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E-loyalty in Websites: User Domain Perspective

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Abstract:
Due to ever increasing customer base of online web users, market researchers have examined how to design websites that can build and maintain e-loyalty. Several e-loyalty models have been given still extant literature do not ascertain consensus among the antecedents of e-loyalty. Although certain antecedents of e-loyalty are obviously important, the authors believe domain or industry specific research could bequeath different result. The basic premise of this study is to comprehend the online environment from user point of view, prior to build up the conceptual model of e-loyalty of online users. This paper provides two important contributions to the understanding of e-loyalty models. First, we demonstrate the probable reasons for differences in opinion among various researches. Second, we lay bare the five plausible domains where relation between e-loyalty and its antecedents can be established separately for each domain, in order to augment e-loyalty.

*Keywords: e-loyalty, e-satisfaction, e-service quality, e-trust, perceived value, user domain*

1. Introduction

We have evidenced the era of development of World Wide Web to failure of dot-com companies. Despite the various phases, online websites have increased significantly over the years. Due to the rapid growth of e-commerce, e-loyalty has gained the worldwide focus on theory as well as in practice to boost the bottom line of financial statements of online companies. In this online era there is a need to acquire and maintain more and more customers.

The value of e-loyalty is often greater on the internet than in the physical world (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000) and because of the increased variety of products and services on the internet generating revisit to company's websites has become a major challenge for many companies (Supphellen & Nyseveen, 2001). Hence small dot-com companies to giants in the market are focusing on e-loyalty. Many argue that website should be simple, easy to access and intuitive on the other hand there are websites full of colours and animations. The emphasis on e-loyalty has increased significantly in recent years; as a result the extant literature contains a number of articles, book and various other periodicals. Previous research has seldom considered the primary need of the user for which the user visits a website while developing their conceptual model of e-loyalty and the vast majority of these studies are not industry specific, therefore the inconsistency lies among studies. The main objective of this study is to solve e-loyalty and its antecedent's conundrum. The aims of this study include:

- Investigating the reasons for disagreement among various researchers
- Identification of domains so that e-loyalty and its antecedent relationship can be established separately for each domain.

Fig. 1 exhibit the conceptual model of e-loyalty based on the existing literature. Section 2 delineates the commonly acknowledged success factors; antecedents lacking consensus are reviewed in section 3. Section 4 discusses the reasons for disagreement among various researches followed by section 5 which identifies five domains based on the primary needs of users in order to develop e-loyalty model in isolation for each domain. Section 6 discusses how e-loyalty can be measured separately for each domain, we conclude with section 7 discussing some implications and direction for future research.
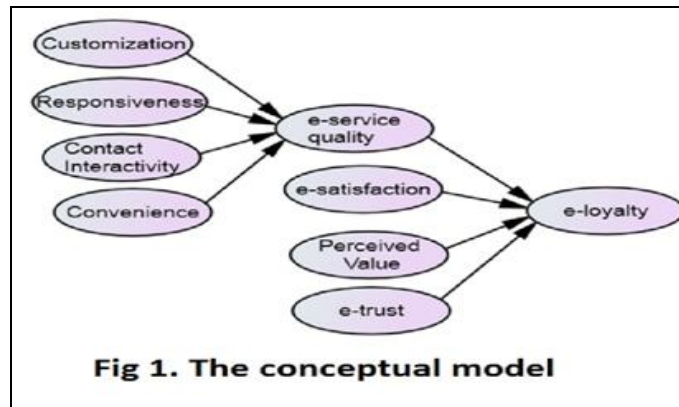
Fig 1. The conceptual model

2. Commonly Acknowledged Success Factors

Comparative analysis of the extant literature on e-loyalty has been done. Major outcomes of the studies are summed up and are depicted in table 1.

