

IMPACT OF POST PURCHASE EXPERIENCES ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of a customer during the purchase process definitely determine the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction for the product or service. The towering competition the market place persuaded the marketers for managing the customer interaction even before making their decisions. This view would be more significant in the case of high involvement products such as automobiles. Automobile industry shows extensive competition and every player comes with innovative strategies for acquiring as well as retaining its customer base. Recent marketing thinkers suggested that customers are the most influential advertising weapon in the modern world because they have to negotiate the product with new customers. They might feel that they are not cheated by anyone in the sales channel and should get enough supports even after the purchase of the product. This study becomes important as customers evaluate their post purchase experiences as a criterion for recommending an automobile to their near and dear. The data were collected among the customers of medium segment cars in Kerala and the results of the study states that customers purchase experiences significantly influences post purchase customer loyalty.

Key words: *Purchase Experiences, Customer Loyalty*

Introduction

The experiences of customer during the purchase process have a definite role in determining their level of satisfaction. Earlier studies in consumer behavior stated that customers' experiences with

the product during the usage and the after sales services extended by the service people determine their level of satisfaction. The post purchase experiences consists all possible encounters between the customer and marketer after the actual purchase of the car and they are considered as the antecedents and loyalty considered as the consequences of customer satisfaction. The automobile consumers are highly involved for their purchase and their evaluation during the post purchase of the car becomes extremely significant. . Through this study, the researcher explored the influences of post purchase experiences towards customer satisfaction and its impact on customer loyalty. The results of the study states that certain items under post purchase experiences significantly influences customer satisfaction that determines customers loyalty.

Statement of the Problem

Marketing intermediaries generally perform a significant role between the manufacturer and consumers. It was identified that major chunk of the resources in any channel were projected the marketing of goods and services to the ultimate consumer group. The customers' experiences at the suppliers' premises has been given more important and least attention was paid after the customer leaving from the shopping premises. It can be noted in the durable industry, especially in the automobile industry, where customers involvement is very high, sufficient attention should be given to the consumers' experiences after the sale of their products. Several automobile companies are seldom given such attention that leads to diminishing market shares for several players. The current study was

addressed the low responsibility of dealers towards customers during their post-purchase experiences stage.

Research Questions

It has been observed that the channel members or dealers of automobile industry was least considered the relationship with the consumers after the purchase. They offer several influencers for persuading the customers to buy their product but not much of effective in their relation after the purchase of the automobile. The research question studied through this paper was the identification of the importance of post purchase experiences of customers towards the generation of loyalty.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the role of post purchase experiences for the generation of customer loyalty
2. To identify the major items during the post purchase experience stage that determine customer loyalty
3. To explore the intervening role of customer satisfaction between the post purchase experience and customer loyalty

Post Purchase Customer Loyalty

Post Purchase Customer Loyalty simply means that the bonding and attachment of a customer towards a specific product after experiencing the value generated from them. Numerous studies have reported that customer loyalty is an important outcome of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1999, Lee et al., 2001, Fornell, 1992). It is a desire to continue the relationship with an organization that can be viewed through repeat patronage of a customer (Neal 1999, Czepiel & Gilmore 1987). Earlier studies imply the importance of loyalty for the survival of business organization that highlights companies' should

work for beyond customer satisfaction (Reichheld & Scheffer 2000, Anderson & Mittal 2000). There are several dimensions for customer loyalty and most of the researchers discussed the behavioral as well as attitudinal evaluations (Jacoby & Kyner 1973). The behavioral dimension conceptualizes the repeat purchasing behavior and the attitudinal dimension focuses the future intention to purchase from the same shop that reflects in the cognitive and emotional attachment (Jacoby & Chestnut 1978, Dick & Basu 1994). Loyal customers are treated as the real asset of any organization that should be maintained like any other tangible asset because such customers may have resistance to switching (Cronin & Taylor 1992) and ready to pay premium (Zeithaml et al 1996) and recommend the brand to peers (Feick et al 2001) and minimize the evaluation of alternatives during the purchase (Reichheld 1996). For the current study, the researcher used the standardized scale developed by Harris and Goode (2004) for the measurement of action based loyalty. This scale consists of four items based on seven-point Likert type response intended to measure the degree to which a person express his intention to continue with the same company/product (Oliver 1997).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction simply means an evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/or consumption experience. It is an evaluation rendered that the experience was at least as good as it was supposed to be (Hunt 1977, p. 459-460). The ultimate evaluation of the customer could include the performance of the real product (Anderson & Mittal, 2000). It is clear that market and consumer segments are the important factors to consider while measuring customer satisfaction (Anderson & Mittal 2000, Mittal & Kamakura 2001) and valuable from both customer goodwill perspective and organization's financial perspective (Malthouse et al 2003). Consumer satisfaction is an ongoing process and it never ends (Peters & Waterman

