Asian Journal of
Marketing

ISSN 1819-1924

Academic
Journals Inc.

www.academicjournals.com

Asian Journal of Marketing 9 (1): 27-37, 2015
ISSN 1819-1924 / DOI: 10.3923/ajm.2015.27.37

Self Esteem, Customer Identification and Willingness to Pay Price Premium: Evidence from Young Consumers Market

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of self-esteem, customer perceived value and customer identification on willingness to pay price premium. Additionally, it ascertains the impact of customer loyalty on customer perceived value. This study employed a survey research design. The respondents were undergraduate students. The convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample. Questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to ascertain the validity and reliability of the constructs. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the data. The results indicate that self-esteem, customer perceived value and customer identification significantly influence consumers' willingness to pay price premium. Again, the study found a significant effect of customer loyalty on customer perceived value. The findings indicate that enhancing consumers perceived value will demand that service firms build customer loyalty. Again, marketers must build strong brands and enhance their reputation among their customers. This can influence customers to identify themselves with the brand. The study provides evidence for the relationship between customer loyalty and perceived value. Again, it establishes the effect of self-esteem on consumers' willingness to pay price premium.

Key words: Customer identification, customer loyalty, price premium, self-esteem, customer perceived value, telecommunication

INTRODUCTION

Customers identification with a brand has in recent times received attention from scholars (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Berger *et al*., 2006). Customer identification has been defined as the association that a customer has to a brand and identifies him/herself with the brand (Underwood *et al*., 2001). Even though the concept is very significant in the growth of firms (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003), it appears that scholars have identified that it is less utilized in the marketing environment. Berger *et al*. (2006) described customer identification as aiding in the explanation of the relationship between employees and the organization and also consumers and the firm itself (Underwood *et al*., 2001). Thus, how a customer identifies himself or herself with a brand shows the rate of internal marketing going on in the firm and the relationship that the firm also has with its customers. Similarly, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) conceptualized customer identification as how a consumer is motivated and feels more satisfied with the offerings of a brand meeting his perceived needs. Such consumers become loyal to the brand and do not switch even if there is price increase (Rao and Bergen, 1992; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007). Some scholars

(Bendixen *et al*., 2004; Kumar *et al*., 2003; Mai, 2014; Trivedi *et al*., 2015) have found willingness to pay price premium as one of the key characteristics of customer commitment. A price premium according to theoretical economic literature can be described as excess price paid over and above the fair price that is justified by the true value of the product (Klein and Leffler, 1981; Rao and Bergen, 1992). Pratt (1998) identified the effect of organizational identification on employee commitment. Meanwhile, Fullerton (2005) has asserted that identification is a necessary condition for building customer commitment. Again, Keh and Xie (2009), found a mediating role of customer commitment in the relationship between customer identification and behavioral intentions. This suggests that customers who identify themselves with a brand would be willing to pay premiums for such brands.

Furthermore, the extant literature seems to suggest a relationship between self-esteem and willingness to pay price premium. Self-esteem has been defined as a motivational process by which individuals work to improve and maintain a social standing through the manifestation of certain behaviours that symbolize status both for the individual and the society at large (Kilsheimer, 1993). The acquisition of self-esteem materializes a tendency to purchase goods and services that befits their status regardless of the price being offered for it (Eastman *et al*., 1999). Eastman *et al*. (1997) found a positive relationship between a higher self-esteem and the concept of materialism and even paying attention to what others think about them. The self-esteem acquired can be shown evidently through the wealth a consumer has shown through conspicuous consumption and gained "power" through an association (Eastman *et al*., 1999). Sometimes, these conspicuous consumption attitudes give the consumer some sort of satisfaction when others react with the displaying of wealth (Mason, 2001). O'Cass and McEwen (2004) describe self-esteem as the personal nature of owning status products either for internal reasons (self-reward, with no public display of the products) and/or external reasons (to signal wealth through public display). While, some scholars (Eastman *et al*., 1997, 1999; Kilsheimer, 1993; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004) argue that status and conspicuousness is one and the same, others (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004; Truong and McColl, 2011) describe status and conspicuousness as two separate but related constructs. O'Cass and McEwen (2004) define self-esteem as consumers' desire to gain prestige from the acquisition of status-laden products, while conspicuous consumption is the overt usage of products in the presence of others.

