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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	ADEQUACY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OF STUDENT LIBRARY USERS AT SELECTED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN CALABARZON, PHILIPPINES <i>DR. MA. LINDIE D. MASALINTO, DR. MA. CONSUELO M. OBILLO, RUFO S CALIXTRO JR., JOSEFA G. CARRILLO & MA. XENIA Z. BITERA</i>	1
2.	MOBILITY IN HETEROGENEOUS WIRELESS NETWORK USING HMAC <i>C. SUGANTHI & DR. C. MANOHARAN</i>	4
3.	A STUDY ON CONSUMERS PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE PURCHASE DECISION OF TWO WHEELER MOTORCYCLES IN NELLORE DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH <i>D.V.RAMANA & DR. PARA SUBBAIAH</i>	9
4.	OPTIMIZING THE DE-DUPLICATION FOLIAGE IMAGE ACCESS IN STORAGE SYSTEMS <i>CHITTALA RAMA SATYA & B.VIJAYA KUMAR</i>	15
5.	A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF E TAILERS ON UNORGANISED AND ORGANISED RETAILERS WITH REFERENCE TO ELECTRONIC GOODS <i>KALAVATHY K.S & DR. BINA PANDEY</i>	18
6.	A MODERN CLASSIFICATION OF PRICING STRATEGIES OF RETAILERS <i>SREELATA, N. V. NARASIMHAM & DR. M. K. GUPTA</i>	24
7.	LEADERSHIP CONCEPT: AN OPINION SURVEY IN A PRIVATE SECTOR AND GOVERNMENT SECTOR <i>DR. E. LOKANADHA REDDY & DR. G HARANATH</i>	30
8.	MARKETING MIX: A REVIEW ON THE 'P'S OF MARKETING <i>M.VASUDEVAN, DR. V. M. SENTHILKUMAR & K.SASIKUMAR</i>	37
9.	SECURING A BIOMETRIC TRAIT: A CASE STUDY ON FINGER PRINTS <i>MADHU CHAUHAN & DR. R. P. SAXENA</i>	40
10.	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA <i>UMARU DANLADI MOHAMMED & CHINELO GRACE OBELEAGU-NZELIBE</i>	43
11.	RELIABILITY TEST PLANS BASED ON LOG-LOGISTIC DISTRIBUTION <i>R.R.L.KANTAM, B.SRIRAM & A. SUHASINI</i>	49
12.	MIGRATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT <i>DR. H.R.UMA, MADHU G.R. & MAHAMMAD HABEEB</i>	58
13.	THE ANTECEDENTS OF BRAND LOYALTY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON AIRTEL CELLULAR SERVICES <i>DR. P. SUJATHA</i>	61
14.	STATUS OF BI SOLUTIONS AT SELECTED BRANCHES OF BANKS IN RAJASTHAN <i>DR. AZIMUDDIN KHAN</i>	66
15.	A STUDY ON USAGE OF GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGIES IN POWER UTILITY <i>VARUN PRAKASH</i>	71
16.	AN IMPROVED INVISIBLE WATERMARKING TECHNIQUE FOR IMAGE AUTHENTICATION <i>DASU VAMAN RAVI PRASAD</i>	76
17.	ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, RESPONSIBILITY, MOTIVATION LEVEL AND JOB SATISFACTION OF SELF-FINANCING ENGINEERING COLLEGES BY USING MATHEMATICAL MODELING <i>RAVI DATT, DR. SUNIL DUTT, DR. SITA RAM & SANTOSH KUMARI</i>	82
18.	DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A REAL-TIME VEHICLE TRACKING SYSTEM <i>MAITANMI OLUSOLA STEPHEN, OGUNLERE SAMSON OJO, DR. ADEKUNLE YINKA, GREGORY ONWODI & MALASOWE BRIDGET</i>	86
19.	PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF MANET ROUTING PROTOCOLS WITH SCALABILITY FOR E-MAIL THROUGHPUT TRAFFIC USING OPNET MODELER <i>MANDEEP SINGH & BALWINDER SINGH</i>	93
20.	DETAILED INVESTIGATION OF RESIDENTIAL SATISFACTION IN APARTMENT'S MANAGEMENT SERVICE <i>P. BALATHANDAYUTHAM & DR. R. SRITHARAN</i>	98
21.	A STUDY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF REDUNDANCY ON SURVIVORS <i>S.SOWJANYA</i>	100
22.	A STUDY ON SECURITY THREAT AWARENESS AMONG STUDENTS USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES, BY APPLYING DATA MINING TECHNIQUES <i>A.PAPPU RAJAN</i>	103
23.	ELECTRONIC REMITTANCE SYSTEM IN INDIA: CHANGING PARADIGMS OF PAYMENT MECHANISMS IN INDIA <i>SAMIR</i>	107
24.	E-SATISFACTION AND E-LOYALTY OF CONSUMERS SHOPPING ONLINE <i>R. SATHISH KUMAR</i>	111
25.	STUDENTS PERCEPTION TOWARDS e-BANKING: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KOLLAM DISTRICT IN KERALA <i>NIJAZ NIZAR</i>	114
26.	TECHNOLOGICAL DRIFT TOWARDS SMART DEVICES: AN OVERVIEW <i>MUKESH H.V & HALASWAMY D. NAIK</i>	118
27.	MOTIVATION AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA <i>DR. ABDULSALAM JIBRIL & YUSUF SAJO</i>	121
28.	AN UNDERSTANDING OF DUNNING'S OWNERSHIP-LOCATION-INTERNALISATION (OLI) ECLECTIC THEORY OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES <i>JABES GABBIS ODHIAMBO KOTIENO</i>	124
29.	AUTHORING TOOL: KEY FOR E-LEARNING SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT <i>JAVED WASIM</i>	128
30.	ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF WORK-EXHAUSTION (IT SECTOR) <i>UMAIR NAJAM & FAISAL ABBAS</i>	131
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	136

