Conceptualizations and Measurement Issues in Customer Loyalty: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract
Customer loyalty is amongst the main phenomenon of concern for marketing practitioners and academicians because of its link to organizational survival, development and growth. Loyalty reflects the customer’s sense of belongings or affections with the firm’s employee, product or service. These intentions directly affect the customer-rephrased behaviors, which is resulted into positive word of mouth. This study is based on systematic review of the current body of literature and issues that impede the current research related to customer loyalty domain in the telecom sector. This study also addresses the issues related to the robustness of measurements and conceptualizations in the past and contemporary research findings. For systematic review, Studies has been abstracted from the reputable search engines like Google scholar, Ebscohost, Research Gate and well reputable publishing groups like, Emerald, Elsevier, Science direct, Taylor & Francis. Systematic process was adopted for reviewing the literature of the selected studies. Moreover, Data for review is abstracted from the literature review and results revealed from the past and contemporary studies.

Keywords: Customer Loyalty, Systematic review, Telecom sector.

Introduction
The phenomenon of loyalty is amongst the most prioritized area of concern. During past few decades we have witnessed an ideological shifts from customer acquisition to customer loyalty and retention. This is because of the fact that retaining the existing customer through customer satisfaction and loyalty is much cheaper than to attract or acquire the new customers. In view of few researchers, customer loyalty will serve as a safe guard against the dangers of customer switching or churn(Ram, Ram, Wu, & Wu, 2016). Undoubtedly, service firms in particular are suffering with the phenomenon of customer churn globally(EY, 2016). However, the insensitivity of switching differs from industry to industry such as switching is more intense in firms operating in hypercompetitive environments. Importantly, telecom sector is suffering from the high rate of customer churn rates due to the mobile number portability facility, intense nature of rivalry or the advents of alternative facilities in the forms of video calls and text facilities through social networking like Facebook, twitter etc or through the various application like Whatsapp, Skype and IMO (Joshi, Jog, & Chirputkar, 2016).

In order to cope up with above mentioned challenges, customer loyalty has been emerged as the most significant area of concern because of its proximity with the organizational survival, growth and profitability(Chadha & Kapoor, 2009; Cheng, Lai, & Yeung, 2010). From the early 1980, we have witnessed a great emphasis on the development of loyalty across the globe and firms have started investing handsomely on the customer loyalty initiatives. For example in the USA alone, spending on loyalty programs have been growing at very rapid pace as it is almost 48$ billion almost half percent increased since 2010 (Berry, 2013). However, ultimate outcomes of most of the loyalty building efforts revealed beyond the expectations (Henderson, Beck, & Palmatier, 2011). Moreover, there is no consensus on the definition of loyalty to date. Every researcher has defined it according to his or her own perspectives. However, from the review of past and contemporary studies it is found that concept loyalty is a mixes of customer attitudes or behaviors towards any particular firm, goods or service or regarding any particular features which is reflected from the favorable attitude of customers in the form positive word of mouth or from the repurchasing patterns / behaviors(Dick & Basu, 1994; Keiningham, Cool, Andressen, & Aksoy, 2007; Oliver, 1999; Reinartz & Kumar, 2002; Watson, Beck, Henderson, & Palmatier, 2015). Besides this there is there is significant variations on grounds of conceptualizations and operationalization of loyalty(Goyal, Maity, Kaur, & Soch, 2013; Watson, et al., 2015).

Theoretical domains of customer loyalty in telecom sector
Antecedents of loyalty have been immensely studied (e.g., Jiang & Zhang, 2016; Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012; Namukasa, 2013; Priporas, Stylos, Vedanthachari, & Santiwatana, 2017; Richard & Zhang, 2012; Saepa, Roberts-Lombard, & Tonder, 2015; Van Vuuren, Roberts-Lombard, & Van Tonder, 2012). Similarly, In telecommunication in depth studies have been conducted (e.g., Abdullah, Putit, & Teo, 2014; Agyei & Kilika, 2013, 2014; Danish, Ahmad, Ateeq, Ali, & Humayon, 2015; Goyal, et al., 2013; Izogo, 2013, 2016; Izogo & Izogo, 2017; Muturi, Jackline Sagwe, Kipkironong Tarus, & Rabach, 2013; Qayyum, Ba Khang, & Krairit, 2013; Segoro, 2013; Shafei, Shafei, Tabbaa, & Tabbaa, 2016; Yeboah-Asiamah, Nimako, Quaye, & Buame, 2016; Yee,
Ling, & Leong, 2015). Consequently, review of the study revealed several facets of loyalty in telecom sector, out of them two are Predominant: attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. A behavior wise loyal customer is preferred to get involved in continuous relationship while attitudinal loyal customer is not only engaged in continuous relationship but also involved in spreading positive word of mouth and makes business referrals (Rauyuen & Miller, 2007). Furthermore, (Izogo & Izogo, 2017) opined that behavioral loyal customer can switch for the best alternative while attitudinal loyal customer hardly switch the service provider.

