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### Brand Loyalty in Smartphone in Nepal

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#### Abstract

This study analyzed on the brand loyalty in smartphone in Nepal. The dependent variable is brand loyalty. Similarly, the selected independent variables are price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration. The primary source of data is used to assess the opinions of the respondents regarding price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration in Nepal. The study is based on primary data of 151 respondents. To achieve the purpose of the study, structured questionnaire is prepared. The correlation coefficients and regression models are estimated to test the significance and importance of brand loyalty in smartphone in Nepal.

The study showed that price and value proposition is positively correlated to brand loyalty. It indicates that better price and value proposition, leads to better brand loyalty. Similarly, customer service and support is positively related to brand loyalty indicating that higher the level of customer service and support, higher would be the brand loyalty. Likewise, social influence and word of mouth has positive relationship with brand loyalty. It shows that social influence and word of mouth leads to an increase in the brand loyalty. Similarly, brand communication and marketing has positive relationship with brand loyalty. It reveals that higher the level of brand communication and marketing, higher would be brand loyalty. The result shows that there is positive relationship between eco system and integration and brand loyalty. It shows that an increase in the level of eco system and integration leads to the increase in the brand loyalty.

**Keywords:** price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, eco system and integration, brand loyalty

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#### 1. Introduction

Brand loyalty is the critical subject of interest for marketing researchers. The study 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. Dick and Basu (1994) argued that customer loyalty is a mixture of attitude and behavior loyalty. Behavioral loyalty considers proportional purchase, purchase sequence and probability of purchase (Min *et al.*, 2012). 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). Ban *et al.* (2012) stated that the behavioral definition is, consequently, insufficient to explain how and why brand loyalty developed and modified up. Purchase intention is linked to the behavior of consumer, attitudes, and expectation of consumers. The buying behavior is a key point for consumers to access and assess the individual product.

Hardjono and Teng (2019) found that brand personality like competence, sincerity,

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ruggedness, and sophistication have a positive significant impact on preference in sportswear brand choice, but the personality of excitement components are not proven to have significant influence. Borzooei and Asgari (2013) found that the brand personality effect on a purchase intention. Vahdati and Nejad (2016) found that the brand personality, word-of-mouth, and brand equity have a positive significant effect on customer's purchase intentions. Mao *et al.* (2020) found that brand personality, brand image, brand identity, and flow of experience directly influence to purchase intention. Kim *et al.* (2011) found that the brand personality has a significant role in the customer brand loyalty and purchase intention in the hospitality marketing. Bouhlel *et al.* (2011) found that the brand personality positively influence the brand trust, brand commitment, and brand attachment.

Brand loyalty has been the center of attention among academicians and practitioners for many decades (Ban *et al.*, 2018). In their attempt to conceptualize brand loyalty, most academicians and practitioners focused on the behavioral aspect, less emphasis on the attitudinal brand loyalty. The attitudinal aspect has gotten more attention when they notice behavioral brand loyalty couldn't give them a comprehensive picture of loyalty. Behavioral loyalty considers proportional purchase, purchase sequence and probability of purchase (Dick and Basu, 1994). Dick and Basu (1994) stated that the behavioral definition is, consequently, insufficient to explain how and why brand loyalty developed and modified up.

Shi *et al.* (2018) argued that brand customer, brand loyalty satisfaction, brand quality, brand experience, brand image and customer product involvement in brand switching has positive impact on brand loyalty. Sata (2013) stated that brand loyalty has both attitudinal and behavioral elements, and it is determined by the strength of the relationship between relative attitude and repeat patronage. Farzana (2012) developed a conceptual framework of brand loyalty based on relative attitude and repeated patronage, attitude used to evaluate an object/ brand position on a continuum favorable, so brand attitude range from high to low. An individual customer may have a positive or negative attitude toward a brand, but in rare situation customers may patronize a brand for which they have negative attitude (Dick & Basu, 1994). A consumer might have a high or a low altitude to a brand, however situation might affect attitude. The relative attitude combines with the attitudinal differentiation of a brand gives more indications of brand patronage than relative attitude in isolation (Albert *et al.*, 2008).