1982) that leads positive consequences such as re-patronage intention and loyalty (Anderson et al 1997, 1994, Reichheld & Sasser 1990). A consumer can be both satisfied and dissatisfied with different aspects of the same product and thus can have complaints and appraisals for the same (Mittal 1998, Chan et al 2003). If an organization focuses on its most demanding customers and/or most demanding market expectations, it is likely to exceed all other customers and expectations (Sheth & Kellstadt 1992). It is the marketers' duty to recognize the most influential aspects determining customers' satisfaction and through this study, a list of post purchase encounters and its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty were hypothesized.

Purchase Experience

The expectancy confirmation paradigm became an important criterion for customers purchase experiences evaluation (Khalifa & Liu 2003, LaTour & Peat, 1979). Customer approaches any product or organization with certain expectations and they started to evaluate their expectation with actual performance or encounter (Cohen & Goldberg 1970, Olshavsky & Miller 1972). On the basis of these comparisons, the customer decided himself whether he is satisfied or not. So the post purchase experience evaluation becomes an important determinant or antecedent of customer satisfaction that ultimately determine customer loyalty (Ulaga 2001, Bower & Garda 1985, Jones & Sasser, 1995).

The marketer's job does not end with the sale of the product but continue even after and should monitor purchase evaluation of their customers. Sometime customer may rethink about the foregone alternative considered before purchasing the existing product (Sugden 1985), or rethink about the other possibilities that could have been chosen (Zeelenberg & Pieters 2006). Customers' affective mental status also determines their satisfaction evaluations. Holbrook and Zirlin (1985) states that sensory experiences during the purchase process

influence the customer significantly and they impact directly to customer emotions (Pham 2004). Likewise shopping enjoyment influences positive behavior changes in customers (Jarvenpaa and Todd 1997, Novak et al 2000, Koufaris 2002) that motivates them to purchases (Dennis, Newman & Marsland 2005, Batra & Ahtola 1991).

The determinants of customers' evaluation definitely affect customer satisfaction and thereby customer loyalty, a clear understanding of such determinants becomes highly important for effective marketing of products. The consumers' behavior is highly sensitive to context and cultures, so the researcher developed the items under post purchase experiences through in-depth interview.

Methodology

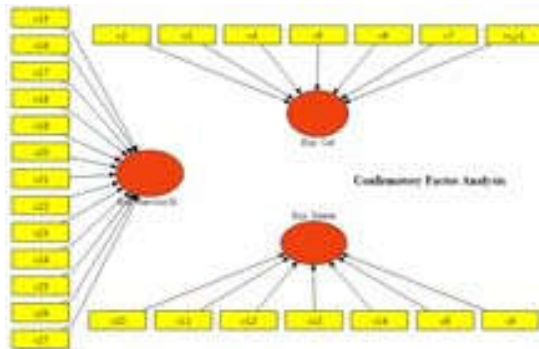
The population for the study consists of medium segment car users in the state of Kerala. As per the wordings from the Transport Department, it is registered around 42000-48000 medium segment cars were registered in Kerala during 2013. The medium segment car means any car whose basic model's cost lay between 4.5 lakhs to 6.5 lakhs Indian rupee. The researcher assumed that criteria under post purchase experience evaluations are context specific and varying as per the culture and geographical region, a list of such items are developed through in-depth interview with selected automobiles customers and based on content analysis, a list of 27 criteria was developed as the items under post purchase experiences. An instrument was developed consisting of the items under post purchase experiences, scale for measuring customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, and used the same for data collection. Initial reliability and validity of the instrument has ensured before starting the detailed data collection. About 300 questionnaires were distributed and among them, 228 questionnaires are filled completely and used for further data analysis.

Item Generation and Validation of the Instrument

The instrument consists of three scales such as Post Purchase Experiences (PPE), Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty. The PPE scale was developed by the researcher and the remaining was adapted from standardized scales. The details of the instrument development were stated below:

The items under Post Purchase Experiences (PPE) were developed through in-depth interview and a content analysis was followed. The same kind of items giving identical meaning were removed and based on the 'item to total statistics', it has shortlisted 27 items under PPE. Three factors were generated through confirmatory factor analysis that represents the entire 27 item and named as Experiences with Car (7 items), Experiences with Service Station (12 items) and Experiences with Dealer (7 items). The following figure shows the hypothesized confirmatory representation of various items under each factor of PPE.

