

The Mediating Effects of Customer Loyalty in the Relationships Between Trust and Repurchase Intention Towards Malaysia Hypermarkets.

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Abstract

Hypermarkets have grown significantly faster than other sectors of the economy in Malaysia. With their contribution to the national gross domestic product (GDP), these retail shops have continued to grow in the Malaysian economy. However, some hypermarkets have seen slow sales because of consumers having more purchasing options, particularly in the critical situation with the spreading of the pandemic and the expansion of e-commerce. As a result, hypermarkets must take measures to retain their customers by cultivating customer loyalty. Loyal consumers not only increase the worth of the firm, but they also incur lower cost than obtaining new customers. The objective of this study is to measure the mediating effects of customer loyalty on the relationship between trust and repurchase intention towards Malaysia hypermarkets. In this study, a quantitative research approach was used to collect data from 474 useful questionnaires that were filled out by customers of hypermarkets in Klang Valley, Malaysia via an internet survey. The data was then analysed using SPSS v.26.0 and SmartPLS v.3.0 software to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings showed that trust and repurchase intention have a significant relationship on customer loyalty. On the other hand, the findings revealed that trust has an indirect impact on the repurchase intention through the mediators of customer loyalty. The current study's findings will assist hypermarket managers in Malaysia, and in developing nations generally, in creating the optimal strategies for increasing consumer trust and loyalty in order to induce repurchase intentions.

Keywords: customer loyalty, hypermarkets, repurchase intention, trust

1. Introduction

Hypermarket is the type of modern retailing which provides everything under one roof. Hypermarkets are more focused on fast moving consumer products which differentiated them to the existing shopping center [18]. Until the establishment of hypermarkets, Malaysia's retail industry evolved in comparison to other developing countries in the South East Asia region [26]. Most of the hypermarkets in Malaysia are in Klang Valley which comprising Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya [9]. Malaysia is currently attracting a number of foreign names, such as Tesco from the United Kingdom, Carrefour from France, and DFI from Hong Kong, which operates the Giant hypermarkets [29].

Despite of this, the hypermarkets are highly competitive due to a large number of emerging retailers on both the national and international levels [4]. Furthermore, the emergence of many alternatives for individuals shopping their needs as diverted to internet creates a challenge for hypermarkets. However, the bulk of Malaysians still shop at hypermarkets for basic requirements, particularly perishable goods. As a result, even though internet services provide an alternative for acquiring similar products, the existence of a physical hypermarket remains relevant [9]. In such circumstance, a continued relationship is conceivable if the hypermarket tradesperson can assess customer loyalty based on the quality of service or product encountered at the retail store [25].

According to [23], customer loyalty is critical since it is all about retaining actual consumers and getting those customers to buy more frequently and in larger quantities. Increasing customer loyalty is also strongly related to effective management since it encourages repurchases, which are more efficient than gaining new consumers. As a result, organisations must understand and manage repurchase intention while managing loyalty. In this repurchase scenario, buyers tend to evaluate a product or service based on its real performance as experienced after consumption [35]. Furthermore, loyal consumers have a close relationship with the service provider, which benefits the company by needing less effort to build trust among the customers [34]. Literature stated that trust is one of the most essential variables in building consumer loyalty [38], and it is widely acknowledged for its importance in repurchase intention [11]. Several studies have been conducted to investigate the factors of trust and customer loyalty that motivate customers to repurchase, with the majority of them focusing on e-commerce. Moreover, because there has been very little empirical study done on physical hypermarkets and customer loyalty as a mediator in Malaysia, there is a need to conduct further studies in this area. Thereby, the study's purpose and objectives are to investigate the mediating effects of customer loyalty on the relationship between trust and repurchase intention towards Malaysia hypermarkets.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Trust, Customer Loyalty and Repurchase Intention

Many researchers acknowledge the critical role of customer loyalty in marketing theory. Broadly, customer loyalty concerns a buyer's strong commitment to repurchase or patronise a particular product in a consistent manner in the future [27]. In other words, customer loyalty leads to the repurchase intention which consumes the same product or service with the same company [15]. Besides, they also propagate more positively through word-of-mouth endorsements, never switching to rival brands, having high tolerance even in-service failure, and ready to pay the even higher price for their retailer's products [28]. However, to capture the loyalty among the customers, the service provider needs to build trust.

