

The Systematic Review and Conception of Brand Socialization, Engagement and Loyalty Amongst Private Hospital Patrons

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Abstract

Our study aim is to present the systematic review and conception of the potential research concerning brand socialization and brand engagement and how they find out about the brand loyalty among private hospital patrons. Currently, the health care industry in developing countries is playing a crucial role to cater for consumers' needs and demands. The private health care industry in Malaysia is also of no exception—it is undeniably facing intense challenges in trying to deliver the best services to their patrons in the most effective and efficient manner. Of late, marketers, practitioners, and researchers are interested in analysing the key secret behind their engagement with their consumers. Moreover, it would be pointless for firms to spend a significant amount of time and money to build their brands with the patrons will be in vain if they fail to generate profits to stay for long in the industry. Thus, the interaction among consumers is boosted by brand socialization to build engagement which further affects the loyalty of the health care industry. However, as far as the conception process is concerned, researchers may have to deal with a lot of information about brand and branding from past literature which requires some systematic reviews that aim to identify, evaluate critically and assimilate the outcomes of connected and considerable studies so that more proper conception of the research framework can be obtained. The practical implications of this study will both enrich and benefit the researchers and marketers in the health care industry to increase the conceptions of appropriate branding constructs.

Keywords: socialization, customer brand engagement, brand loyalty, private health care

1. Introduction

Health care industry has become more and more popular in developing countries. Many health issues have become the reason for the authority to set up and develop the health care industry owing to the changes people go through in their lifestyles, severe disease outbreak, or longevity. Recently, the dynamics of health care demand and supply in developing countries have given them the direction to grow (Nah & Osifo-Dawodu, 2007). Thus, an increasing number of private health care have been mushrooming to cater for the consumers' needs in the market. The growing number of private hospitals and specialized care in Malaysia was becoming noticeable in 1980s (Chee, 2008). The previous work by Yong (2000) as cited by Aliman and Mohamad (2016) reveals that around 50 percent of healthcare total earnings in Malaysia come from the revenue of private hospitals. Thus, our government has taken the initiative to boost our health care industry to give a better service to the population.

The impalpability of our healthcare sector has made it vital for private hospitals to deliver services and care to the patrons needs to ensure that patrons will be engaged with them and subsequently, make them revisit and build loyalty in the long run. Keller (2003) pointed out that patrons need to have all the emotional and sensory experiences with the brand through time. Being sociable and recognising it are substantial not only to the brand but also to the whole entity's reputation—this enables these private bodies to create interaction and engagement with their customers. It boils down to the fact that brand loyalty of the health care industry will eventually get to be improved and sustained. However, there are not many studies that aim to study the socialization, or the engagement that can affect the loyalty amongst private hospital patrons in Malaysia. Based on this argument, these next questions inevitable emerge:

RQ1: How do they go about conducting the systematic review of the suggested branding constructs?

RQ2: How are the Brand Socialization, Brand Engagement and Brand Loyalty conceptualized amongst the patrons of Private Hospitals?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Loyalty

When a consumer feels good about a product that he or she buys and decides to repurchase it in the future, this person would be regarded as developing a sense of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty, additionally helps an organization to meet its objectives and brand success in the marketplace (Oliver, 1999). One can be certain that the ultimate goal of any organization would be to build a formidable brand and develop customers' loyalty. Owing to this, it is understandable why marketers constantly try to create something unique in their services just to engage consumer's attention and interest. The definition of loyalty varies from one researcher to another based on the study context and the dimensionality (behavioural, attitudinal & cognitive) of the construct. Some past studies have emphasised the multi-dimensional approach (Oliver, 1999; Arora 2013; Jones & Taylor, 2007) although earlier research has shed light on the uni-dimensional approach.

In a study by Wel et al. (2011) they explained that before repurchasing a brand, loyal consumers will be emotionally connected and/or committed towards a brand and they will not only repurchase the same product/service, but also purchase other or new products/services launched under the same brand. Table 2 summarize some past studies and have found two significant dimensions (attitudinal and behavioral loyalty) in which the behavioral aspect of loyalty refers to customer's repeat purchase behavior while attitudinal deals with positive word of mouth and their words of recommendation (Dlagic & Zabkar, 2012). In fact, Kumar (2013) reported that brand-building would be most powerful when customers' actually experience the service although marketing and external communications are also helpful. A similar study also indicated that personal experiences help people to bond with a brand and enable an intelligent and informed purchasing decision which is the most prevailing tool that verifies brand loyalty. Despite some amazing discovery on brand loyalty by various studies, private hospitals have yet to surmount this confidently due to the fact that the services' consistencies are difficult to quantify.