E-loyalty Model	Research Type	Theme of Study	Determinants of e-loyalty	Context
Reichheld & Schefter (2000)	Theoretical	E-loyalty	Trust experience helps in building e-loyalty.	e-commerce
Supphellen 2001	Empirical	Driver of intention to revisit a website	Brand loyalty creates e-loyalty.	Scandinavian Airline Industry
Gommans et al. (2001)	Theoretical	Brand loyalty to e-loyalty	Website & Technology, Customer service, Value proposition, Trust & security, Brand building and its underlying factors are decisive factors for e-loyalty.	e-commerce
Srinivasan et al. (2002)	Empirical	Exploration of antecedents of customer loyalty in e-commerce	Factors that impact e-loyalty are Customization, Contact interactivity, Cultivation, Care, Community, Choice and Character. Convenience does not affect it.	e-commerce
Anderson et al. (2003)	Empirical	Impact of satisfaction on e-loyalty	E-satisfaction affects e-loyalty however business level factors (trust, perceived value) and individual level factors (purchase size, inertia, and convenience motivation) moderate its effect.	e-commerce
Ribbink et al. (2004)	Empirical	Derive determinants of e-loyalty	E-satisfaction and E-trust is the direct antecedent of E-loyalty. Assurance, ease of use, e-scape, responsiveness and customization influence indirectly.	Online Book and CD Stores
Gummerus et al. (2004)	Empirical	Customer loyalty to content-based Web sites	Loyalty to the health site is satisfaction-driven, but that trust is the main antecedent of satisfaction. Need fulfilment, responsiveness, security and technical functionality of the Web site are shown to influence trust	Health
Rodgers et al. (2005)	Empirical	Antecedents and consequences of online satisfaction	Information quality directly affects e-loyalty while system quality and service quality affect e-loyalty through e-satisfaction.	e-commerce
Semeijn et al. (2005)	Empirical	Effects of online and offline service components on e-loyalty	Industries offline fulfillment appears to be at least as important as web site performance.	e-commerce
Cyr et al. (2007)	Empirical	How social presence in e-services influences e-loyalty	Perceived social presence, perceived usefulness, trust, enjoyment are direct antecedents while perceived ease of use is an indirect antecedent of e-loyalty but with varying influence for men and women.	e-commerce

Chang & Chen (2008)	Empirical	Impact of customer interface quality, satisfaction and switching cost on e-loyalty.	Customer interface quality is a critical factor while customization, interactivity and effect e-loyalty indirectly.	e-commerce
Chao et al. (2009)	Empirical	Customer loyalty in virtual environments	Consumer trust and consumer satisfaction are direct antecedents; e-service quality effect customer trust and customer satisfaction	e-banks
Cyr et al. (2009)	Empirical	Perceived interactivity leading to e-loyalty	Efficiency, Effectiveness, Enjoyment, Trust directly affect e-loyalty. Perceived value contribute to above 4 determinants	e-commerce
Sheng & Liu (2010)	Empirical	Effect of e-service quality on online customer satisfaction and loyalty	Efficiency and fulfillment have positive effects on customer satisfaction, and fulfillment and privacy have positive effects on customer loyalty	e-commerce
Blasco et al. (2011)	Empirical	Antecedents of e-loyalty	Contact interactivity, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Enjoyment and Trust effects e-loyalty	e-commerce
Anderson & Swaminathan (2011)	Empirical	Loyalty in E-Markets	Adaption, commitment, network, assortment, transaction ease and engagement affect satisfaction in e-business	e-commerce
Sadeh et al. (2011)	Theoretical	Structural Model of Service Quality, Satisfaction, Trust, Customer, Perceived Value and E-loyalty	Customer perceived value, e-customer satisfaction and trust are contributes in building e-loyalty.	e-commerce
Ghane et al. (2011)	Empirical	Impacts of e-satisfaction, e-trust, e-service quality on e-loyalty	e-satisfaction, e-trust, e-service quality have influence on e-loyalty	e-Banks

Table 1: E-loyalty Models

Subjective evaluation of the e-loyalty model described in table 1 reveals that e-satisfaction, perceived value; e-trust and e-service quality emerges out as dominant antecedents of e-loyalty. Customization, responsiveness, contact interactivity and convenience are the constituents of e-service quality. Contact interactivity, convenience, customization, responsiveness, perceived value, e-trust and e-satisfaction are the antecedents which are commonly acknowledged (Gommans et al., 2001; Srinivasan et al., 2002; Rodger et al., 2005; Chang and Chen, 2008). However the consensus lacks among the antecedents like efficiency, enjoyment, e-scape, fulfilment, assurance, privacy and virtual communities. The constituents of e-service quality are ease of use, web site design, responsiveness, customization (Ribbink et al., 2004; Srinivasan et al., 2002; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2003).