Hew *et al.* (2017) stated that brand loyalty increase brand market share brand loyalty increases exponentially market share, resistance to alternative competitor brands and favors positive word of mouth. Mostert *et al.* (2016) stated that brand loyalty is a crucial role in organization profitability and future growth prospect loyal customers stick with their suppliers or service providers over the long run. Paulralan (2011) stated that customer satisfaction is "customer's psychological response to his/her or her positive evaluation of the consumption outcome in relation to his/her expectation. Satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of the consumption experience. Brand satisfaction is one factor that influences brand loyalty. The more the customer satisfied with the brand the more they are willing to use the same brand in the future. High level satisfaction strongly correlated with increase brand loyalty. Perception of brand quality is determined by individual customers (Min *et al.*, 2012). Individual customer is the ultimate determinate of quality. However, there is a parameter than can be used to establish brand quality as a reference. Similarly, Sata (2013) found that price of the mobile phone has strong effect on the purchase of consumers and

followed by the features of the mobile phone than compare to others in the buying of mobile phone. Similarly, Paulrajan *et al.* (2011) found that price of the smartphone, functions of smartphone, and quality of smartphone play a significant role in the smartphone's purchase intention. However, the study also indicated that the quality and availability of mobile phones also play an important role in the perception of consumers when selecting mobile phones.

Sujata *et al.* (2016) found that the features of technology factors, OS version, and hardware factors have a positive significant impact on the choice of young students when buying a smartphone. Rahman *et al.* (2020) found that there is a positive significant influence of brand image, social factors, and product attributes factors, and product sacrifice on purchase intention of smartphone.

Brand personality factor plays a significant role in the development of the perception and expectation of the customer's behaviors towards the product and the company (Yeh *et al.*, 2016). Brand personality influences consumer judgments of the consumers in the purchase intention (Biel, 1992). Lee and Kang (2013) found that a consumer-brand relationship and choice of a brand are affected by the brand personality. Winarti *et al.* (2021) found that the dimensions of brand personality like ruggedness and excitement have positive significant impact on purchase intention, but competence, sincerity, and sophistication have not significant impact on the purchase intention.

In the context of Nepal, Shrestha (2020) stated that there are six pre-purchase stages: awareness, information, interest, preference, persuasion, and purchase. Consumer behavior as seeking, buying, using, assessing, and rejecting products and services. The behavioral outcome that causes the consumer to differentiate between varieties of options is the purchasing choice, which follows from their preferences (Poudel, 2023). Prestige refers to how well the products communicate superiority and relevance to a social group. Sah (2021) argued that brand quality is a cumulative evaluation of brand excellence. It includes tangible and intangible brand attributes. Customers might not understand brand quality the way manufacturers do (Pandey and Raju, 2009). According to them, it is common method customers use intangible brand attributes when their asses brand quality for durable goods. Singh and Upadhyay (2009) stated that perceived quality can affect a willingness to buy, and the price that customers will pay. Sah (2021) found the insignificant relationship between social influence and brand preference. Brand experience, brand image; consumer product involvement has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. (Shrestha, 2020). Variables price has positive and significant effect on brand preferences but remaining variables, advertisement, brand image, brand loyalties positive but not significant effect (Singh and Upadhyay, 2023). There would be a proportional increase in customer engagement in brand life if brands developed a structured approach across all measures in our system to explicitly explain the benefits of engagement to customers (Poudel, 2023). The purchase decision can be influenced by the price of the product, perceived quality, and value of the product (Rai, 2023).

The above discussion shows that empirical evidences vary greatly across the studies on the brand loyalty in smartphone in Nepal. Though there are above mentioned empirical evidences in the context of other countries and in Nepal, no such findings using more recent data exist in the context of Nepal. Therefore, in order to support one view or the other, this study has been conducted.

The major objective of the study is to determine the brand loyalty in smartphone in Nepal. More specifically, it examines the relationship of price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration in brand loyalty in smartphone.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows. Section two describes the sample, data and methodology. Section three presents the empirical results and the final sections draws the conclusion.

## 2. Methodological aspects

The study is based on the primary data. The data were gathered from 151 respondents through questionnaire. The respondents' views were collected on price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration in brand loyalty in Nepal. The study used descriptive and casual comparative research design.