Figure : Confirmatory Factor Analysis



The items in the PPE scale has undergone for face and content validity and undergone essential revisions and rewordings before the final data collection. The reliability coefficients of the PPE scale shows an acceptable statistical reliability for the instrument as per the literature such as Cronbach's Alpha (0.715), Spearman-Brown Coefficient (0.765) and Guttman Split-Half Coefficient (0.812).

Table 1 : Reliability Statistics (Scale-I)

Cronbach's Alpha	Part 1	Value	.761
		N of Items	14 ^a
	Part 2	Value	.785
		N of Items	13 ^b
	Total N of Items		27
Correlation Between Forms			.715
Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length		.799
	Unequal Length		.765
Cronbach's Alpha			.715
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.812

Below mentioned are the list of items under PPE scale and their respect latent variables. There are 27 measurement items and 3 latent variables representing each items was listed for the study and details are given below.

Table 2 : Items under PPE

Items in PPE Scale		
SL.No.	Measurement Variable	Latent Variable
1	Reliability	About the car
2	Riding comfort	About the car
3	Safety features	About the car
4	Future resale value	About the car
5	Working condition of the car	About the car
6	Ease of handling	About the car
7	Overall opinion	About the car
8	Promptness in attention	About the dealer
9	Facilities available at the office	About the dealer
10	Explanation of car's features	About the dealer
11	Feeling of pricing practices of seller	About the dealer
12	Vehicle display	About the dealer
13	Speedy arrangement of finance and other documents	About the dealer
14	Overall opinion	About the dealer
15	Explanation of problems and repairs	About service station
16	Cordiality, friendliness and trustworthiness	About service station
17	Quality of work done	About service station
18	Response to telephone calls	About service station
19	Facilities at the waiting lounge	About service station
20	Facilities to watch the maintenance work	About service station
21	Fairness of service charges	About service station
22	General handling of cars	About service station
23	Service employees caring during complains, if any	About service station
24	Service personnel's responsiveness during complains, if any	About service station
25	Service personnel's knowledge for servicing the product	About service station
26	Waiting time for service or appointments	About service station
27	Responses to unawareness of the customers by the sales people	About service station

The items used for measuring customer satisfaction with the car (Scale II) were based on the standardized scale developed by Gaski & Etgar (1986). The scale was adapted for the current study, and the reliability and validity were ensured before data analysis. The reliability coefficients are greater than 0.7 and considered for further analysis (Gaur & Gaur, 2008).

For the current study, the researcher used the standardized scale developed by Harris and Goode (2004) for the measurement of action based loyalty (Scale III). This scale consists of four items based on seven-point Likert type response intended to measure the degree to which a person express his intention to continue with the same company/product (Oliver 1997). The items were adapted for the current study and

Table 3: Reliability Statistics (Scale II)

Reliability Statistics (Scale II: Satisfaction)			
Cronbach's Alpha	Part 1	Value	.861
		N of Items	2 ^a
	Part 2	Value	.822
		N of Items	1 ^b
	Total N of Items		3
Correlation Between Forms			.867
Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length		.869
	Unequal Length		.836
Cronbach's Alpha			.845
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.873

the reliability and validity were ensured before further analysis.

Table 4 : Reliability Statistics (Scale III)

Reliability Statistics (Scale III : Loyalty)			
Cronbach's Alpha	Part 1	Value	.728
		N of Items	2 ^a
	Part 2	Value	.769
		N of Items	2 ^b
	Total N of		
Correlation Between Form Items			.796
Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length		.745
	Unequal		.745
Cronbach's Alpha	Length		.708
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.728

The items in the scales were measured with 7 point from highly disagree to highly agree. All the items in the scale show an acceptable reliability and validity for the entire measuring instrument. So the researcher considered the data for further analysis.

Customer Satisfaction as an Intervening Variable

An intervening variable is a qualitative or quantitative variable that links the relationship between an independent variable and dependent variable (Barron and Kenney 1986, Mohr et al 2005, Cooper et al 1990). Mediation means the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable is transmitted through a third variable (Alwin & Hauser, 1975) called mediating variable, and for this study, customer satisfaction has considered as the mediating variable (Barron and Kenney, 1986). Several studies have reported the customer satisfaction as a mediator between the antecedents and consequences (Anderson and Sullivan 1993, Fornell 1992, Oliver 1980, Bolton and Drew 1991, Szymanski and Henard 2001) and the researcher interested to study its role in the context of the current study.

Hypothesis of the Study

H1: There is a positive relationship between Favorable Experiences with the Car and Customer Satisfaction.

H2: There is a positive relationship between Favorable Experiences with the Service Station and Customer Satisfaction.