Recently, (Izogo & Izogo, 2017) established a study in Nigerian telecom sector to analyze the impact of service assurance and service reliability on customer loyalty with the mediating role of affective and continuous commitments. Data was collected from the 138 respondents and analyzed through SEM. Results of the study confirmed the direct significant impact of service reliability on customer satisfaction while service assurance revealed insignificant impact on customer loyalty. Moreover, affective commitment partially mediates into the relationship between reliability and customer loyalty. However affective and continuous commitment reveal positive and insignificant mediating role between the relationship of service assurance and customer loyalty.

(Shafei, et al., 2016) Developed a study in Egyptian telecom sector to measure the structural relationship between service quality, switching costs, customer satisfaction and loyalty with the mediating role of switching barriers. Results of the study proved the significant impact of service quality on customer satisfaction then switching cost: in turn, customer satisfaction affect the customer loyalty while switching barriers confirmed a significant mediating role.

In the similar vein (Izogo, 2016) has confirmed a significant impact of service reliability and customer commitment on customer loyalty in a study conducted in Nigerian telecom sector. Furthermore, this study revealed customer commitment as a strong predictor of customer loyalty then service reliability. Whereas, (Yeboah-Asiamah, et al., 2016) revealed a significant impact of explicit loyalty on implicit loyalty in the Ghanaian telecom sector. In addition to that, customer satisfaction developed more significant moderated role then trust and brand image.

(Yee, et al., 2015) Developed a study in Malaysian telecom sector to measures the impact of service quality, customer value and corporate image on customer loyalty. As per results, service quality revealed more significant impact on customer loyalty than customer value and corporate image. Consequently, (Gupta & Sahu, 2015) Conducted a study to measure the impact of relationship marketing tools (e.g., customer trust, brand image, loyalty programs, customer satisfaction, service quality, technological orientation, long term orientation) on customer loyalty in Indian telecom sector results of the study confirmed significant impact of trust, long term orientation, brand image on customer loyalty. whereas, corporate image revealed as the most significant predictor of customer loyalty then service quality in another study conducted in the Keynian telecom sector (Agyei & Kilika, 2014).

(Adjei & Denanyoh, 2014) Conducted a study in Ghanaian telecom sector to ascertain the impact of call rates, network quality, and promotional offers, brand image and prompt customer support services on customer loyalty. Results of the study confirmed significant impact of call rates, network quality and promotional offers on customer loyalty. However, brand image and customer support services revealed insignificant impact over customer loyalty.

Moreover, (Muturi, et al., 2013) Worked on identifying the most significant antecedents of customer loyalty in Keynian telecommunication sector. Results of the study revealed that social pressure, perceived service value, service quality significantly influenced the customer loyalty. However, customer satisfaction established an insignificant impact on customer loyalty while corporate image significantly Moderates between perceived service value, service quality, social pressure and loyalty. (Hossain & Suchy, 2013) Developed a study in Bangladesh telecom sector in which authors have analyzed the impact of communication, value added services, price structure, convenience, sales promotion and customer service on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Out of all the variables, price structure followed by value added services and communication established significant impact on customer loyalty.

(Segoro, 2013) Established a study to investigate the impact of perceived service quality, relationship quality and morning effect on customer satisfaction customer and loyalty in Indonesian telecom sector. Cited authors have used multiple measures to analyze each variable such as: perceived service quality has measured through call quality, price structure, and mobile devices, value added services, convenience in procedure and customer support services. Whereas, morning factors were measured through attitude, social influence, switching cost, prior switching behavior and variety seeking. Relationship quality is measured through customer trust, familiarity and partnering, customer satisfaction is measured through dimensions of price, technical, functional and emotional. While, customer loyalty is judged through dimensions of cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty and behavioral loyalty the study set out that morning factors have positive correlation with perceived service quality and relationship quality. Perceived service quality also showed positive relationship with customer satisfaction. However, the direct effect of morning factors and relationship quality on satisfaction was not significant. However, morning factors successfully moderates with the relationship of service quality.
and relationship quality to customer satisfaction. Moreover, perceived service quality, relationship quality and customer satisfaction shown positive effect on customer loyalty.