Extant literature has given instances where customers with high self-esteem spend and consume conspicuously and as such will pay the price quoted for any offer that enhances their status (Truong and McColl, 2011; Drennan *et al*., 2011). In the research conducted by Interbrand (2008), it was realized that over 95% of the respondents sampled, change their purchase patterns in terms of overall spending based on their new status gained. That is consumers who are regarded to have high self-esteem, being influenced by the quality and brand they are purchasing will pay a price premium for the product or service they are enjoying (Drennan *et al*., 2011). Some scholars (Goldenberg *et al*., 2000; Ferraro *et al*., 2005) have also linked self-esteem to luxurious behaviours. With such conditions being prevalent, it is safe to conclude that consumers' willingness to pay price premium can be predicted by self-esteem since paying price premium can be out of luxury (Rao and Bergen, 1992).

Additionally, some scholars have suggested a relationship between price premium and customer perceived value. Customer perceived value has been given substantial space in the marketing literature and more especially among marketing practitioners (Lapierre, 2000). This is probably because customers of today are satisfied with quality products at cheapest prices

(Mazumdar, 1993). Much attention has been given to value and its provision to customers. Extant research by marketing researchers has been conducted in the area of customer perceived value (Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005; Ulaga and Eggert, 2006; Hansen *et al*., 2008; Wang, 2010). Zeithaml (1988) saw customer perceived value as a trade-off between the benefits and sacrifices the customer perceives to be receiving from a brand of firm. Monroe (1990) further explained that, the benefits could either be the physical service or attributes of the firm. Other scholars also look at the customer's perceived value from the subjective point of view (Kortge and Okonkwo, 1993; Bose and Rao, 2011). The same product offering can be perceived differently by customers, value wise. Perkins (1993) adds that because of the differences in human nature, customers who have been segmented in a particular purchasing process can have different value for the same product being purchased.

Tai (2011), posits that, there are three types of scholarly views with regards to the conceptualization of consumer perceived value, that is the classical, functional views and relational dimension. The classic view conceives customer perceived value as a construct formed by benefits received and sacrifices (costs) given. Based on the classical view, previous studies have focused on evaluating customer's perceived value according to the difference between what customers benefit and sacrifice (Walker *et al*., 2006; Smith and Colgate, 2007). To avoid excessive concentration on economic utility and give consideration to the complex nature of perceived value, a number of recent studies have focused directly on the benefits gained and attempted to construct customer's perceived value as a multi-dimensional construct (Fiol *et al*., 2009; Khan, 2010; Li and Petrick, 2010). From the viewpoint of benefits gained, Lindgreen and Wynstra (2005) have argued that customer value has two research streams: a focus on value of goods and services and a focus on value of buyer-seller relationships.

The functional dimension of perceived value concerns the utilitarian functions by which a product or service can satisfy a customer's practical needs (Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005; Cheng *et al*., 2009; Khan, 2010). That is, functional value refers to the utility and enterprise a customer perceives in a supplier's functional or utilitarian performance. The perspective of perceived functional value is based on the assumption that customers are objective and rational and their value perception are built on a product or service's composite attributes, such as qualities or features that can deliver the utilitarian performance.

In contrast, the relational dimension of perceived value concerns the feelings derived from the attributes of image, trust and communication (Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005; Khan, 2010). That is, relational value refers to a customer's positive feelings towards its suppliers. The perspective of perceived relational value is based on the assumption that the customer's value perception is built on its belief that its suppliers will perform actions that will result in positive outcomes for the customer. Pura (2005) ascertained the correlation between customers perceived value and behavioral intentions in a service context. He noted that customer perceived value influences the behavioural (example consumers' behavioral intentions and commitment) component of loyalty significantly. Meanwhile, Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) asserted that loyal customers are willing to pay price premium. This gives a hint that customer perceived value influences customers' willingness to pay price premium. Therefore, this study argues that perceived value influence customers' willingness to pay price premium.

Peng and Chen (2015) on the other hand noted that customers are inclined to feel equitably treated if they perceive that the ratio of their outcomes to inputs is comparable to the ratio of outcomes to inputs experienced by the company. This happens because customers compare the offerings of their preferred brands as against that of competitors which help them place value on these brands (Holbrook, 1994). When customers have a high perceived value for products, their patronage increases, which can inevitably contribute to high customer loyalty. Sirdeshmukh *et al*. (2002) posit that the value a customer places on a product works on the higher goal and the loyalty they develop for the product because their perceived value becomes their behavioral intentions. Furthermore, Sirdeshmukh *et al*. (2002) stated that since customer value is a super-ordinate goal and supersedes customer loyalty which is a subordinate goal, the customer value regulates the behavioral intentions of customer loyalty towards the brands or firms. Again, a study by Yen (2012) revealed that perceived value is a major determinant of customer loyalty. Again, some studies (Zhang *et al*., 2014; Lai *et al*., 2009) on the other hand found perceived value as predictor variable of loyalty. However, customer loyalty influences consumers' behaviour (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007; Martensen, 2007; Lazarevic, 2012) and Zeithaml *et al*. (1996) believe that perceived value rather influences customer loyalty. According to some psychologists (Gino and Flynn, 2011), affective commitment towards a gift giver significantly influences recipients' appreciation. Thus, gift recipients show much appreciation for any "small thing" they receive from individuals they like. Although, this is in the context of gift given, since this character trait is psychological in nature it is possible for people to translate this to a business relationship. Thus, loyalty can influence customers' perceived value. Besides, trust plays a key role in evaluation of services (Yang *et al*., 2013). Therefore, this study argues that customer loyalty influences customer perceived value.

