab a sustainable market share, customer care service facility should now be the first consideration just after product development in service as well as manufacturing industries around the world (Magesh, 2010). Getting control over the market share snatching in a hyper-competitive market means that producers and service providers are nowadays more conscious to focus on CC service to increase the customer retention level at the same brand. Such practice is strategically overlapped with long term competitive advantages to increase organizational profit. Promised customer service delivered in a proper way is enough to build up root communication between the final

retain-consumer and service provider (Zeithaml, 2000). As a result, interest in the same brand evolves among final consumers and even new customers. Therefore management personnel like managers, managing directors, in any industry should implement consumer friendly customer care service to grab maximum brand retention interest among target consumers.

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