(Qayyum, et al., 2013) Conducted a study to analyze the structural relationship between customer satisfaction, perceived service quality, value, switching costs, trust, and corporate image on customer loyalty with the moderating role of customer demographics. Results of the study confirmed a significant impact of perceived service quality, perceived value, switching cost, customer satisfaction on customer loyalty. Out of these four, customer satisfaction reflected a strong impact on customer loyalty while perceived service quality and perceived value established a weaker impact on loyalty as compared to satisfaction. Whereas, corporate image shown non-significant impact on customer loyalty. Moreover, demographic successfully moderates in majority of the relationships.

(Khurshid, 2013) Conducted a study in Pakistani telecom sector to measure the structural relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, price structure, corporate image, customer trust and value added services with customer loyalty. Out of all the variables, service quality followed by corporate image and pricing structure show significant impact on customer loyalty. in the similar vein, Based on the responses from the 236 telecom subscribers of China telecommunication sector another study was conducted by (Chen & Myagmarsuren, 2011). In this study, impact of brand equity is also examined on customer loyalty. Results of the study proved the significant impact of all the constructs on customer loyalty. (Kaur & Soch, 2012) Developed a study to measure the impact of trust, commitment, and satisfaction, corporate image switching cost on behavioral and attitudinal loyalty in the Indian telecom sector. Results of the study

While, (Achour, Md Said, & Boerhannoeddin, 2011) conducted a research on mobile subscribers of university of Utara Malaysia and results of the study revealed significant effect of Service Quality, Switching Behavior and Brand Image on Customer Loyalty of mobile subscribers. (Deng, Lu, Wei, & Zhang, 2010) Developed a study in Chinese telecom sector. Cited authors wanted to analyze the impact of service quality, trust, perceived value, switching costs, customer demographics on customer satisfaction and loyalty with context of instant messages. Result of the study confirmed significant impact of service quality followed by trust and perceived value consisting of functional and emotional values on customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition to that, customer demographic revealed as a significant moderator.

A Survey based on the 118 mobile users of China telecom was conducted by (Lai, Griffin, & Babin, 2009). Study revealed that service quality and corporate image pash the customer loyalty through customer satisfaction directly and indirectly. (Lai, et al., 2009) Conducted a study in Chinese telecom sector to analyze the structural relationship between service quality, customer value, corporate image, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Results revealed mixed findings such as, service quality significantly influence perceived value and corporate image, in turn perceived value and corporate image impacts on customer satisfaction, corporate image influence value, whereas, customer satisfaction and value were the most significant predictors of customer loyalty. In addition to that, corporate image confirmed a significant mediating role between customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Conceptualizations and Measurement Issues
Despite the unified importance of the loyalty, no comprehensive studies are found regarding this construct. Despite of the large number of studies published in the well-reputed journals there are several issues that limit the understanding, generalizability and conceptualizations of customer loyalty construct. Firstly, lack of consensus is found confined to the most significant antecedent of loyalty. Like, some antecedents of loyalty e.g., satisfaction, trust, value are over examined in various researches. Moreover, the explaining power of these antecedents on loyalty were unassertive (Ball, Simões Coelho, & Machás, 2004; Chen & Cheng, 2012; Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012; Richard & Zhang, 2012) which will urge the researchers to incorporate the other antecedents of loyalty. whereas, few researchers have confirmed the significant impact of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty(e.g., Aksoy, Buoye, Aksoy, Lariviére, & Keiningham, 2013; Aktepe, Ersöz, & Toklu, 2015; Bayraktar, Tatoglu, Turkylilmaz, Delen, & Zaim, 2012; Chang, 2015; M.-K. Kim, Wong, Chang, & Park, 2016; M. Kim, Chang, Park, & Lee, 2015; Kumar, Dalla Pozza, & Ganesh, 2013; Muhammad, Shamsudin, & Hadi, 2016), while in few studies customer satisfaction revealed in-significant with customer loyalty (e.g., Khatibi, Ismail, & Thyagarajan, 2002; Muturi, et al., 2013; Stoel, Wickliffe, & Lee, 2004).