The main research questions of this study are as follows:

- Does customer loyalty influence customer perceived value?
- What is the effect of customer identification on consumers' willingness to pay price premium?
- Does customer perceived value influence consumers' willingness to pay a price premium?
- Does self-esteem influence consumers' willingness to pay price premium?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design, sample and data collection: In order to collect large data and analyze them quantitatively, the survey research design was used. The respondents of the study were mainly, university students (undergraduate students). This population was used because they constitute a substantial amount of the telecommunication market in Ghana. Furthermore, they constitute a greater proportion of the youth market of the telecommunication companies (www.mtn.com.gh). Again, students are active and well-informed customers (Meng and Mummalaneni, 2010). Since, the target respondents were young people, the outliers were not used in the final analysis. The respondents were selected using convenience sampling technique because the sample frame was not available to enable us employ a probability sampling technique. The results represent responses from respondents within the ages of 18-25 years, thus those who were below 30 years. The total number of respondents was 433. Out of this number, 56.1% were males while 43.9% were females. This means that there were more male respondents than females. A greater number (40.6%) of them were subscribers of MTN followed by Tigo (27.5%). Those respondents who were subscribers of Airtel constituted 13.9% while Vodafone subscribers accounted for 11.5%. Glo and Expresso subscribers were 4.4 and 1.8%, respectively. These figures represent the main lines of the respondents. All the respondents were active users of telecommunication services. With the help of some students, we collected the data within a period of two weeks.

Study area: The telecommunications industry has seen a tremendous growth within a short period of time. In 1996, telephone usage penetration rate stood at 0.26%, one of the lowest in Africa. As at December 2014, the penetrating rate had reached 113.37% (NCAG., 2014). Currently, there are six mobile telecommunication companies operating in Ghana; MTN, Tigo, Airtel, Vodafone, Glo and Expresso. As at December 2014, MTN had the highest (45.63%) market share followed by Vodafone 23.29%, Tigo 13.62%, Airtel 12.3%, Glo 4.78% and Expresso 0.39% (NCAG., 2014). Due to the intense competition in the industry, some companies adopt different pricing and promotional strategies to attract customers. Table 1 presents the current end user tariffs (in Ghana Cedi) in the industry.

Measures: All the measures were adopted from extant literature. The constructs measuring customer perceived value were adapted from Cronin *et al*. (2000) while, those measuring self-esteem were adapted from Rosenberg (1965). Similarly, customer identification measures were adapted from Mael and Ashforth (1992) and price premium and customer loyalty measures were adapted from Zeithaml *et al*. (1996). Initially, there were four variables measuring each construct, however, some were deleted after "purification". In other words those measures that were below the acceptable threshold were deleted. The measures used in the final analysis have been presented in Table 1. Consistent with Sun and Wu (2012), a five-point likert scale was used to measure the items (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The following are the means and standard deviation of the constructs; customer perceived value (mean = 3.5, standard deviation = 0.907), self-esteem (mean = 3.7, standard deviation = 0.691), customer identification (mean = 3.6, standard deviation = 0.898) and price premium (mean = 3.5, standard deviation = 1.070).

Construct validity: This study employed confirmatory factor analysis to assess the measurement model. In addition, discriminant and convergent validities are used to ascertain the internal validity and reliability of the measurement model. The measurement model met the acceptable threshold of the data (χ^2 = 48.95, df = 21, pb.00051; CFI = 0.0.94; GFI = 0.98; NNFI = 0.0.90 and RMSEA = 0.0.067), confirming the robustness of the measures model (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Furthermore, as shown in Table 2, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values and the composite reliability values met the acceptable standard, indicating the convergent validity has been achieved (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). Again, as presented in Table 3, the AVE values are higher than the squared correlation of the constructs; meaning that discriminant validity has been achieved (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Besides, all the factor loadings were acceptable (Table 2) and there were no cross loadings confirming discriminant validity of the constructs (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012).