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- Garg, Sambhav (2011): "Business Ethics" Paper presented at the Annual International Conference for the All India Management Association, New Delhi, India, 19-22 June.

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THE ANTECEDENTS OF BRAND LOYALTY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON AIRTEL CELLULAR SERVICES**DR. P. SUJATHA****HEAD****DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES****ANNAMACHARYA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY & SCIENCES****TIRUPATI****ABSTRACT**

The Mobile market in India is very robust and is the second largest mobile telecom market in the world, adding nearly 20million subscribers every month. This rapid growth in the mobile segment has been driven by an enabling policy framework and intense competition. With up to 12 competing operators in a circle, the tariffs in India are the lowest as compared to global benchmarks. In such a hyper-competitive scenario service providers make an all out effort to attract and retain customers. There is an ongoing effort from the service providers to improve the service and enhance customer delight. Even though the literature on customer satisfaction is normally related to customer loyalty, a formal model explaining the steps between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is missing. It has been mentioned that customer satisfaction is necessary, but not a sufficient condition for improving customer loyalty. There are evidences that despite favorable customer satisfaction, companies are losing important buyers of their products and services every day. If there is no straight forward relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, then what is there in the middle? How can we explain that customer satisfaction does not always lead to customer loyalty? The present study will address these primary problems by establishing relationship between mobile service quality, customer satisfaction, switching costs and brand loyalty.

KEYWORDS

Brand Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Service Providers, Switching Costs, Telecom Industry.

INTRODUCTION

The service sector is growing at a faster rate than any other sector of the economies in both developed and developing countries. The most marked change in the twentieth century, particularly in the later half, has been the economic transformation from the manufacturing sector to the service sector in almost all the countries in the world. India is not exception to this change. Liberalization of Indian economy, during the 1990s, has given momentum to the service sector. While, during the previous decades, the three main sectors of economic activity- agriculture, industry and service- have roughly equal contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) of India. According to the statistics of Central Statistical organization (CSO) data for 1999-2000, the service sector accounts for more than 53 percent of Indian GDP. From 2001 onwards it has been increased gradually. Contribution of service sector to the Indian GDP reached 86.5 percent by the end of the financial year 2012-13.

Among the various service sub-segments, the main growth driver of the sector is telecommunication services, apart from Information Technology (IT), Information Technology-Enabled Services (ITES), and tourism. Since 1990s, the telecommunications sector has been a key area for the economic advancement of developed as well as developing countries. In addition to this, the changing economic conditions, changing needs of customers and competition among the telecom companies have made the field, a dynamic service sub-sector for economic development. So marketing orientation has become main strategy of telecommunication services firms in India.

