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Examining the Relationship of Customer Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty in Sports Products among University Students

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Abstract: To stay relevant in this market field, involving technology, many sports brands come forward with features that distinguish them from the other brands. Sports brand companies prioritize consumer demand to maintain the relevance of their products in the market. They emphasize customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, as these factors directly impact sales outcomes. Sporting goods customers come from diverse backgrounds, and university students significantly contribute to the sales of these products. Therefore, this research investigates the correlation between the contentment of customers and their loyalty toward sports brands within the context of university students. The quantitative approach using a survey design was used to conduct this study. A total of 361 university students were involved in this study. The data for this study were collected using a series of questionnaires containing 26 items that assess customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. The statistical analysis was performed using the Pearson Correlation analysis test. The results indicate a significant and high correlation between customer satisfaction and loyalty toward sports brands. Thus, this study offers valuable insights into customer satisfaction and product loyalty, specifically among university students and recommends that future studies focus on exploring the variations in customer perception towards sports goods based on gender and age.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Brand Loyalty, University Students, Sports Products, Sports Brand.*

1. Introduction

Customer satisfaction can determine repurchase and brand loyalty. Many studies concentrate on studying customer satisfaction and brand loyalty separately. According to Parashar (2018), customer satisfaction can be measured by how healthy experiences meet the customer's needs. Not forgetting too that the brand name differentiates it from other brands, including campaign, value, services, and action. These factors lead to brand loyalty. Ilias et al. (2020) stated that brand loyalty can be described as a positive attitude toward a brand that results in repurchasing over time. Choosing suitable sports attire such as shirts, pants, and shoes is vital to enhancing a healthy lifestyle. It is essential to have the correct apparel to start a daily routine when it comes to sports. Therefore, the provider creates a sports brand that involves sports activity. Adidas, Nike, Puma, and others are examples of sports brands. Brand loyalty can involve a strong and deep connection between the customer and the brand, wherein the customer remains steadfast and does not switch to another brand as long as the current brand delivers comfort and satisfaction (Sugiarto & Octaviana, 2021).

It represents the consumer's decision to consistently choose a specific brand within a particular product category. Ilias et al. (2020) indicated that it happens when buyers perceive satisfaction with the products offered, such as quality at the right price. These factors can lead to repurchase behavior. In addition, few researchers found that brand loyalty results from customer satisfaction. Besides, satisfaction and trust are two pillars of building loyalty (Mansouri et al., 2022). When discussing sports brands, particularly in apparel and footwear, it becomes evident that Nike, Adidas, and Puma are globally recognized brands favored by numerous customers, including those in Malaysia. Among the sportswear brands in Malaysia, Nike stands out as the most preferred choice, closely followed by Adidas, Reebok, Puma, New Balance, and other brands, as Uzir (2010) noted. This preference for Nike is further supported by the findings of Hardjono and Teng (2019), who stated that Nike and Adidas are the top choices among Gen Y consumers in Malaysia, followed by New Balance, Puma, and Asics.

The researchers also highlighted that nearly 80% of the respondents preferred Nike regarding sportswear. Meanwhile, individual preferences vary among people, and sports products have gained significant popularity among the youth demographic. There are a lot of sports brands that can be offered to students, and they are more concerned about quality, price, and value than looking for their satisfaction when selecting a brand. Pa et al. (2021) found an increasing number of students seeking sports products, and Nike and Adidas are the brands most university students prefer. Thus, to compete in the market, it is necessary if providers provide a variety of features in their products. Saricam (2022) stated that the more services supplied by brand sportswear retailers, the greater the likelihood of brand loyalty.

2. Literature Review

Customer Satisfaction: In Mohammad's (2021) perspective, customer satisfaction is defined as fulfilling customers' needs, desires, and demands regarding quality, timeliness, cost, and flexibility, which fosters brand loyalty. This concept is closely linked to the customer's expectations derived from the brand. Rahuman et al. (2022) further suggest that customer satisfaction hinges on a product's perceived performance compared to the buyer's expectations. Previous research conducted by El et al. (2020) identified various factors influencing customer satisfaction, including product quality, service quality, price, situational factors, and personal factors. Customer satisfaction is influenced by the customer's perceptions of their cognitive functioning and expectations. Consequently, customer satisfaction can impact a customer's choice to interact with a particular business. The higher the joy, the higher the loyalty (Zhong & Moon, 2020). For example, sports consumers will buy products from their favorite brands because of their experiences using them. Customer satisfaction is based on the customer's feelings towards the brand they purchase, whether it satisfies them or not. Customer satisfaction can also be achieved when customer expectations are met (Kee et al., 2021).