Table 1: End user tariffs (Ghana cedi/pesewas)

Parameters	MTN	Tigo	Vodafone	Airtel	Glo	Expresso	Industry average price
On net	0.105	0.04	0.19	0.0999	0.14	0.0954	0.1117
Other local	0.13	0.102	0.19	0.0999	0.14	0.1494	0.1352

Source: NCAG (2014)

Table 2: Reliability and validity of the construct

Constructs/items	Loadings
Customer perceived value (Cronin *et al*., 2000) CR = 0.85; AVE = 0.74	
Using the services provided by my telecom company is worth for me to sacrifice some time and effort	0.84
As a customer of my telecommunication network company I get more value for money	0.70
Self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) CR = 0.71; AVE = 0.50	
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself when I am using my telecommunication network	0.70
I feel that I am a person of worth if I am using my telecommunication network	0.70
Customer identification (Mael and Ashforth, 1992) CR = 0.70; AVE = 0.50	
I am very interested in what others think about my telecommunication network company	0.70
If a story in the media criticized my telecommunication network company, I will company would feel embarrassed	0.72
Price premium (Zeithaml *et al*., 1996) CR = 0.80; AVE = 0.70	
I will continue to do business with my telecommunication network company even if its prices increase somewhat	0.70
I will pay a higher price than competitors charge for the benefits currently received from my telecommunication network company	0.90
Customer loyalty (Zeithaml *et al*., 1996) CR = 0.71 ; AVE = 0.51	
I will not switch to another mobile telecommunication company in the future	0.81
I will continue to use my current telecommunication network and recommend it to my friends and relatives	0.72
Overall I am loyal to the telecommunication network you are using currently	0.76

Table 3: Correlations among the variables and discriminant validity test

Correlation parameters	PP	CPV	SE	CI	CL
PP	0.70				
CPV	0.185	0.74			
SE	0.294	0.244	0.50		
CI	0.243	0.165	0.412	0.50	
CL	0.244	0.181	0.341	0.231	0.51

Diagonal variables are the AVE values, PP: Price premiums, CPV: Customer perceived value, SE: Self-esteem, CI: Customer identification, CL: Customer loyalty

Table 4: Model fit and analysis of variance indicating the significance of the model

R2	Sum of squares	df	F	Sig.
Model 1 (0.11)				
Regression	57.208	3	18.706	0.000[a]
Residual	437.330	429		
Total	494.538	432		
Model 2 (0.11)				
Regression	40.131	1	54.880	0.000[a]
Residual	315.169	431		
Total	355.300	432		

Model 1: a: Predictors: Customer identification, Customer perceived value, Self-esteem, b: Dependent variable: Price premium, Model 2: a: Predictors: Constant, Customer loyalty, b: Dependent variable: Customer perceived value, df: Degree of freedom, Sig: Significance

Table 5: Regression coefficients showing contribution of each variable to the model

Predictor variables	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
Model 1			
Constant		2.845	0.005
Customer perceived value	0.111	2.359	0.019
Self esteem	0.209	4.121	0.000
Customer identification	0.139	2.777	0.006
Model 2			
Constant		13.325	0.000
Customer loyalty	0 .336	7.408	0.000

Model 1: Dependent variable: Price premium, Model 2: Dependent variable: Customer perceived value, Sig: Significance

RESULTS

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to address the research questions. There were two linear regression models (model 1 and model 2). The first model (model 1) was used to predict customers' willingness to pay price premium from customer perceived value, self-esteem and customer identification. The $R^2 = 0.11$, F (3, 429) = 18.71, p<0.001, (Table 4). As shown in Table 5, the predictor variables individually made significant contributions to the model. Self-esteem made the highest ($\beta = 0.209$, $p<0.001$) contribution followed by customer identification ($\beta = 0.139$, $p<0.05$) and customer perceived value ($\beta = 0.11$, $p<0.05$). The results indicate that customer perceived value, self-esteem and customer identification significantly explain 11% of the variance in customers' willingness to pay price premium. Additionally, the results suggest that self-esteem explains 21% of the variance in consumers' willingness to pay price premium while, customer identification and customer perceived value explains 14 and 11%, respectively of the variance in consumers' willingness to pay price premium. The second model, that is model 2 was used to assess the relationship between customer loyalty and perceived value. Customer loyalty was used as the predictor variable while customer perceived value was used as the dependent variable. The analysis shows that $R^2 = 0.11$, $F (1, 431) = 54.880$, $p<0.001$, (Table 4) while, beta coefficient for customer loyalty was significant ($\beta = 0.336$, $p<0.001$) (Table 5). This results means that customer loyalty explains 34% of the variance in customer perceived value.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to ascertain the effect of customer perceived value, self-esteem and customer identification on consumers' willingness to pay price premium. Additionally, this study examined the effect of customer loyalty on customer perceived value.