Because of heavy competition in Indian cellular services market, Airtel cellular services, the market leader is facing the threat of losing subscriber base. Though Airtel has nation-wide network, the performance of the company with regard to service provision is not on par with other service providers in few areas.

The general purpose of this study is to reconceptualise a traditional model of consumer loyalty in the mobile services context. The importance of consumer loyalty in the services industry cannot be overstated. As consumer's controlling power over the market increases, the marketing effort is shifting from satisfying customers to retaining customers.

This paper is mainly focused on assessing the relationship between mobile service quality, perceived value, customer satisfaction, switching costs and customer loyalty. For the analysis of data, SPSS 11.5 software package and excel are used.

COMPANY PROFILE: AN OVERVIEW

Bharti Airtel Limited formerly known as Bharti Tele-Ventures LTD (BTVL) is an Indian company offering telecommunication services in 18 countries. It is the largest cellular service provider in India, with more than 197 million subscriptions as of April 2013. Bharti Airtel is the world's third largest, single-country mobile operator and fifth largest telecom operator in the world in terms of subscriber base. It also offers fixed line services and broadband services. It offers its telecom services under the Airtel brand and is headed by Sunil Bharti Mittal. The company also provides telephone services and broadband Internet access (DSL) in over 89 cities in India. It also acts as a carrier for national and international long distance communication services.

Brand Airtel was born free, a force unleashed into the market with a relentless and unwavering determination to succeed. A spirit charged with energy, creativity and a team driven to seize the day, with an ambition to become the most globally admired telecom service.

It is the first service provider to introduce life-time prepaid and e-recharge system. AirTel has launched a new logo. The new logo would symbolise innovation, energy and friendliness. It has also introduced 32K SIM card with DP5 server to its post-paid customers. A London based company which goes by the name Brand Union has designed the new logo of Airtel. The new logo is the letter a in lowercase, and has airtel written in lowercase under the logo. Brand Union the company that designed the new logo is also associated with the logo of Vodafone.

AIRTEL LOGO

The company is structured into four strategic business units - Mobile, Telemedia, Enterprise and Digital TV. The mobile business offers services in 18 countries across the Indian Subcontinent and Africa. The Telemedia business provides broadband, IPTV and telephone services in 89 Indian cities. The Digital TV business provides Direct-to-Home TV services across India. The Enterprise business provides end-to-end telecom solutions to corporate customers and national and international long distance services to telcos.

Globally, Bharti Airtel is the 3rd largest in-country mobile operator by subscriber base, behind China Mobile and China Unicom. In India, the company has a 30.7% share of the wireless services market.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Mobile market in India is very robust and is the second largest mobile telecom market in the world, adding nearly 20million subscribers every month. This rapid growth in the mobile segment has been driven by an enabling policy framework and intense competition. With up to 12 competing operators in a circle, the tariffs in India are the lowest as compared to global benchmarks. And with Mobile Number Portability introduced in India, the competition has increased further. In such a hyper-competitive scenario service providers make an all out effort to attract and retain customers. There is an ongoing effort from the service providers to improve the service and enhance customer delight. All service providers have made huge investments towards setting up sophisticated, state-of-the-art customer care centers, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems with consumer friendly, menu driven options that can easily cater to an entire gamut of services.

Despite this new emphasis on customer retention and the acceptance that managers need to understand and know how customer retention can be achieved, marketing researchers did not have advanced studies on the antecedents of customer retention in telecommunication services. Some authors of marketing textbooks have linked customer retention to customer satisfaction (Kotler (1997), Kurtz and Clow (1998), Rust, Zahorik and Keiningham (1996), Zeithmal and Bitner (1996) under the assumption that a satisfied customer may be prone to repeat purchases, whereas an unsatisfied customer may tend to defect. Similarly, some marketing researchers have underscored the direct relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction (Hallowel (1996), Heskett (1994)). Even though the literature on customer satisfaction is normally related to customer loyalty, a formal model explaining the steps between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is missing. It has been mentioned that customer satisfaction is necessary, but not a sufficient condition for improving customer loyalty. There are evidences that despite favorable customer satisfaction, companies are losing important buyers of their products and services every day.

