

The Impact of Loyalty on Satisfaction: Reverse Logic and Unintended Consequences

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Predictors of online satisfaction include website usability, performance, privacy, and security. Researchers have examined the effects of mediating and moderating variables on the relationship between online satisfaction and loyalty. The present study examines the reverse logic and feedback effects of loyalty on the relationship between satisfaction and its predictors. It is an important topic because satisfied customers may not be loyal. The idea of reverse logic is to emphasize satisfaction investments that focus on loyal customers, who are usually more profitable. The results of this study may indicate that it is more difficult to satisfy than to create loyal customers.

Keywords: Website Usability, Performance, Privacy, Security, Loyalty

JEL Classification: O14

I. Introduction

Online commerce has provided enormous business opportunities for millions of people in the world. It improves business efficiency and effectiveness by reducing the constraints of space, distance, and time. An important aspect of e-commerce is the website, where the merchants and customers meet and conduct transactions.

With the advantages and opportunities enabled by e-commerce, competition has increased exponentially. Consequently, customer relationship development in terms of attracting, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) has experienced escalating costs and time requirements and has captured the attention and time allocation of business managers. This is especially true with the rise of social media. For example, social media have greatly changed how consumers strategize and interact with online businesses. Customers nowadays can rely on many social media sources to share and generate information about online businesses. The information changes their expectations and how they evaluate business experiences. Thus, attracting and maintaining customers have definitely become more difficult.

Researchers have found that one of the main predictors of online loyalty is satisfaction (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003; Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2004; Flavián *et al.*, 2006; Picón *et al.*, 2014; Toufaily *et al.*, 2013; Valvi and West, 2013). A meta analysis concluded that satisfaction accounts for 25 percent of the variance of loyalty (Szymanski and Henard, 2001). Hundreds of studies have catalogued various antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcomes of satisfaction.

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The extant literature and recent research results have indicated the feedback effect of loyalty on satisfaction. Furthermore, the rise of the customer lifetime value (CLV) metric has called for the reverse logic approach in studying satisfaction and loyalty (Homburg *et al.*, 2005; Kumar *et al.*, 2013; Kumar *et al.*, 2009). In the era of social media, instead of focusing on how satisfaction creates loyalty, the idea of reverse logic is to focus on satisfaction investment directed at loyal customers who are usually more profitable and more difficult to retain. In other words, instead of asking how to create loyal customers, we ask, if loyalty is so important, how do we satisfy these clients? Thus, creating loyal customers is not the same as satisfying loyal customers.

I believe that pursuing research from both causal logics is complementary and very important. This study follows the call for reverse logic and extends the literature by examining the moderating impacts of loyalty on the relationship between satisfaction and its predictors. The results of this study may indicate that it is more difficult to satisfy than to create loyal customers.

This paper begins by summarizing the current literature. I then propose a research model and several hypotheses. I explain the research methods and report on the data analysis and results. I describe and discuss the theoretical and practical implications. I propose Study 2 to test the hypotheses by solely focusing on social media. I conclude the paper by discussing some limitations and future research.

II. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Research results have provided ample empirical support for the importance of online satisfaction. It is a very significant predictor of loyalty. Loyal customers are very important because they are very difficult and costly to attract and maintain but bring various benefits and contribute significantly to a firm's profitability (Reichheld and Scheffer, 2000). They found that increases in retention rates by 5 percent improve profits by 25 to 95 percent. Indeed, researchers have found that online satisfaction creates more loyalty than its offline counterpart (Shankar *et al.*, 2003). With the rise of social media, we might expect to see the stronger impact of retention on the bottom line.

Some important predictors of online satisfaction are website usability, perceived performance, privacy, and security (Angriawan and Pearson, 2009; Belanger *et al.*, 2002; Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2004; Muylle *et al.*, 2004; Palmer, 2002; Toufaily *et al.*, 2013; Valvi and West, 2013). In an online context, websites can be seen as the merchants of offline businesses. The overall experience with the merchants is reflected by the experience of the consumers with the websites in terms of their navigation, content, interactivity, and responsiveness (Palmer, 2002).