As table 1 describes the major outcome of existing literature. We explain commonly acknowledged determinant of e-loyalty followed by antecedents lacking consensus.

E-service quality is the extent to which e-commerce providers effectively and efficiently manage customer interaction. Santos (2003) defined e-service quality as the customer's evaluation or overall judgment regarding the excellence and quality of electronic service provided by online markets. A wide opinion exists on e-service quality and the dimension revolve around reliability, assurance, responsiveness customization, ease of navigation, efficiency, flexibility, empathy yet there is no consensus on the exact nature or number of quality dimensions that customers consider when evaluating e-services. However in this study we have considered the widely acknowledged dimensions of e-service quality which is discussed below.

Contact interactivity is the extent to which website facilitates the two way transfer of communication and the availability of customer support tools (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Contact interactivity defines how much the website is mutually or reciprocally active.

The sites interact with the user usually through either a text-based or graphical user interface, thus a good interactive website is a part of e-service quality (Srinivasan et al., 2002; Cyr et al., 2007; Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011) and eventually plays an important part in creating e-loyalty (Gommans et al., 2001; Srinivasan et al., 2002; Rodger et al., Chang & Chen, 2008; Hassanein et al., 2007; Anderson & Srinivasan., 2003). Observing the definition of ease of use, convenience and navigation efficiency, the literature reflects the same meaning. Srinivasan et al. (2002) suggests if a website is convenient to use, it must be simple, intuitive and user friendly. 30% of the user leaves a website without purchasing anything because they find it is difficult to navigate through the site and a convenient website, saves time, make browsing easier, and minimizes customer effort. Convenience is navigation efficiency and user friendliness of a website (Chang & Chen, 2008).

Ease of use refers to the property of a website that user can navigate or use the website conveniently and with ease. It is the degree to which the prospective user expects the target system to be free of effort. Ease of use is an antecedent of e-service quality (Ribbink et al., 2004; Cyr et al., 2007; Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011) and plays a critical role in building e-loyalty (Gommans et al., 2001; Srinivasan et al., 2002; Ribbink et al., 2004; Semeijn et al., 2005; Rodgers et al., 2005; Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011).

Responsiveness is the site's ability to answer the user queries (Cyr et al., 2007). It is crucial that users receive adequate and timely support in case of any questions or problems (Semeijn et al., 2005). Thus, responsiveness in websites is a constituent of e-service quality (Gummerus et al., 2004; Ribbink et al., 2004; Semeijn et al., 2005; Rodgers et al., 2005; Blasco et al., 2010).

Customization is the ability of an e-retailer to tailor product, services, and environment to individual customers (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Customization is giving the user what he wants; it creates the perception of increased choice and can reduce the frustration of surfers. Several websites, for example Google, Facebook has let their homepages be customized by users and with the advent of new web technologies users are able to do more enhanced and slicker customized interfaces for them.

Satisfaction can be defined in two broad contexts traditional and electronically in the context of e-loyalty. Traditionally e-satisfaction satisfaction is defined as consumer's sense that consumption provides outcomes against a standard of pleasure versus displeasure by Srinivasan et al. (2002).

For this study we are confined to electronic context only hence we use the term e-satisfaction. E-satisfaction is the contentment one feels when one has fulfilled a desire, need, or expectation. A dis-satisfied consumer will definitely think to revisit a website if he is not satisfied with the website services. Thus the fact that e - satisfaction is an imperative constituent of e-loyalty has been established by many studies (Anderson & Swaminathan 2011; Parsuraman et al., 1988).

To gain the loyalty of customers, you must first gain their trust. That's always been the case, but on the web, where business is conducted at a distance and risks and uncertainties are magnified it is truer than ever (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). Ribbink (2004) defined e-trust as the degree of confidence customers have in online exchanges, or in the online exchange channel. Therefore e-trust is trusted as significant antecedent of e-loyalty (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000; Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003; Gummerus et al., 2004; Chao et al., 2009).