Perceived Quality: Quality refers to a distinctive characteristic of a product or service that fulfills the requirements of current or prospective customers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The perception of quality has a positive influence and constitutes one of the elements contributing to customer satisfaction (Assaker et al., 2020). Specifically, in consumer brand engagement, perceived quality encompasses a consumer's assessment of the product or service's trustworthiness and reliability. It is closely associated with customer preferences, satisfaction levels, and purchase decisions (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022). The research conducted by Jain et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of brand credibility in influencing consumers' decision-making processes and perceptions of choices. Perceived quality plays a crucial role as a fundamental aspect of brand equity. When customers have higher expectations regarding purchasing a product from a particular brand, they are more inclined to recommend that brand to others (Falahat et al., 2018). Therefore, it will influence purchase intention. The quality of products that satisfy users' needs may include different features and simultaneously enhance the performance of products. When customers recognize superior quality in a product, it indicates that their needs are being met, resulting in satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand (Falahat et al., 2018). According to Akoglu and Özbek (2022), product quality is the primary factor influencing loyalty toward sports brands.

Perceived Value: Perceived value can be described as the balance between what customers pay to acquire products or services and what they receive in return (Fan et al., 2023). This value can manifest in both monetary and non-monetary forms. Monetary value is often associated with price, while non-monetary value encompasses customers' investment of time, physical effort, and mental energy (Ikechi & Tamuno, 2023). However, the specific nature of perceived value may vary slightly depending on individual consumers and specific situations. Tukiran et al. (2021) propose that value can be understood as the benefits that customers derive from a product, such as the value of affordability, the value of meeting specific consumer preferences, the value of price quality, and the value of receiving a fair exchange for what is given. Ashraf et al. (2018) meanwhile added that customers perceive performance, stability, economy, presence, and protection with the service, and customers include time and money in the total cost incurred. In addition, Hamzah and Shamsudi (2020) revealed that the customers who gain value from the organizations will be more loyal to the organization than those who do not. According to Pandey et al. (2020), perceived value is defined as the value of a product according to its price in the mind of customers. After using a product, the customer will decide if it is worth buying. This point will influence the customer's willingness to pay for the product.

Brand Trust: Brand trust can mediate the current market's long-term relationship between provider and buyer. According to Khan and Fatma (2019), trust in a brand is established through personal experiences and interactions with the brand, which play a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions. Brand trust is developed through information-seeking behaviors and diverse encounters with the brand. To enhance trust, customers' willingness on the capabilities and function of brands is needed. Previous studies suggested considering brand loyalty as an essential outcome of brand trust. Brand trust results in increased loyalty, as trust establishes a mutually beneficial relationship between the customer and the brand. Brand trust is rooted in the customer's expectations, formed by beliefs that the brand possesses consistent, competent, and credible characteristics (Kwan et al., 2019). As per Chen and Cheng (2020), consumers' trust in a specific brand is gradually established through prior experiences and interactions with the brand. Building trust in a brand fosters long-term relationships between manufacturers and their customers.

Service Quality: Service quality can accurately describe the consumer's overall perception of the organization's excellence and services. It encompasses the customer's ability to discern when an organization delivers the expected services and meets the basic requirements (Jan et al., 2022). It also often reflects the customer's perception and value judgment of a product or service. The lack of a connection between customer expectations and the services provided leads to short-term customer satisfaction. However, good service leads to long-term customer satisfaction and positive feelings about the organization. Besides that, if customers prefer one brand over another and continue to use the brand's services, it indicates that the customer is delighted with the product or service. As suggested by Zeithaml et al. (1996), cited in Ashraf et al. (2018), as a result of the customer's good evaluation of the brand's services, it was recommended that the consumer have a strong relationship with the brand.