### *The model*

The model used in this study assumes that brand loyalty depends upon brand loyalty in smartphone. The dependent variable selected for the study is brand loyalty. Similarly, the independent variables are price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration. Therefore, the model takes the following form:

$$BL = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PVP + \beta_2 CSS + \beta_3 SIWM + \beta_4 BCM + \beta_5 EI + e$$

Where,

PVP = Price and value proposition

CSS = Customer service and support

SIWM = Social influence and word of mouth

BCM = Brand communication and marketing

EI = Ecosystem and integration

BL = Brand loyalty

Price and value proposition was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "I believe the price of a smartphone significantly influences my choice of brand", "I believe the price of a smartphone significantly influences my choice of brand image" and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.926$ ).

Customer service and support was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include "The level of customer service and support provided by my current smartphone brand directly impacts my overall satisfaction

with the brand”, “I am more likely to remain loyal to my current smartphone brand if they offer efficient and effective customer service and support” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.932$ ).

Social influence and word of mouth were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “Positive recommendations from friends and family influence my decision to stick with my current smartphone brand”, “I trust the opinions of other users when it comes to choosing or sticking with a smartphone brand”, and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.951$ ).

Brand communication and marketing competence was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The brand communication and marketing efforts of my current smartphone brand help me understand its value proposition better”, “I am more likely to be loyal to my current smartphone brand if their marketing campaigns resonate with my preferences and lifestyle” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.954$ ).

Ecosystem and integration was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “The seamless integration of my smartphone with other devices and services enhances my overall satisfaction with my current brand”, “I am more likely to stay loyal to my current smartphone brand if it provides a comprehensive ecosystem that complements my digital lifestyle.” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.933$ ).

Brand loyalty was measured using a 5-point Likert scale where the respondents were asked to indicate the responses using 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. There are 5 items and sample items include “I would switch to another smartphone brand if I encounter better customer service and support elsewhere”, “My loyalty towards my current smartphone brand is influenced by the overall brand experience rather than just product features.” and so on. The reliability of the items was measured by computing the Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.888$ ).

The following section describes the independent variables used in this study along with hypothesis formulation:

#### *Price and value proposition*

Dhanabalan (2018) found that the price factor, brand image, design, quality, technical considerations, and perceived value have a significant influence on purchase intention. It was stated that all these factors are considered by consumers during their buying of cars. Likewise, Kumari and Kumar (2016) found that the technical features of the mobile phone and looks, image and resource, entertainment have a significant role in the choice of the mobile phone has high price. Price has a significant influence on the consumer’s purchase intention in the buying of mobile phone. Similarly, Rahman *et al.* (2020) found that social factors, hedonic motivation, price value factor, habit, and privacy factors have significant

influence on behavioral intention. Moreover, price value has a significant positive influence on behavioral intention. Price has been found to have a significant influence on purchase intention in many previous studies (Lay-Yee *et al.*, 2013). Dam (2020) found that the brand trust and perceived value like price have significant positive influence on purchase intention and brand preference. Likewise, Johnson *et al.* (2005) found that price factor was the most powerful factor effecting on purchase intention of smartphone. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between price and value proposition and brand loyalty.

#### *Customer service and support*

Consumers who are passionate about the brands are more eager to have an affirmative word-of-mouth about them. Likewise, Thomson *et al.* (2005) found that brand love has affirmative impacts on both interpersonal relationships and brand loyalty. Consumers who feel love for the brands are also expected to remain loyal to these brands (Albert *et al.*, 2008). Similarly, Lau and Lee (1999) found that consumers who are in love with the brands they use have more trust in these brands and that this trust is an important role in the formation of brand loyalty. Likewise, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) found that consumers who are satisfied with their brands tend to strengthen their ties with the brands along with positive experiences. They also asserted that the consumers' willingness to pay more for the brands with which they are in love might be increased by this situation. Similarly, Heindrich *et al.* (2012) indicated that brand love would result in the increase of the consumers' willingness to pay more as well as their ignorance of certain negativities. According to Sarkar *et al.* (2012), brand love consists of intimacy and passion dimensions, and it has a positive effect on the brand-buying attitude. Similarly, Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2013) found that there be a positive relationship between brand love and romance. Likewise, Albert and Merunka (2013) found that the affirmative impact of the brand love on both the brand's global identity and trust in the brand has a positive effect on both oral communication and willingness to pay more. Similarly, Fetscherin (2014) found that brand love has a linear and strong association with commitment, repurchase intention, and oral communication. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive relationship between customer service and support and brand loyalty.