According to Zeithaml (2002) perceived quality is a consumer judgement about the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. Previous studies have shown a positive correlation between perceived value and e-loyalty (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003; Gummerus et al., 2004; Semeijn et al., 2005; Sadeh et al., 2011).

Following section discuss the factors that lack consensus in the existing literature.

3. Antecedents Lacking Consensus

Accuracy, assurance, brand loyalty, care, character, choice, cultivation, commitment, efficiency, enjoyment, escape, fulfilment, privacy and the system availability are the success factors that lack consensus in literature.

The customer expects accurate information and accurate deliveries of product and services. Accuracy is the measure how well the information about a product or service is well specified and is easy to understand for users. It is the ability of a website to portray the information precisely and to the point (Semeijn et al., 2005).

Assurance can be answered by the question, does the customer has confidence in the website. If the answer is yes, it can be presumed website is able to assure customer about it. It is a sense of security and privacy which user perceives during a visit to a website (Ribbink et al., 2005).

Brand loyalty is the affection of an individual toward a particular product or service. In our context, it is the affection to a particular website which results in repeat visits and thus creates e-loyalty. The brand loyalty is a powerful determinant of intentions to revisit the website (Supphellen & Nyseveen, 2001).

Care is the attention provided to customers before and after purchase in order to facilitate the user visit time, thus reaping the short term and long term benefits (Srinivasan et al., 2002). Thus, the high level of care is expected to generate high level of e-loyalty.

Character is attractively using the graphics, designs, and logos on a website, so that it appeals to the customer and he will have a delightful experience (Srinivasan et al., 2002; Chang & Chen, 2008).

Choice is the ability of an e-retailer to provide a wide variety of products and services (Srinivasan et al., 2002). If the e-retailer is able to provide more choices to customers, satisfaction of customer will increase.

Cultivation is the degree to which an e-retailer proactively provides information and incentives to its customer in order to entice him to new products and services and make the visit time rich (Srinivasan et al., 2002).

Commitment refers to the potency of the ongoing associations with the customers of an e-business (Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011). It refers the degree to which an online service provider is dedicated to their loyal customers. Commitment of e-retailer is reflected in good quality of service provided to the user.

The efficiency of a website is the extent to which it saves time effort and cost of the user for the intended task or purpose. The more efficient the website is the more smooth the online visit and transactions will be.

Enjoyment refers to the gratification the user receives during surfing or bliss while purchasing a product or service. It is the pleasurable feeling which website is able to generate in minds of users.

Escape is how pleasantly the content is arranged and displayed, and how well the colours and design are used to enhance the appearance of a website (Semeijn et al., 2005).

Fulfillment is the deliverance of a product or service within time, rapidly and in accordance with user expectations (Sheng & Liu, 2010). This dimension represents the e-commerce system's knack to execute the tasks with consistency and reliability (Blasco et al., 2010).

Privacy is one of the major concerns in the internet era, easy availability of services also make fraud only a click away. Internet privacy is the ability of a website to protect the personal information from being communicated with others. Internet privacy is gaining attention due to huge amount of personal information being gathered, stored, transmitted and shared on the internet (Hong et al., 2013).

System availability refers to truthful and precise functioning of the site and its availability when needed (Blasco et al., 2010). Many a time website is not available due to heavy traffic or some other technical problems, if such problem occurs repetitively users may get dis-satisfied.

The virtual community is the group of populace sharing their ideas, opinion, and information. It is the aggregation in cyberspace of individuals sharing common interests through repeated contacts via electronic means, such as chat rooms, online forums, bulletin boards, and email (Sheng & Liu, 2010).

The determinants discussed above in this section are posing a problem to reach at a consensus among various researchers. Now, we discuss the probable reasons why this problem is persistent over a long period of time.

4. Reason For Difference In Opinion

Concurrence exists on success factors however it does not mean agreement lie among researchers as some have ignored the very same antecedents which stands high on the list of success factors for building and acquiring e-loyalty.