Trust is one of the elements that makes the relationship between customer and a company strong. Positive beliefs towards the products, services or brand sold by a company is referred to as customers trust. As mentioned in study by [22], trust has direct relationship with customer loyalty. This fact is supported by [12], which stated that customer trust has a significant and positive influence on customer loyalty. When customer trust to the company which delivered their needs and demands as expected, these customers will repeat their purchasing and at the same time will recommend it to others [17];[3]. Therefore, greater trust has the potential to build loyal customers with less intention to switch to its competitor which eventually leads to high profitability.

[28] also stated that once trust is instituted, automatically repurchase intention will be more likely. Repurchase intention is known as consumers' willingness to repurchase a product in the form of products or services for which they have previously experienced the benefits and quality [13]. The relationship between trust and repurchase intention will boost the existing customer loyalty as mentioned by [34]. In the study, the higher the customer loyalty from existing trust by customers, the higher the likelihood of repurchase intention. This shows that customer loyalty can both play a major and supporting role in a relationship [1]. This study proposes three hypotheses based on the preceding discussion:

H₁ Trust has a significant effect on customer loyalty.

H₂ Customer loyalty has a significant effect on repurchase intention.

H₃ Customer loyalty mediates the relationship between trust and repurchase intention.

3. Conceptual Framework

The relationship between the variables is clearly demonstrated and summarised in by establishing the conceptual framework in Figure 1. Based on the figure below, trust can lead to the customer loyalty and customer loyalty can also lead to the repurchase intention where both relationships have a direct effect. While, trust impacts repurchase intention indirectly via customer loyalty.

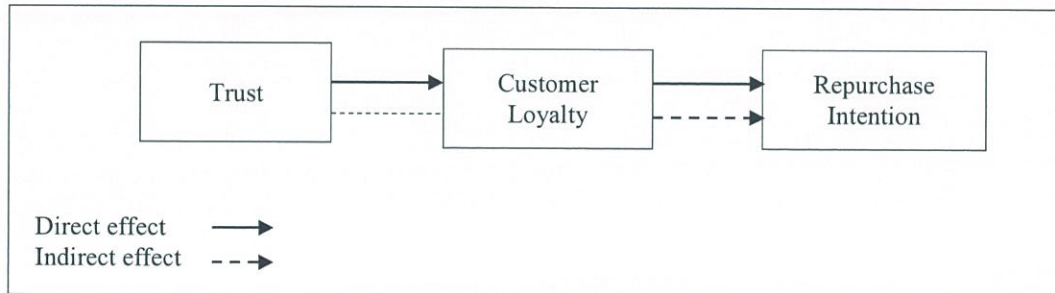


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

4. Methodology

The data acquired in an online survey through Google Forms was used to test hypothesised relationships. The convenience sample technique was used in the current study to reach out to the target respondents. When participating in the current study, the respondent must meet specific prerequisites outlined in the questionnaire. The respondents were supposed to be customers between the ages of 15 and 64 who had made purchases in hypermarkets in Klang Valley, Malaysia. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, Klang Valley is the biggest city in Malaysia which estimated to be around 8 million people. Besides, the hypermarkets are mostly located in Klang Valley compared to other states in Malaysia [8]. Due to the enormous size of population, this study followed the recommendation made by Krejcie and Morgan in determining the sample size whereby 384 respondents is the minimum amount for population exceeding 1 million.

The research constructs were based entirely on previously validated measurements. All scale items were rearticulated to correspond closely to the requirements of the current investigation. The constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "1-strongly disagree" to "5-strongly agree." There were two sections, section A contained the variables in the current study while section B regarding the respondent profile which they willingly to answer. Then, the data obtained was analysed by SPSS software to assess the descriptive analysis. While software PLS-SEM was used to assess the measurement models and structural models.

5. Results

5.1. Demographic Profile

Using Google Forms survey, the questionnaire was distributed to 474 respondents in Klang Valley. Males outnumbered females (51.3%) among those who responded (48.7%). The majority of respondents (69.6%) were Malay, followed by Chinese (22.4%), Indian (6.8%), and others (1.3 %). The age group of 15-24 years (27.2%) formed the bulk of respondents, followed by respondents aged 35-44 years (26.8%), 25-34 years (24.9%), 45-54 years (11.2%), and 55-64 years (9.9%).