Perceived performance relates to the reliability and integrity of the merchants and their products. In offline businesses, dealings with reliable managers and products provide better customer experience and higher satisfaction. As in offline businesses, satisfaction increases with good experiences of website usability, perceived performance, privacy, and security. However, the rise of social media makes these relationships more challenging and difficult to achieve.

Without the physical presence of the merchants and stores and in the absence of face-to-face communication, the presence of privacy statements can enhance customer experience and satisfaction. Customers become more confident and less concerned with how their data will be used. Similarly, the ability to protect consumer, transaction, and financial data will increase experience and satisfaction with the websites. This is especially true in the era of social media.

Researchers have also examined the effect of various mediating and moderating variables on the relationship between online satisfaction and loyalty. These mediating factors include switching

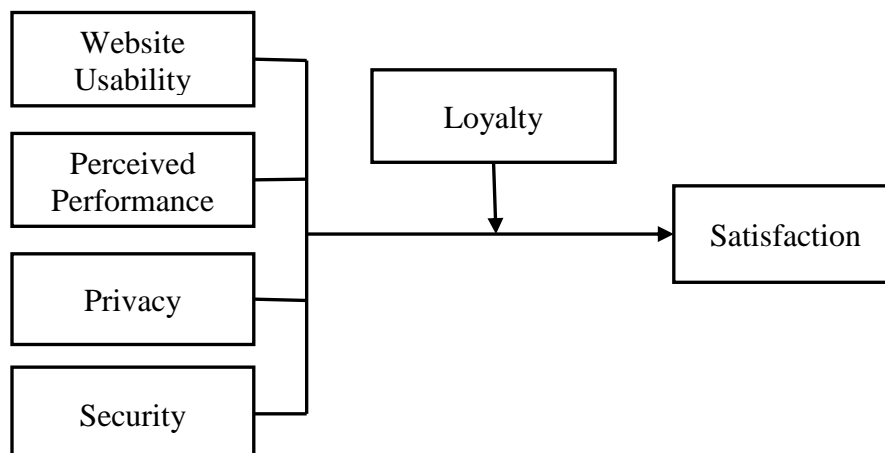
costs and attractive alternatives (Picón *et al.*, 2014). Moderating variables include purchase size (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003), switching costs (Yang and Peterson, 2004), industry and customer segments (Szymanski and Henard, 2001), gender, age, and income (Homburg and Giering, 2001).

Picón *et al.* (2014) noted the mediating roles played by perceived switching costs and attractiveness of alternatives. They found positive and significant effects of perceived switching costs on loyalty. They also found negative and significant effects of attractiveness of alternatives on loyalty. Homburg and Giering (2001) found that product satisfaction rather sales process satisfaction has a stronger impact on loyalty for men and vice versa for women. They found that older people are more loyal if they are satisfied with the products they bought, while younger people tend to associate loyalty more with the sales process experience and satisfaction. They also found that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is stronger for higher income groups of people.

Recent research suggests that the satisfaction and loyalty relationship changes over time. For example, researchers found that as satisfaction increases, its impact on loyalty decreases (Agustin and Singh, 2005). Similarly, other researchers found that the satisfaction effect on loyalty decreases at the later stage of a relationship cycle (Lin and Kuo, 2013). This indirectly might suggest that satisfied and consequently loyal customers are more difficult to continuously satisfy. This indicates the feedback effect of loyalty on satisfaction (Melcher and Melcher, 1980). This might also indicate the presence of a systemic effect such as the increasing impacts of social media on relationship development.

Previous researchers on relationship marketing have observed that the impact of satisfaction on loyalty depends on the customers' relationship orientation. Some customers are more transactional while others are more relational (Jackson, 1985). In order to test the feedback impacts of loyalty, I specifically choose to focus on the moderating impact of loyalty on satisfaction, because previous research found that satisfaction is the main driver of loyalty for low relational customers, while trust and commitment are the main drivers of loyalty for high relational customer (Agustin and Singh, 2005; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Thus, the relationship between satisfaction and its predictors provides an appropriate context to examine the feedback effect of loyalty.