Perceived value, e-service quality, e-trust and e-satisfaction are generally accepted while efficiency, enjoyment, fulfillment, character, privacy, system availability, virtual communities, security are the determinants which are studied but has not been able to recognized widely.

Three primary reasons are identified for having a disagreement among the above said variables.

- First is diversity in nature of the samples and the methodologies. The outcome varies because samples are taken across different cultures and backgrounds. Most studies fail to acknowledge the effect of cultural diversity or multiple cultures on e-loyalty.
- Second is the primary need of users. Millions of user visit web daily each having their own specific needs. Thus, the authors argue that the same model is not applicable for two different users having two different primary needs or even the same user having two different primary needs at two different point of time.
- The third reason is overlapping of variables. There is no consensus on the exact nature or number of quality dimension while evaluating e-services (Ribbink et al., 2004). Srinivasan et al. (2002) have considered e-service quality as direct antecedent of e-loyalty unlike (Szymanski & Hise, 2000) which considers e- service quality as antecedent of e-satisfaction. Thus the definition of variable seems to be overlapped and come out as a significant reason for differences in e-loyalty models.

5. User Domain

Why is defining the domains imperative? Before we explore the different domains, it is important to have an understanding of why we are asking this question. Identification of our domains is essentially based on user need which drives him to visit a website. The domain category for building e-loyalty helps us to guide what determinants we must consider in developing the conceptual e-loyalty models. It can also impact the way a company can promote the website to online users. The domains are also important so we have an understanding of what considerations must be followed in building a website before placing the website into the market. Lacking the knowledge of the domain in which users exist, it is very hard to make assessments for website managers to acquire and maintain e-loyal customers.

An inquiry into the relevant literature shows that e-loyalty and its antecedent relation is not well specified, however most commonly acknowledged factors are e-service quality, e-trust, perceived value and e-satisfaction. Why significant disagreement lies among studies? To answer the question, introduction of domain is required into the literature. Hence, five of the possible diverse domains, based on the primary need; where people visit a particular website are identified.

- **Product Market Domain:** This domain entertains the fact that the primary need of the user to visit a website is to buy a product. For this study, goods are further classified as tangible and intangible. Goods that are tangible include anything that can be physically touched. Printed books, CDs and DVDs are all examples of tangible goods. Digital files, though technically goods, are examples of intangible products. Downloaded video games, applications, music files, or movies cannot physically be touched, and thus are considered intangible. We consider the user belong to the product market domain when he essentially goes on the internet to buy a product, although he may do other activities like chat, surfing till the time he remains on the web.
- **Service Market Domain:** This domain suggests the main objective of the user to visit a website is to acquire any kind of online service. For example, a user logs on to a banking website to do some financial transaction. There has been a long academic debate on what makes services different from good. For this study we have differentiated it on the basis of ownership. Ownership implied tangible possession of an object that had been acquired through purchase or gift.
- **Information Sharing Domain:** Information sharing referred to exchanges of data between a sender and receiver. The sender and receiver can be a person, a group of person or an even a company. Information sharing domain dealt with people whose primary motive is to share information through an online tool. Typical examples of this are google, gmail etc. Four primary information sharing design patterns are sharing information one-to-one like emails on one to one basis, one-to-many like group emails, many-to-many, for example a database where many people store and retrieve the

information simultaneously, and many-to-one, for example a mail from an individual directed to all employees of the organization.

- **Virtual communities Domain**: In recent years fast-developing social networking sites (SNS) have developed virtual communities and became the major media by which people share their experiences, keep touch with family and friend line in recent years. When a user primarily visits a website to fulfill such need, we say users exist in this domain. A virtual community is a social network of individuals who interact through specific social media, potentially crossing geographical and political boundaries in order to pursue mutual interests or goals. One of the most pervasive types of virtual community operates under social networking services consisting of various online communities.
- **Fun Domain**: They are basically fun seekers. The primary purpose of them to visit or to revisit a website is to spend moments full of excitement and enjoyment. A user falls into this category of domain whenever he uses the internet for fun. For instance, a user log on with the prime motive to play angry birds (game) on the internet.