If there is no straight forward relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, then what is there in the middle? How can we explain that customer satisfaction does not always lead to customer loyalty? The present study will address these primary problems.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In order to get answers to the above questions, the present research is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- To find out the antecedents of Brand Loyalty.
- To find out the impact of Antecedents of Brand Loyalty (BL) on the loyal behavior of customers.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

On the basis of the theoretical framework and review of literature, the following hypotheses were developed.

H₁: There is no significant correlation between Mobile Service Quality (MSQ) and Brand Loyalty.

H₂: There is no significant correlation between Perceived Value of mobile services (PVMS) and Brand Loyalty.

H₃: There is no significant correlation between Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Brand Loyalty.

H₄: There is no significant correlation between Switching Costs (SC) and Brand Loyalty.

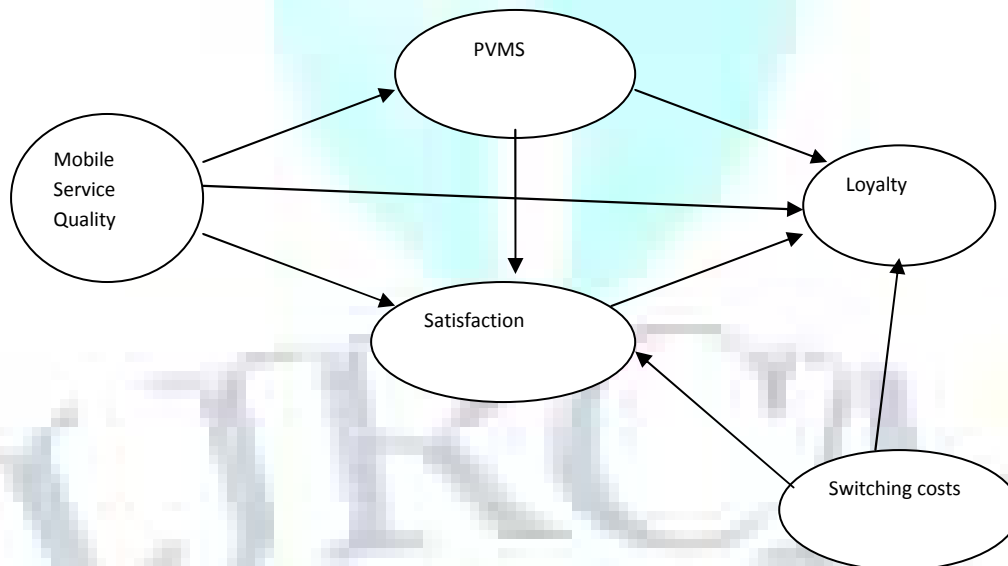
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is the science of dealing with the principles of procedure in research study. It deals with the definition of the research problem, research design, and method of data collection, selection of sampling, statistical tools employed and interpretation of collected data.

(i) **Research Design:** The research design is descriptive as it provides the inventory of feelings regarding Mobile Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty intentions of customers towards Airtel cellular service provider.

The subscriber respondents were chosen from the Airtel subscribers in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh

(ii) **Research Model of the Present Study:**



(iii) **Period of Study:** The study of this type requires at least a decade period to observe the trend and draw valid conclusions from the analysis. Now, the present study covers a period of 10 years starting from 2002-2003 to 2011-2012.

(iv) **Sources of Data:** The data sources required for the study include both primary and secondary. The primary data sources were the subscribers of Airtel cellular mobile telephone services in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh.

The secondary data sources were: relevant websites, national and international refereed journals, business magazines and news papers, working papers and monographs relevant to the area of research. Literature related data were collected from the libraries like IIM-Bangalore Library, computer centre (IIM-B), Sri Venkateswara University Central library and Digital library, etc.

(v) **Data Collection- Research Instrument:** A structured questionnaire consisting of six parts, was used as research instrument for the present study.

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Although a few measures used in this study were taken from previously published research and required only minor changes in wording, reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's α (alpha) is a coefficient of reliability. It is commonly used as a measure of the internal consistency or reliability of a psychometric test score for a sample of examinees. It was first named alpha by Lee Cronbach in 1951.

VALIDITY ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The scale used in the present study was assessed for validity, using confirmatory factor analysis (Peter, 1981). The dimensional structure of all the items used in the present study, their difference scores were examined using a principal component factor analysis with VARIMAX rotation. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicate an acceptable model of fit at 0.01 level of significance.