The results show that customer loyalty influences customer perceived value. This probably is because loyal customers are not difficult and are easily served and therefore are appreciative of least service they receive from their service providers (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007). In other words, their commitment and emotional attachment to their service providers influence their perception of value of the services they receive from their service providers. This confirms the assertion that perceived value is not limited to the functional benefits consumers receive from buying a service but the intangible benefits of the service as well (Monroe, 1990). Furthermore, this result might be attributed to the trustworthiness and image of the service provider. As, Khan (2010) noted, consumers' feelings toward service providers influence their perception of value of the product or service they receive. This conclusion however appears to be limited to the relational dimension of perceived value as espoused by Tai (2011), which refers to customers positive feelings toward their suppliers. The other dimensions of perceived value, namely, classical and functional perspectives focus on cost/benefit analysis and utilitarian functions respectively. These latter dimensions of perceived value focus on actual benefits derived from the product and service and do not rely on emotional attachments. Further, the conclusion that customer loyalty influences perceived value is in contrast to the finding by Zeithaml *et al.* (1996), who believe that customer perceived value rather influences customer loyalty. It appears therefore that a virtuous cycle can be established between customer loyalty and perceived value.

This study also noted that, customers' willingness to pay price premium is predicted by customer identification. Thus, consumers' willingness to buy a particular service at a price higher than the industry average price is influenced by customer identification. Customers who are interested in the success or otherwise of their service providers will pay price premium (Kumar *et al.*, 2003). This might have accounted for the reason why MTN still has the highest market share despite having the highest call tariff rate in the telecommunication industry in Ghana (NCAG., 2014). While, this conclusion is supported in the extant literature (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007). Trivedi *et al.* (2015) identified willingness to pay price premium as only one of the characteristics of customer identification. This conclusion lends credence to the finding of the study which, identifies self-esteem and perceived value in addition to customer identification as relevant in influencing willingness to pay premium prices. It is therefore important to note that these constructs are not exhaustive in terms of their contribution to consumers' willingness to pay premium prices.

As intimated, this study found that self-esteem influences consumers' willingness to pay price premium. Thus, consumers who take positive attitude towards themselves and feel inferior when not using a particular brand will pay price premium. They most of the time patronize brands that enhances or are consistent with their status (Eastman *et al*., 1999) and therefore are willing to pay price premium for such brands (Drennan *et al*., 2011). However, drawing from the findings of other researchers (O'Cass and McEwen, 2004; Truong and McColl, 2011), consumers who display high self-esteem in terms of status but not conspicuousness and ostentatious living may not necessarily pay premium price.

Consistent with some earlier studies (Pura, 2005), this study found the effect of perceived value on consumers' willingness to pay price premium. This suggests that if service firms create value for their customers they will pay price premium. Therefore, relying on only low pricing strategy might not yield the desirable results.

CONCLUSION

It must be noted that no matter the contextualization of perceived value, consumers look at it in relation to competing products. Service firms must therefore find out what exactly constitute value for their customers relative to competitors' offerings.

This study has some implications for marketers and researchers. The findings indicate that enhancing consumers perceived value will demand that service firms build customer loyalty. Marketers can build customer loyalty by meeting their basic needs (through the provision of quality products and services), development of relationship bonds in the form of financial incentives, social and interpersonal relationships, mass customization and customer intimacy strategies and structural bonding (by use of technology to provide customized service). Specifically for young consumers, service marketers can sponsor programmes that target the youth. Again, marketers must build strong brands and enhance their reputation among their customers. This can influence customers to identify themselves with the brand.

For researchers, more studies should be conducted on the drivers of customer identification and other behavioural outcome of customer identification. Again, future studies should investigate the interactive effect of self-esteem and customer identification on consumers' willingness to pay price premium. Also, more studies must be conducted on the relationship between customer loyalty and customer perceive value.

LIMITATION

This study like any other studies is not without limitations. For instance, the sample was selected using convenience sampling technique making it challenging for the findings to be generalized. A probability sampling technique should be used on future studies. Furthermore, the application of the findings might be limited to youth market since the respondents were mainly youth; future studies should expand the scope of the sample.

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