H3: There is a positive relationship between Favorable Experiences with the Dealer and Customer Satisfaction.

H4: There is a positive relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty.

H5: Customer Satisfaction mediates Post Purchase Experiences (PPE) towards Customer Loyalty.

H5a: Customer Satisfaction mediates Experiences with the Car towards Customer Loyalty.

H5b: Customer Satisfaction mediates Experiences with the Service Station towards Customer Loyalty.

H5c: Customer Satisfaction mediates Experience with Dealer towards Customer Loyalty.

Data Analysis

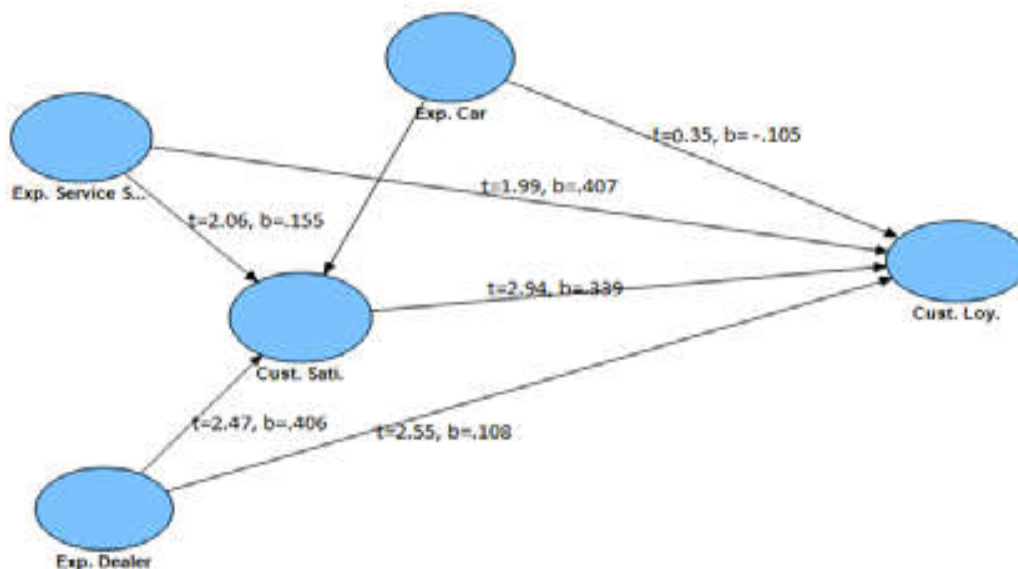
The following table shows the results of the initial 4 hypothesis. The first hypothesis explains that Experiences with the Car positively influences Customer Satisfaction ($b=0.281$, $t=3.06$) and proved through the study. The results of the second hypothesis shows that Experiences with the Service Station influences Customer Satisfaction ($b=0.155$, $t=2.06$) and the third hypothesis stated to measure the influences of Experiences with the Dealer towards Customer Satisfaction also significant ($b=0.406$, $t=2.47$). The influences of customer satisfaction towards customer loyalty also proved ($b=0.339$, $t=2.94$) and accepted the alternative hypothesis. Altogether, the data analysis shows that Post Purchase Experiences significantly influences customer satisfaction that leads to customer loyalty.

The hypothesis 5 has been stated to test the mediation role of customer satisfaction between the Purchase Evaluation and Customer Loyalty. The PPE consists of three dimensions and the mediation role of customer satisfaction between individual dimensions towards customer loyalty has been tested. Sobel (1982) gives an approximate test of significance for the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator. This test is based on 't' statistic that determine whether the changes in the effect of the independent variable such as Experiences with the car, Experiences with the service station and Experiences with the dealer, shows a significant change and therefore whether the mediation effect is statistically significant towards customer loyalty.

Table 5 : Results of the Analysis

DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY & SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HYPOTHEZED PATH								
	AVE1	AVE 2	r	r ²	AVE1>r ²	AVE2>r ²	Discr.	T Stat.
Exp. with the Car --> Cust.Sati.	0.69553	0.72605	0.6258	0.39163	sig.	sig.	yes	3.06
Exp. with Ser. Stan. --> Cust.Sati.	0.70316	0.73368	0.5124	0.26255	sig.	sig.	yes	2.06
Exp. with the Dealer --> Cust.Sati.	0.71079	0.74131	0.4869	0.23707	sig.	sig.	yes	2.47
Cust.Sati.--> Cust.Loyalty.	0.71842	0.74894	0.6521	0.42523	sig.	sig.	yes	2.94

Figure 2 : Structural Model



Baron and Kenney (1986) suggested that a variable is function as a mediator when it meets the conditions such as variation in levels of the independent variable significantly account for variation in the presumed mediator, variations in the mediator significantly accounts for variations in the dependent variable, and when the mediation path is controlled, a previously significant relation between the independent and dependent variable is no longer significant.