#### *Social influence and word of mouth*

In the purchasing of smartphones for Generation Y, perhaps the social influence might come from friends, peers, family members, and spouses. Consumer's purchase behavior is shaped up by others, especially by family members while buying high-involvement products (Farzana, 2012). It is due to the interaction with other people that know each other such as parents and peers. Consumers would be influenced by media, parents, and peers in order to purchase the Smartphone (Nelson & McLeod, 2005). Social factors affect consumer behavior significantly. Every individual has someone around influencing their buying decisions. The important social factors are: reference groups, family, role, and status. Similarly, Perreau (2014) found that family members can influence individual consumers' buying behavior. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive relationship between social influence and word of mouth and brand

loyalty.

### *Brand communication and marketing*

Brand communication 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. 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 (Ngo *et al.*, 2019). 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 (Farzana, 2012). Similarly, Pratiwi (2015) stated 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. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a positive relationship between brand communication and marketing and brand loyalty.

### *Ecosystem and integration*

Ecosystem and integration factor plays a significant role in the development of the perception and expectation of the customer's behaviors towards the product and the company (Johnson, 2005). Likewise, Riyas and Hearth (2016) found that the dimensions of ecosystem like ruggedness and excitement have positive significant impact on purchase intention, but competence, sincerity, and sophistication have not significant impact on the purchase intention. Similarly, Mulyanegara and Tsarenko (2009) showed that there is a significant positive relationship between brand personality and ecosystem. Likewise, Borzooei and Asgari (2013) found that the brand personality effect on ecosysyem of a person. Kim *et al.* (2011) confirmed that the brand personality has a significant role in the customer brand loyalty and purchase intention in the hospitality marketing. Similarly, Bouhlef *et al.* (2011) found that the brand personality positively influence the brand trust, brand commitment, and brand attachment. Similarly, Lavuri *et al.* (2019) found that there is a significant influence in the consumers' buying preference toward branded mobiles. The features of the smartphone like touchscreen, design, and style also have a significant effect on the choice of the device. Based on it, the study develops the following hypothesis:

H<sub>5</sub>: There is a positive relationship between ecosystem and integration and brand loyalty.

## **3. Results and discussion**

### *Correlation analysis*

On analysis of data, correlation analysis has been undertaken first and for this purpose, Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients along with means and standard deviations have been computed, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

### **Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients matrix**



This table presents Kendall's Tau coefficients between dependent and independent variables. The correlation coefficients are based on 151 observations. The dependent variable is BL (Brand loyalty). The independent variables are PVP (price and value proportion), CSS (customer service and support), SIWM (social influence and word of mouth), BCM (brand communication and marketing), and EI (ecosystem and integration).

Variables	Mean	S.D.	BL	PVP	CSS	SIWM	BCM	EI
BL	3.978	0.853	1					
PVP	3.977	0.868	0.470**	1				
CSS	3.862	0.887	0.506**	0.597**	1			
SIWM	3.862	0.951	0.547**	0.601**	0.665**	1		
BCM	3.984	0.969	0.517**	0.539**	0.591**	0.645**	1	
EI	3.953	0.909	0.518**	0.551**	0.555**	0.589**	0.721**	1

Notes: The asterisk signs (\*\*) and (\*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent level respectively.

Table 1 shows Kendall's Tau correlations coefficients of dependent (Brand loyalty) and independent (price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration) variables for Nepalese smartphone customers. The result shows that price and value proposition is positively correlated to brand loyalty. It indicates that better price and value proposition, leads to better brand loyalty. Similarly, customer service and support is positively related to brand loyalty indicating that higher the level of customer service and support, higher would be the brand loyalty. Likewise, social influence and word of mouth has positive relationship with brand loyalty. It shows that social influence and word of mouth leads to an increase in the brand loyalty. Similarly, brand communication and marketing has positive relationship with brand loyalty. It reveals that higher the level of brand communication and marketing, higher would be brand loyalty. The result shows that there is positive relationship between eco system and integration and brand loyalty. It shows that an increase in the level of eco system and integration leads to the increase in the brand loyalty.