2.2 Customer Brand Engagement

The current concept in business appears to be Engagement. Despite this realization, not much has been done to build strong and powerful integration to optimize the benefits of the outcomes. A deeper analysis on the reasons why the consumer engages with a brand or entities needs to be done. The numerous past studies have not, however, been able to yield a definite understanding in this area. Kuvykaitė and Tarutė (2015), echoed this by stating that any discussions regarding co-creation, interaction and decision making are usually referred as engagement.

The work done by Bordie, Hollebeek and Smith (2011) stated that levels of individual customer's motivation depend on brand interactions either through cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity. Van Doorn et al. (2010) mentioned that 'engagement' is a motivational state, which occurs by virtue of an individual (i.e., the 'engagement subject') and mainly his or her interactive experiences with a particular object or agent (i.e., the 'engagement object'; Hollebeek, 2011), which is pivotal for many online offerings. In the same vein, Vivek et al. (2012) also agreed that an engaged consumer would develop more favorable attitudes toward a product, company, or brand by demonstrating positive behavior towards the brand. Subsequently in earlier study by Patterson et al. (2006), it is stated that engagement levels may vary by factors including industry and product/service attributes. Indeed, the higher level of consumers' brand engagement (CBE) will be beneficial for the organization, as it can achieve more profit and overall, better outcomes.

As referred to the preceding literature, consumer brand engagement has been studied in different contexts. Moreover, Table 1 review of past works by Guthrie and Cox (2001) on engagement focusing mainly on cognitive, Catteruw, Flynn and Vonderhorst (2007) studies on employee engagement through emotions and Pomerantz (2006) study on student engagement referring to behaviour showed predominantly that engagement focused on the uni-dimensional construct. However, some of the the recent studies, Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014), Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric and Ilic (2013), Vivek et al. (2012), Vivek et al.

(2014), Hollebeek (2011b) have proven otherwise, that engagement is a multi-dimensional construct that comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements.

Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric and Ilic (2013), acknowledged that emotional engagement perhaps increases the intensity level of cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Thus, in brief, engagement goes beyond satisfaction, trust and commitment and it simply differs from one customer to another in different perspectives.

2.3 Customer Brand Socialization

Customer to customer communicates in a direct way such as face to face interaction or indirectly through the phone, email, blogging and so on. To compare, many services are performed in the presence of other customers and the indirect influence of customers on other customers requires further exploration (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). One of the earlier studies by Moschis and Smith (1985) mentioned that consumer socialization is the process by which individuals develops his or her cognitive or behavioural processes with regards to consumption. Similarly, in another study by Steffes and Burgee (2009), they stated that the Internet has become the iconic platform where consumers can share and exchange brand-related information such as purchase experience either online or offline.

Mochalova and Nanopoulos (2014), recommended that socialization plays an essential role when consumer finally decides to buy a product or service. This statement is parallel with the findings of Wang et al. (2012), which stated that consumer socialization through peer communication about products on social media has a positive association with product attitudes. Moreover, Asquith (2014) found that advertisers also embedded popular culture and encouraged consumers to join clubs (such as Harley Davidson Club) to share information to develop brand socialization—this ultimately generates a line of brand-loyal consumers. The overview of past studies is established in Table 3.

Earlier studies have elaborated on the role of socialization agents in consumer socialization that it helps to develop attitudes toward all these multiple behaviors (Pinto & Mansfield, 2011). This enables the connection to their preferred brand which further empowers customer brand loyalty. As another effort, marketers organized events such as brand fests to open up an outlet for people to share information and experience about the product or services they use. Moreover, it is also a way to promote brand socialization when customers forge a closer relationship with their brand. Therefore, it is essential to explore further into the effects of consumer brand socialization to enlighten the influence towards loyalty. The study's conceptual framework consists of socialization and engagement influence on loyalty which can be seen in Figure 1.

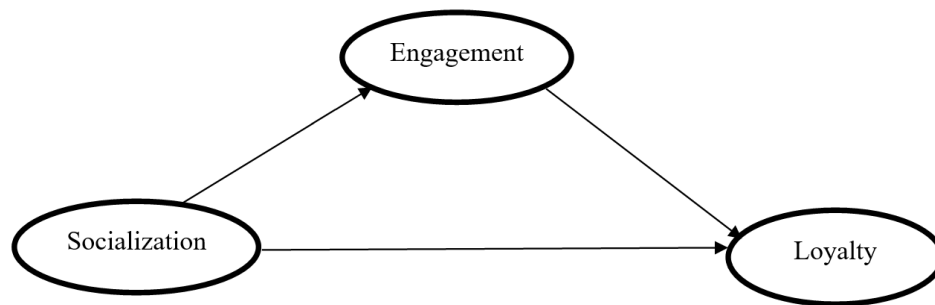


Figure 1. Conceptual framework on the interrelationship between socialization, engagement, and loyalty

3. Methods

According to Khan, Kunz, Kleijnen and Antes (2003), there are five steps that we need to take to carry out Systematic review. Step 1: Framing the question, Step 2: Identifying relevant publications, Step 3: Evaluating the Study quality, Step 4: Summarizing the evidence and Step 5: Interpreting the findings.