Furthermore, the majority of respondents (25.7 percent) preferred to shop at Tesco (Lotus) hypermarkets, followed by Aeon (23.0%), Giant (19.6%), others (12.7%), Mydin (10.1%), and Econsave (the least favoured) (8.9%). The majority of respondents (46.2 percent) made weekly purchases, followed by daily purchases (20.7%), once a month (21.7%), and every 2-3 months (11.4%).

5.2. Measurements Models

The measurement model assessment was begun by examining the factor loadings, Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability to reach the items reliability and internal consistency. Despite the fact that [10] said that researchers normally accept 0.7 as the referent value for all of the loading, this implies that the loading should be more than 0.7. Scholar, [36] advised that reflective components with a loading value of 0.4 or above be retained in this model. Since all of the items were modelled as reflecting, 0.4 was chosen as the lowest loading value. Meanwhile, both the Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability need to exceed 0.6 [24]. Table 1 demonstrates that the value of trust, customer loyalty and repurchase intention was greater than 0.6 of Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability. Furthermore, the analysis was proceeded by looking at the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) which determines the convergent validity in this study. Based on the table below, all of the variables were ranged between 0.511 and 0.581 where the value was greater than 0.5 as recommended by [7]. It can be concluded that all categories achieved their recommended level that meet the higher convergent validity and reliability.

TABLE I: Measurement Models Results

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Trust	T1	0.799	0.897	0.917	0.581
	T2	0.770			
	T3	0.744			
	T4	0.714			
	T5	0.775			
	T6	0.736			
	T7	0.771			
	T8	0.785			
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.693	0.863	0.893	0.511
	CL2	0.725			
	CL3	0.734			
	CL4	0.705			
	CL5	0.803			
	CL6	0.705			
	CL7	0.654			
	CL8	0.691			
Repurchase Intention	R1	0.616	0.839	0.880	0.513
	R2	0.760			
	R3	0.799			
	R4	0.726			
	R5	0.728			
	R6	0.752			
	R7	0.609			

There are different ways to assessing discriminant validity as described in the methodological literature. However, the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) proposed by [10] is one of the most common applications for assessing discriminant validity due to its high performance and ease of use [32]. In particular, the HTMT value of 0.85 is regarded as a criterion for ensuring discriminant validity [10]. Table 2 illustrates that the HTMT criterion was met, indicating that discriminant validity had been established.

TABLE 2: Discriminant Validity Results

	Trust	Customer Loyalty	Repurchase Intention
Trust			
Customer Loyalty	0.575		

Repurchase Intention	0.460	0.777
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5.3. Structural Model Assesment

The next step is measuring the structural model and hypothesis testing. In this study, R2 was measured to examine the proportion of the variation in the value of the affected variable which can be explained by the variable that influenced it. The R2 value was 0.459, meaning that the model explains 45.9% of the variance in repurchase intention [7]. Then, the proposed hypotheses were carried out by looking at the results of the bootstrapping value. The hypotheses would be accepted if the path coefficient showed the significance level of 0.05 or the t-value exceeding 1.96 [7]. Therefore, Table 3 indicates that H₁ ($\beta=0.517$; $t=12.884$) was accepted where trust was found to have a significant effect on customer loyalty. Besides that, customer loyalty had a significant effect on repurchase intention ($\beta=0.618$; $t=16.084$), thus H₂ was accepted too.

TABLE 3: Outcomes Hypotheses 1 and 2

Relationship	Beta Value	T-value	P-Value	Decision
Trust → Customer Loyalty	0.517	12.884	0.000	Accepted
Customer Loyalty → Repurchase Intention	0.618	16.084	0.000	Accepted

5.4. Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was carried out to determine the function of customer loyalty in mediating the relationship between trust and repurchase intention. This study used the analytical approach described by [31] to evaluate the mediation hypothesis (H3). The 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval (CI) of the indirect effect was created using the bootstrapping process with a resample of 5,000 to evaluate the existence of the mediation impact of customer loyalty. This approach is recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008) as one of the powerful methods to test the role of mediator in a relationship. Thus, the bootstrapping indirect effect procedure was applied in this research. In Table 4, the indirect impact was significant as ($\beta=0.322$; $t=9.354$), with values of the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval [LL = 0.253, UL = 0.386] that did not straddle a 0 in between, confirming mediation. As a conclusion, H3 is accepted since it has been demonstrated that customer loyalty mediates the relationship trust and repurchase intention.