Brand Loyalty: Brand loyalty refers to customers' positive attitude toward a brand, which may result from frequent purchases over time (Ilias et al., 2020). Loyalty represents customer attitudes and reflects customers' permanent commitment (Nora, 2019). Customers receive brand loyalty after they experienced a brand and have a relationship with it through perception and cognition. The greater the brand's position in the market, the less exposed customers are inclined to switch brands (Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020). Brand loyalty is influenced by various factors, encompassing both emotional and cognitive aspects such as brand association, trust, perceived quality, performance, and customer satisfaction (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022). It can be defined as a strong preference for a particular brand over similar alternatives available in the market. Brand loyalty represents a consistent pattern of behavior and thinking exhibited by consumers. The choice of including a specific brand within a product category is ultimately made by the consumer. Loyalty is fostered through the establishment of trust and the impact of the brand on consumers. Buyers believe the brand provides the appropriate product look, quality grade at the right price, and identity.

3. Methodology

This quantitative research utilizes descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to accomplish its objectives. The study involved 361 respondents who were administered a comprehensive questionnaire to collect the necessary data. In this study, university students refer to students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Seremban Campus. The researcher employed a simple random sampling method to select the respondents. The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. The hypothesis aims to explore the existence of a significant correlation between customer satisfaction and sports brand loyalty among university students. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. Section A focuses on gathering information about the respondent's demographic background. Section B contains 20 items related to customer satisfaction, while Section C includes six items regarding brand loyalty. All of these questions were derived and modified from the study by Ahmed et al. (2014) on the impact of brand trust and customer satisfaction on brand loyalty. In Sections B and C, respondents rated the items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

4. Results and Findings

Table 1: What is the Preferred Sports Brand among University Students?

Preferred Brand	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Adidas	106	29
Nike	97	27
Puma	48	13
Asics	47	13
Under Armor	21	6
Sketchers	18	5
Reebok	16	4
Others	8	3

Based on the finding, the highest preferred sports brand among university students, with twenty-nine percent (29%), is Adidas, compared to the lowest with three percent (3%) which is others.

Table 2: Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Sports Brand Loyalty among University Students

		Sports Brand Loyalty
Customer Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.906**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	361

Based on the finding, there is a significant relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Sports Brand Loyalty among university students with r = .906, p = .000.

Discussion

This research examines the correlation between Customer Satisfaction and Sports Brand Loyalty among university students. The study reveals that Adidas emerges as the favored sports brand among university students based on the findings. This finding is similar to the previous journal, in which the most significant brand is primarily Adidas (Janoskova & Kral, 2020), as we know that Adidas is one of the most famous brands among all groups for its brand image and is also known for its quality, durability as well as affordable price. As a result, it is proven that this brand is a choice for university students. However, this finding was contrasted when Matthews et al. (2019) found that Nike is the brand most university students admire. The results of the study indicate that the image of a brand plays a crucial role in representing the quality of its products or services. This finding is supported by Kataria and Saini (2020), who emphasized that the brand nature scale encompasses the inherent attributes of manufactured goods, such as quality, value, and trust.

This study also found no vast gap between these two brands. Thus it can conclude that every brand has their follower since they know the good and bad of every brand, such as its design, features, quality, and durability. The study's results indicate a notable positive correlation between Customer Satisfaction and Sports Brand Loyalty. This finding is consistent with a previous study by Uysal and Okumus (2022), which also discovered a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty among sportswear consumers. The features associated with sportswear were shown to contribute to this similar outcome. Furthermore, to reinforce these findings, Hadi and Rahim (2014) uncovered similar results, demonstrating a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and the cognitive aspect of loyalty toward sports brands. Researchers believe a buyer will repurchase and stick to one brand due to their experiences when using the products. With a good experience, they will maintain in their head and be afraid to try other brands because they are afraid to experience a new one. Fels et al. (2017) mentioned that brand loyalty is when customers keep repurchasing the same brand.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The result demonstrates a significant and high correlation between customer satisfaction and sports brand loyalty among UiTM students. This indicates that most of the students are satisfied and loyal to their sports brand due to the quality and values of the products. In this situation, providers and marketers must sustain

their brands significantly to enhance customer trust. A good representative of the brand may affect the reputation and sales of the product. As a result, it enables customers to stay loyal and perceive the brand choices for the long term. Therefore, this study's findings can contribute to university students by gaining a deeper understanding to enhance their marketing knowledge, especially in product, price, place, and promotion. This could influence students' purchasing decisions on satisfaction and loyalty toward the chosen brand. This study also provides valuable insight for future researchers by extending the findings to other university students to retrieve their satisfaction and brand loyalty. Besides, future researchers can study the perceptions of customer satisfaction towards brand loyalty based on gender. This can broaden the perspective of this research and contribute new literature to the studies.

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