(vi) Sampling Methodology: Sampling frame comprised of the subscribers of cellular mobile services of Airtel, in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. Non-Probability Quota sampling technique was used. A total of 500 customers were contacted over a 3 months period (Aug-Oct 2012) via a structured questionnaire.

(vii) Statistical Techniques: In order to test the proposed hypotheses through data analysis, correlation and regression techniques were used.

DATA ANALYSIS

H₁: There is no significant correlation between MSQ and Brand Loyalty.

This hypothesis has been tested by using correlation and regression (Table 1.1 and 1.2). It has been observed from the results of correlation coefficients matrix that there is significant positive correlation between Mobile Service Quality and Brand Loyalty. The corresponding correlation coefficient is highly significant at 1% level. Hence we can conclude that there is strong association between MSQ and Brand loyalty. But R² value is less. It indicates that there are many other factors other than MSQ that influence Brand Loyalty of the respondents. Only 5% of the variability in Loyalty can be predicted from MSQ. In other words, a large number of residual variability is presented in Brand Loyalty.

TABLE 1.1: CORRELATION MATRIX

		QMS
BL	Pearson Correlation	.240**
	p-value	0.0000

TABLE 1.2: REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS

(a)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.240	.058	.056
2	.259	.067	.064

(b)

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.704	1	1.704	30.524	.000 ^a
	Residual	27.805	498	.056		
	Total	29.509	499			
2	Regression	1.985	2	.993	17.923	.000 ^b
	Residual	27.524	497	.055		
	Total	29.509	499			

(c)

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.060	.235		8.776	.000
	Quality	.378	.068	.240	5.525	.000
2	(Constant)	2.295	.256		8.962	.000
	Quality	.378	.068	.240	5.550	.000
	Connectivity	-.056	.025	-.098	-2.252	.025

Dependent Variable: Brand_Loyalty

H₂: There is no significant correlation between PVMS and Brand Loyalty.

From the Table 1.3, it has been observed that there is insignificant positive correlation between perceived value of mobile services and Brand loyalty. This implies that PVMS and BL are related but even if the PVMS of the respondents is low, customers may be loyal to the brand and vice-versa. Regression analysis results (Table 1.4) reveals that only 13 % of the variability in BL can be predicted from PVMS.

TABLE 1.3: CORRELATION MATRIX

		PVMS
BL	Pearson Correlation	.051
	p-value	.254

TABLE 1.4: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

(a)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.40	.16	.13

(b)

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.077	1	.077	1.306	.041 ^a
Residual	29.432	498	.059		
Total	29.509	499			

(c)

COEFFICIENTS

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.280	.067		49.188	.000
PVMS	.021	.019	.051	1.143	.04

H₃: There is no significant correlation between CS and Brand Loyalty.

From the tables 1.5 and 1.6, it has been observed that there is significant positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The corresponding correlation coefficient is significant at 5% level. The R² value reveals that both the variables contribute to 31% of the explained variance. We can conclude that customer satisfaction and Brand Loyalty are strongly related. Hence there is significant relationship between CS and BL.

TABLE 1.5: CORRELATION TABLE

		CS
BL	Pearson Correlation	.140*
	p-value	0.002

(a)

TABLE 1.6 : REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.6	.36	.31

(b)

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	.577	1	.577	9.924	.002
Residual	28.932	498	.058		
Total	29.509	499			

(c)

COEFFICIENTS

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.101	.081		38.087	.000
CS	.066	.021	.140	3.150	.002

H₄: There is no significant correlation between Switching Costs and Brand Loyalty.

The results of correlation and Regression analysis (Tables 1.7 and 1.8) reveal that there is strong significant relationship between Switching Costs and Brand Loyalty. The correlation coefficient is 0.505, which indicates high association between the variables. From the table 1.8 (a), the adjusted R² value offer noteworthy insight on the overall ability of Switching costs to explain the variation in score on Brand Loyalty. Hence the relationship between SC and BL is highly significant.