The following figure explains the results of hypothesis 5. The direct influences of Exp. with the Car towards loyalty show beta value of 0.4215 with a significant t statistic of 3.258. After introducing the customer satisfaction as a mediator, the direct influences between Exp. with the Car towards loyalty become insignificant with beta value of -0.105 and t statistic of 0.351. Likewise, the influences of Exp. with the Service

becomes insignificant with beta value of 0.2351 and t statistic of 1.004. In the case of Experiences with Dealer towards Loyalty, the customer satisfaction plays a significant role as a mediator. The direct relation between Exp. With Dlr. towards loyalty is significant with a beta coefficient of 0.1083 with t statistic of 2.553. If the customer satisfaction has introduced as a mediator, the original relationship between Exp. with Dealer towards Loyalty becomes insignificant. The result of the Sobel test also shows that the mediation path in the hypothesized influence is significant as the coefficient is greater 1.96.

On the basis of the test result and analysis, it can be concluded that PPE significantly influences customer satisfaction that leads to customer loyalty. The occurrence of loyalty is based on the extent of customer satisfaction. It can also be

Figure 3 : Results of the Hypothesis (Mediation Effect)

H5(a)			H5(b)			H5 (C)		
Items	Coefficients	t Stat.	Items	Coefficients	t Stat.	Items	Coefficients	t Stat.
Exp.Car-->CL	-0.105	6.351	Exp.SS-->CL	0.4072	1.991	Exp.Dlr.-->CL	0.1083	2.553
Exp.Car-->CL(M)	-0.114	1.37	Exp.SS-->CL(M)	0.2351	1.004	Exp.Dlr.-->CL(M)	0.0754	0.865
Exp.Car-->CS	0.3125		Exp.SS-->CS	0.5063		Exp.Dlr.-->CS	0.4061	
CS-->CL	0.3391		CS-->CL	0.5377		CS-->CL	0.3394	
Exp.Car-->CS (SE)	0.0341		Exp.SS-->CS (SE)	0.0341		Exp.Dlr.-->CS (SE)	0.0468	
CS-->CL (SE)	0.1547		CS-->CL (SE)	0.1834		CS-->CL (SE)	0.1458	
Sobel statistic:	2.13184943		Sobel statistic:	2.87630294		Sobel statistic:	2.24834822	
Probability	0.03301923		Probability	0.00402363		Probability	0.02455399	

Station towards loyalty show beta coefficient of 0.4072 with a significant t statistic of 1.991. After introducing the mediator variable of customer satisfaction, the direct influences of Exp. with the Service Station towards loyalty

noted that purchase evaluation doesn't influences or generate loyalty but affects customer satisfaction. As per the literature, it can be seen that satisfied customers becomes loyal to the organization.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has discussed the influences of customers purchase evaluations with respect to car, to the dealer and to the service station towards customer satisfaction and its impact on customer loyalty. The result shows that purchase evaluations significantly determine customers' satisfaction. A positive and favorable evaluation by the customer about their post purchase experiences with respect to their car purchase definitely ensures customer satisfaction. This study conceptualizes that purchase evaluations doesn't generate loyal customers but only satisfied customers are more tend to become loyal to the firm. This theoretical observation suggests that post purchase evaluation doesn't influences customer loyalty but determine customer satisfaction that mediates the influence towards loyalty.

The results of the study are highly significant to the automobile industry as it forms the base of customer retention. The responsibility of the marketers will not end by merely selling the car but proper maintenance and post purchase monitoring should be ensured. The extensive competition and entry of new players in the automobile industry persuaded the marketers for inventing new strategies. This study upholds the importance of post purchase experiences of customer as it becomes the determinants of their satisfaction evaluation. As far as a marketer is concerned, a clear knowledge about the various encounters that each customers faces after the purchase of their car help to make them satisfied customers and by the way loyal to the product and firm. So the marketers of medium segment automobile cars should consider the above stated encounters under PPE as the means to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Further Research Scope

This study conceptualizes the intervening role of customer satisfaction between post purchase experiences and customer loyalty. It states that the influences can be possible only through customer satisfaction and not supported the direct relation. The intervention of other psychological variables such as customer value perception, expectation, etc. can also play a significant role for setting satisfaction level. These influences can be studied in order to get more insight to the theoretical relations. In such a way, the research topic can be taken to a new height with other industry of varying nature as the customer evaluation process become different that depends up on the industry.

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