TABLE 4: Mediation Analysis

Relationship	Beta Value	T-value	CL	Decision
Trust → Customer Loyalty → Repurchase Intention	0.322	9.354***	0.253 (LL) 0.486 (UL)	Accepted

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

In today's corporate environment, knowing how to develop trust with customers is crucial. Going above and beyond for your customers at all times is the most effective way to gain consumer trust and a loyal customer base. Companies who fail to put in the effort required to earn their customers' trust are restricting their potential. This happens when customers who have trust with certain companies or brands will repeat their purchasing (repurchase) in the future [17] where this behaviour will create customer loyalty. The current study's findings will be valuable for retail marketing staff, particularly those working in hypermarkets, in developing effective and efficient approaches to build long-term relationships with customers and gain a sustainable competitive edge. From the findings, trust has a significance effect on the customer loyalty. The same results are shown by [22] and [12] who found evidence that trust can affect customer loyalty. Besides, customer loyalty also has a significant effect on repurchase intention. This finding supports the second hypothesis of this study, as well as similar findings made by [2].

Therefore, this study suggested that hypermarket operators need to focus on the relationship between seller and customer in creating trust. Trust can be enhanced when the seller delivers the quality of product or services which satisfies the customers and being knowledgeable about it. A seller cannot provide high-quality service unless he or she is skilled or knowledgeable. As a result, a consumer will only trust a seller if he or she is confident that the seller is competent (ie; skilled, knowledgeable) enough to meet her or his needs [33]. This is congruent with [29], which in trade relations, the seller should have more information about the product or service quality than the customer and in fact, the customer that does not have comprehensive information about the seller's action might lead to the opportunistic behaviour [21]. In this regard, the hypermarket should provide the employee with the competency and credibility in order to promote trust. Besides, the continuous fulfilment of promises connected to the hypermarket's offerings, thus creating trust with marketing efforts, can act as a vital aspect in building customer intention [37]. This trust can help hypermarkets provide better customer service and customer lifetime value.

Furthermore, we can conclude that customer loyalty plays a key role in hypermarkets customer behaviour. As hypothesis three approved when the findings showed that customer loyalty mediates the relationship between trust and repurchase intention. This means that a portion of trust effect on repurchase intention is mediated by customer loyalty, while trust still explains a portion of repurchase intention independently of customer loyalty. For this reason, in addition to building trust, hypermarket operators must also understand how to enhance consumer loyalty in order to drive repurchase intention. A business that provides superior innovative technology tends to affect customer trust and loyalty in their purchasing decision [5]. This is supported by [6] which stated that the increased use of SST affects service quality with the behavioural intention of loyalty and trust from customers. According to [19], mostly modern consumers want to spend less time shopping in stores, while on the other hand, they want more thorough information on the things they buy. Therefore, these consumer needs can be met by self-service technology (SST) such as self-scanning and self-checkout. Developed countries have generally implemented SSTs. However, such technologies are not widely used in Malaysia, particularly in the retail sector, with Tesco being the most popular hypermarket in Malaysia that offers SSTs [16]. Since the findings showed that the Tesco is the most visited hypermarket by the customers, the SST is crucial as it has resulted in customer facilitation, cost reduction and a convenient service environment for the users of SSTs [14].

In the current study, data was collected from hypermarkets in Malaysia's largest city of Klang Valley, however customers in other regions may have different attitudes towards the product or service of hypermarkets. As a result, new research should be conducted to closely monitor the behaviour of customers in other regions as well, or to compare the urban and rural areas. Besides, since this study was entirely quantitative in nature, certain constraints surrounding survey-based data collecting exist; therefore, additional research should be conducted using alternative methodological techniques, such as mixed methodology and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, customer loyalty, which was used as a mediator in the current study, can also be explored as a moderator. The data was gathered solely from customers; however, viewing staff's perspectives would add some new insights to the findings and could be incorporated for future research.

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