TABLE 1.7: CORRELATION MATRIX

		SC
BL	Pearson Correlation	.505**
	p-value	0.0000

(a)

TABLE 1.8: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.25	.625	.620

(b)

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	7.515	1	7.515	170.167	.000 ^a
Residual	21.994	498	.044		
Total	29.509	499			

(c)

COEFFICIENTS

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.861	.039		73.394	.000
Switching_Cost	.165	.013	.505	13.045	.000

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

• MOBILE SERVICE QUALITY AND BRAND LOYALTY ARE RELATED

The results of the correlation and regression analysis of the study indicated a significant relationship between mobile service quality and customer loyalty. Previous studies also found that mobile service quality and customer loyalty are significantly related (Sirkit, 2000; Johnson and Sirkit, 2002; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml (1993) also indicated that a perception of high mobile service quality lead to a firm's success via high loyalty and positive word of mouth.

• CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BRAND LOYALTY ARE RELATED

The results of the regression analysis report a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in Airtel cellular services. This finding is corroborated by the previous studies of Anderson and Sullivan (1993); Bolton (1998); Cronin and Taylor (1992); Fornell (1992); Oliver (1980); Patterson and Spreng (1997); Rust and Zahorik (1993); Selnes (1998); Swan and Trawick (1981); Taylor and Baker (1994) and Woodside *et al.*, (1989). Wang and Lo (2002) found a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and Brand loyalty with evidence from China's telecommunication industry.

• MOBILE SERVICE QUALITY VARIABLES DETERMINE BRAND LOYALTY

The influence of network quality, value-added services, convenience in procedures and customer service support has strong influence on overall perceived value of mobile services and Brand Loyalty. A similar finding was reported by the previous studies of Gerpott *et al.*, (2001); Lee *et al.*, (2001); Kim and Yoon (2004), Kim *et al.*, (2004) Ahn *et al.*, (2006), Keaveney (1995), Bolton (1998), Bolton *et al.*, (2000), Kim (2000), Moer *et al.*, (2000).

• PERCEIVED VALUE OF MOBILE SERVICES, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY ARE RELATED:

Studies of Wang *et al.*, (2004), Wang and Lo (2002), and Lee *et al.*, (2001) have found positive relationships between the variables. The findings of the present study are similar.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Airtel has to take steps to improve their ratings on the following:

• DEVELOP LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Loyalty programs play an important role in retaining the existing customers. We can develop loyalty programs, an offer where an operator gets free minutes, when their customers reach a certain level of usage. Airtel can also use internal scoring system to identify their high value customers and offer them on a discretionary basis, rebates, specific membership clubs and gift certificates, or free goods when they renew their subscriptions.

• CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Airtel must empower its customer service representatives to take care of the problem quickly and efficiently. They must be empowered to handle the customer complaints because customers are telling that different customer care executives are giving different responses to the same complaint. Also the procedure of connecting to call centre should be made easy and the time taken by the call centre for redressal of the complaint should be as short as possible.

• VALUE-ADDED SERVICES(VAS)

Selling more to the existing subscribers is relatively easier as compared to acquiring new customers. Also the new subscriptions will largely happen at the bottom of the pyramid therefore the new subscriptions will further lower the average revenue per user. So VAS is a potential long term revenue stream as it will be easier to sell more to the existing customers. Airtel should make its VAS more accessible to customers when compared to competitors.

• PRICING STRUCTURE

Pricing is one of the major reasons for customers defecting from the telecom operators. New entrants like Uninor, Tata indicom are offering better tariff packages. So, Airtel should also come up with attractive offers on par with competitors.

• TIE-UP WITH HANDSET MANUFACTURERS

Airtel can have tie-ups with cell phone manufacturers and can provide the handsets at subsidized rates. Once it is purchased, the phone will be locked. Customer cannot use another sim in the same handset. This creates switching costs for the customers and hence they remain loyal to the brand.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has the following limitations:

Drawing Sample from a Single company was a major limitation of the study. Although service industries have much in common, each industry has its own special characteristics in terms of product/ service complexity, distribution channels, automation levels etc. Drawing sample from a single company limits the generalisability of the study.

Sample size: Many of the studies in this field used sample sizes in the range of thousands. The 500 sample size may be reported as small for few researchers from their point of view and this can be concluded as further limiting factor for the generalization of findings.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- What is the effect of psychological characteristics of customers on loyalty in cellular services? Whether these factors function as adjusting variables in the existing interaction?
- What is the impact of inertia and customer indifference on brand loyalty in telecommunication services?
- How to establish relationship among the constructs such as customer satisfaction, loyalty and profitability in cellular mobile services?
- What is the impact of culture on Brand loyalty, as customers from different cultures have different perceptions and expectations?

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