### *Regression analysis*

Having analyzed the Kendall's Tau correlation coefficients matrix, the regression analysis has been carried out and the results are presented in Table 2. More specifically, it presents the regression results of price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration on brand loyalty in smartphone in Nepal.

Table 2

### **Estimated regression results of price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and eco system and integration on the brand loyalty in smartphone**

The results are based on 151 observations using linear regression model. The model is  $BL = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PVP + \beta_2 CSS + \beta_3 SIWM + \beta_4 BCM + \beta_5 EI + \epsilon$ , where the dependent variable is BL (Brand loyalty). The independent variables are PVP (price and value proportion), CSS (customer service and support), SIWM (social influence and word of mouth), BCM (brand communication and marketing), and EI (ecosystem and integration).



Model	Intercept	Regression coefficients of					Adj. R <sub>bar</sub> <sup>2</sup>	SEE	F-value
		PVP	CSS	SIWM	BCM	EI			
1	1.158 (5.096)**	0.709 (12.709)**					0.517	0.593	161.514
2	1.371 (6.156)**		0.675 (12.010)**				0.488	0.610	144.230
3	1.511 (7.363)**			0.639 (12.380)**			0.504	0.601	153.261
4	1.495 (7.151)**				0.624 (12.230)**		0.498	0.605	149.563
5	1.488 (6.427)**					0.630 (11.037)**	0.446	0.635	121.819
6	0.986 (4.349)**	0.439 (4.670)**	0.323 (3.516)**				0.551	0.572	93.095
7	0.966 (4.402)**	0.313 (3.054)**	0.205 (2.058)*	0.254 (2.795)**			0.571	0.559	67.525
8	0.907 (4.178)*	0.247 (2.376)	0.167 (1.687)*	0.156 (1.597)*	0.211 (2.469)*		0.585	0.549	53.924
9	0.893 (4.007)	0.241 (2.264)	0.168 (1.693)*	0.155 (1.587)	0.185 (1.510)*	0.035 (0.298)	0.583	0.551	42.887

Note:

1. Figures in parenthesis are t-values.
2. The asterisk signs (\*\*) and (\*) indicate that the results are significant at one percent and five percent level respectively.
3. Brand loyalty is the dependent variable.

The regression results shows beta coefficients for price and value proposition are positive with brand loyalty. It indicates price and value proposition has a positive impact on brand loyalty. The finding is consistent with the findings of Sah (2021). On the other hand, the result shows that the beta coefficients for customer service and support are positive with brand loyalty. It reveals that customer service and support has a positive impact on brand loyalty. Similarly, the beta coefficients for social influence and word of mouth are positive with brand loyalty. It indicates that social influence and word of mouth has positive impact on brand loyalty. It is significant at 1 and 5 percent level of significance. The finding is consistent with the findings of Sata (2013). The result also reveals that the beta coefficients for brand communication and marketing are positive with brand loyalty. It reveals that brand communication and marketing has positive impact on brand loyalty. The result is significant at 1 and 5 percent level of significance. Likewise, the positive beta coefficients eco system and integration denote that eco system and integration has positive impact on brand loyalty. The finding is consistent with the findings of Thomson *et al.* (2005).

#### 4. Summary and conclusion

Brand loyalty is the critical subject of interest for marketing researchers. The study 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. Customer loyalty is a mixture of attitude and behavior loyalty. Brand loyalty is a consumer connection to a high value of the brand. 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.

This study attempts to examine the brand loyalty in smartphone in Nepal. The study is based on primary data with 151 respondents.

The study showed that price and value proposition, customer service and support, social influence and word of mouth, brand communication and marketing, and ecosystem and integration have positive impact on brand loyalty. Likewise, the study concludes that social influence and word of mouth followed by price and value proposition is the most dominant factors that influence brand loyalty in smartphone.

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