However in this study, the first two steps (framing the question and identifying relevant publications) will be discussed. When framing the question, the problems addressed will be clearly stated and for more detailed exploration, relevant publications will be identified. To be clear, extensive search of the studies should be the main concentration.

4. Findings

Based on the conceptual framework in Figure 1, the interrelationship between Engagement, Socialization and Loyalty were summarized as shown in tables below. Basically, when it comes to the systematic review, researchers must be able to identify the themes of discussions that are prominent in each construct. In other words, each construct may be discussed in the scope of dimensionality, type and context of research other than being based on the research findings. Researchers would usually combine these techniques in establishing the constructs' typology.

Table 1. Summary table on the dimensionality of the ‘engagement’ construct

Name of Author(s) and year of publication	Concept/ idea	Dimensionality (m) multi-dimensional & (u) uni-dimensional
Patterson, Yu and De Ruyter (2006)	Customer engagement	(m) – cognitive, emotional & behavioural
Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie (2014)	Consumer Brand Engagement	(m) – cognitive, emotional & behavioural
Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric and Ilic (2013)	Consumer Engagement	(m) – cognitive, emotional & behavioural
Guthrie and Cox, (2001)	Engagement	(u) – cognitive
Catteeuw, Flynn and Vonderhorst (2007)	Employee engagement	(u) – emotional
Pomerantz (2006)	Student engagement	(u) – behavioural

The above Table 1 illustrates that the brand engagement constructs usually fall under dimensionality of the concept or idea. It has also been indicated that engagement dimensionality can be categorized as uni-dimensional such as cognitive, emotional and behavioural in which studies were carried out to analyze one of the dimensions or multi-dimensional whereby all three (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) were put to the test in a single study.

Table 2. Overview table on research context of brand loyalty

Name of Author(s) and year of publication	Research type	Research context
Arora (2013)	Empirical	In general (buying behaviour)
Jones and Taylor (2007)	Empirical	Canada, Service
Wel, Alam, and Nor (2011)	Empirical	Malaysia, brand choices
Dlacic and Zabkar (2012)	Empirical	Telecommunication
Kumar (2013)	Conceptual	Service

Table 2 explains that the discussion on brand loyalty in the past literature takes place based on the research type and research context theme. Brand loyalty is significant because it can influence customers to repurchase and ultimately, to build long-term relationships. The literature has shown that either empirical or conceptual research has taken a close look into the various perspectives on brand loyalty.

Table 3. Past studies addressing consumer-brand socialization

Name of Author(s) and year of publication	Research type	Research findings
Mochalova and Nanopoulos (2014)	Empirical – Viral marketing	Viral marketing would be a better strategy if previous knowledge about potential markets within the network is exploited
Wang, Yu and Wei (2012)	Empirical – social media	Online consumer socialization through peer communication also determines the purchasing decisions—the first is by conforming with peers and the second one is reinforcing the product involvement.
Pinto and Mansfield, (2011)	Empirical – social media	Significant differences were found between gender for the product and service encounters in which women shows a stronger tendency to use Facebook to complain about the product or service provider
Steffes and Burgee (2009)	Empirical – e-WOM	The information gained from the e-WOM forum is more influential when it comes to making decisions than speaking with friends personally (WOM)

Table 3 sheds light on the consumer brand socialization research findings guided by past literature. Consumers exchange information on brand and services via the process of socialization. The above findings conclude that the significant impact on consumer socialization was brought on by viral marketing, the social media and e-WOM which enable connection to their preferred brand and further strengthen customer or brand loyalty.

5. Conclusions

Conclusively, the new trends that have been pushing through in the consumer consumption experience propel the marketers or service providers to try and meet the demand so that they can sustain in the competitive environment. Additionally, marketers and service providers should improve by customizing their product offerings and services so that they can form a bond with their customers. It is irrefutable that socialization bridges the gap between marketers and consumers. This allows them to develop engagement between the two parties and customers are able to build loyalty when marketers have devoted a significant amount of time and effort for this purpose.

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