Some researchers opined that attitudinal and behavioral loyalty both are important and will capable of producing more generalized results, whenever examined compositely (e.g., Bove, Pervan, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009; Fullerton, 2005; Kumar, Shah, & Venkatesan, 2006; Lam, Shankar, Erramilli, & Murthy, 2004). in addition to that, some studies have integrate or explored different antecedents of loyalty. Like, positive liner impact of personality traits components (extraversion, agreeableness and openness) on customer satisfaction and loyalty have been found in the hotel industry (Lin, 2010) while, corporate image revealed a significant impact on customer loyalty as well as significantly mediate between the customer satisfaction and loyalty of hotel industry (Jani & Han, 2014). In another study, customer value has confirmed significant direct and indirect impact on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction(Lai, et al., 2009). Similarly, out of five variables (brand value,
equity, trust and customer satisfaction), customer satisfaction revealed as the most significant predictor of
customer loyalty in chocolate market context (Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012).

Whereas, in some studies customer satisfaction tend to play a mediating role with various antecedents of
loyalty and loyalty relationships (Chen & Cheng, 2012; Ladhari, Souiden, & Ladhari, 2011; Lewis & Soureli,
2006; Namukasa, 2013). Whilst, customer trust revealed as the most significant predictor of loyalty (Calvo
Porral & Levy-Mangin, 2016) whilst in some studies switching barriers confirmed as the most significant predictor of
customer loyalty (Chuaah et al., 2017; M.-K. Kim, et al., 2016) In short, research in this area is inconclusive, one
possible reason can be the differences in the contexts of study or markets which will increased the likelihood of
 inconsistent findings (Izogo, 2016). This phenomenon is rightly addressed by (De Ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer,
1998) in his study conducted to find out the most significant antecedent of loyalty in five different industries.
Results of the study revealed significant differences in antecedent of loyalty across the industries. Therefore, the
determinant of loyalty in one industry cannot be generalized on the other industry or even other context (Izogo,
2016). Indeed, this lack of generalizability in findings encourages researchers to develop more comprehensive
understanding about the loyalty.

Thirdly, research model based on customer loyalty are poorly constructed because of the absence of
relevant underpinnings and supporting theories. Moreover, majority of the research models were haphazardly
constructed without proper practical, theoretical and methodological research gaps. Fourthly, majority of the
studies are lacking with the research implications issues. As majority of the studies are conducted to achieve the
educational or contextual implications rather than contributing into the existing literature of customer loyalty. In
addition to that, majority of the studies are lacking with the practical implications of the study for the managers
and practitioners. Fourthly, lack of consensus is found on the measurement of loyalty construct. Review of
loyalty literature revealed that loyalty instruments are haphazard in nature and every scholar has operationalized them
according to his own understanding or contexts of the study. In view of few researchers, loyalty should be
measured through uni-dimensional construct (Richard & Zhang, 2012; Rundle-Thiele, 2005). While,
measurement of complex objects by incorporating the single construct is unrealistic because majority of the
multifaceted objects are based on multidimensional constructs (Bassi, 2011) Whereas, some researchers are in
favor of measuring the loyalty through two facets (Čater & Čater, 2009; Chen & Cheng, 2012; Han & Woods,
2014; Kaur & Soch, 2012; Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012). Accordingly, this lack of consensus urged for further
investigation to resolve the operationalization and measurement issues.

Conclusion
Despite of well addressed conceptualization (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999), academics have futile to explore
how the concept of loyalty is evolved and when it will be most effective. Although, antecedents of loyalty are
vastly discussed in diverse industries but the most significant predictor of loyalty is yet to be explored.
Moreover, choice of loyalty instrument is arbitrary in nature and every scholar has operationalised them
according to their own understandings or contexts of the study. In view of few researchers, loyalty should be
measured through uni-dimensional construct. While, measurement of complex objects by incorporating the
single construct is unrealistic because majority of the multifaceted objects are based on multidimensional
constructs. Whereas some researchers are in favor of measuring the loyalty through two facets. In short, lack of
consensus found on the conceptualizations, measurements and generalizability of loyalty construct really has the
urge for further investigation in future studies.

Recommendations
Systematic Review of literature have addressed some theoretical, conceptual and methodological issues which
required a considerable attention of academic researchers for devising the value based mechanisms. Furthermore,
studies must be conducted in broader industrial view rather than from individual contexts. Importantly, new
predictors of loyalty must be explored for the better generalizability and contributing into the existing literature
of customer loyalty. Likewise, loyalty models must be aligned with contemporary theories such as justice or
fairness, reciprocity, confirmation-disconfirmation, social exchange and bonding.

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