The following section suggests that an individual model of e-loyalty should be constructed for each domain.

6. Relation Between User Domain And E-Loyalty

Although the antecedents specified by different studies are obviously important, presented in table 1, and following the e-loyalty models portrayed in different studies we do build and acquire e-loyalty, but we argue domain specific conceptual model could bestow different result. We emphasize that if we consider the primary need of user as leading criteria to build e-loyalty, efficacy of models can be increased. Determinants of e-loyalty and user domain are described in figure 2.

Fig 2. user domains
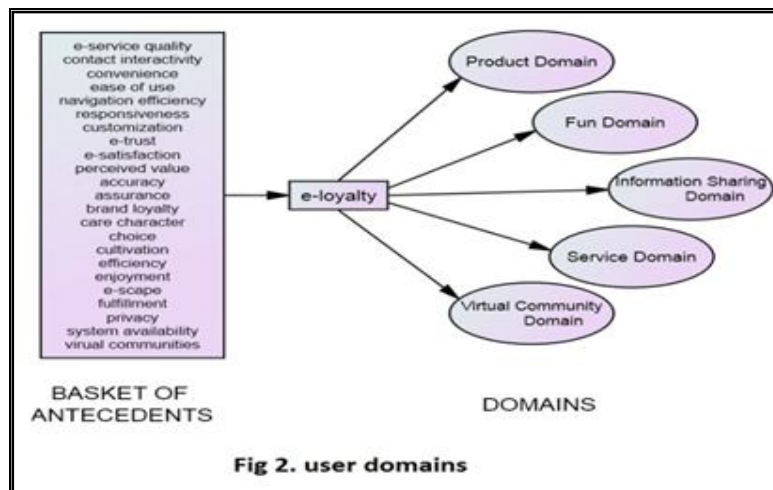
Authors do agree the basket of antecedents more or less remains the same and do concur that it will evolve over time with the changing needs of users, culture, and context. Yet we have to be very predictive about the dynamic needs of the user which in turn reflect our choice of determinants while developing e-loyalty models.

7. Discussion And Conlcusion

Building and maintaining e-loyalty is an intricate task and in recent times, it seems a war has begun over the internet to acquire more and more customers. The work done in this paper sheds light on some important issues related to e-loyalty determinants that have not been addressed by previous studies. It also depicts, for the first time, impact of user domain on e-loyalty and also confirms that significant difference lies in the constructs of e-loyalty models among different research. Although the literature has reported the existence of several e-loyalty models, to gain and win online users and customers but it does not provide an explanation why the e-loyalty models of different researches vary significantly. This study suggests the probable reasons for disagreement are heterogeneous of industries, different primary needs of users and overlapping of e-loyalty constructs. The work done in this paper suggests that in developing an e-loyalty model, first an industry need to be identified, then identification of the primary needs of the user has to be done and to achieve efficient result clear defining of e-loyalty antecedents in an unambiguous way has to be done.

While defining the determinants and development of conceptual models of e-loyalty, the existing literature has largely neglected the relative importance of the need of the user that instigates a user to visit a website. Against this backdrop, our contribution of introduction of possible diverse domain based on the primary needs of the user makes a significant involvement to the extant literature on e-loyalty models.

A comprehensive approach is needed and careful evaluation of the domain in which the user exists is required before developing the conceptual e-loyalty model.

The authors have restricted themselves only to five domains, however it is believed more domains might evolve over time and that domain too can overlap, for instance a user may log on to a website to purchase a product, alternatively his mind changes and he could play a game. Human behaviour is one of the most unpredictable things; hence the need of user may change while surfing.

This paper does not answer what adjustment should be done with e-loyalty models if the user domain changes during a visit by the user. Thus overlapping of domains during the visit time and change in e-loyalty criteria to the changing user needs require further investigation. Domain wise development of e-loyalty models is a useful approach for future study. Further studies could generate more precise antecedents of e-loyalty, helping companies to acquire and maintain customer loyal to websites. We hope that our findings will contribute to the accomplishment of accurate and precise e-loyalty models.

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