Below is the research model.



Following Flavián *et al.* (2006), I define satisfaction as “an affective consumer condition that results from a global evaluation of all the aspects that make up the consumer relationship” (p. 4). Thus, the definition refers to the relationship-specific rather than a service encounter satisfaction (Shankar *et al.*, 2003). Based on the literature, some of the aspects that affect the online satisfaction include website usability, performance, privacy, and security.

I define website usability as the perceived ease of use of a website, such as site navigation and transaction execution (Flavián *et al.*, 2006). Research shows that a positive perceived experience has a positive association with online satisfaction.

Perceived performance is defined as the integrity and reliability of the merchants and their products. This includes perceptions about price competitiveness, quality, on-time delivery, and after-sales service. These basic aspects of commerce eventually contribute to the customers’ satisfaction with the website. In general, customers who have a positive perception will have higher satisfaction.

Privacy refers to customer information management. It includes usage tracking and customer data sharing (Belanger *et al.*, 2002). Privacy policy is important because e-commerce usually requires the sharing of important personal and financial information. Security refers to website ability and reliability to protect the transaction system. Security issues include destruction, disclosure, and denial of service (Kalakota and Winston, 1999). Previous researchers have found that privacy and security issues are important parts of customers’ experience with a website. Customers who have positive experiences with a firm’s privacy policies and security practices will have higher satisfaction.

Most of the existing literature on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty assumes unidirectional causality. This contrasts with the dynamic system approach which takes into consideration the interdependence among variables and introduces two-way relationships or feedback effects into the relationships being investigated (Melcher and Melcher, 1980).

Consistent with the dynamic system approach, the expectation disconfirmation theory would predict that website satisfaction depends on the intensity and direction between the gap of expectations and perceived performance of the website by their customers (Cardozo, 1965; Oliver, 1980). Since loyal customers have good experiences with the website, they naturally increase their comparison baseline or even increase their expectations. Furthermore, with experience and learning, loyal customers become experts in evaluating the website usability and perceived performance. Collectively, loyal customers have a tendency toward higher expectations and lower perceived performance.

The explanation above suggests that online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationships between satisfaction and website usability, as well as with perceived performance. I contend that the strength of the relationships decreases as loyalty increases. Based on the discussion above, I hypothesize:

- H1: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between website usability and satisfaction.
- H2: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between perceived performance and satisfaction.

Loyal customers share more data. Consequently, firms accumulate more data about them. Thus, loyal customers will be more concerned and expect higher levels of privacy and security. Furthermore, with experience and learning, loyal customers become experts in evaluating privacy

policies and security issues. Collectively, loyal customers have the tendency toward lower perceived performance and higher expectations. The expectation disconfirmation theory would predict less satisfaction (Cardozo, 1965; Oliver, 1980).

The explanation above suggests that online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between satisfaction, privacy, and security. I contend that the strength of the relationships decreases as loyalty increases. Based on the discussion above, I hypothesize:

- H3: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between privacy and satisfaction.
- H4: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between security and satisfaction.

III. Research Methods

A. Data Collection

Survey data were collected from students of a major university in the midwestern United States. The sample size was 400 students. The sample consisted of roughly 60 percent female students and 40 percent male students. Half of the sample had less than 5 years of work experience while the other half had more than 5 years.

The operationalizations of the variables of the study were adapted from previous studies (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003; Flavián *et al.*, 2006; Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa, 2004; Ranganathan and Ganapathy, 2002; Suh and Han, 2003). The constructs have 36 items. Summated scale was created for each construct. The items were measured using the Likert scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

B. Analysis

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the data. It shows the means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix of the predictors, moderator, and dependent variable. The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) results show that the assumptions of linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity are met.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of All Variables

	Means	Std Dev	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Website Usability (1)	3.95	.59					
Perceived Performance (2)	3.61	.68	.55				
Privacy (3)	3.65	.76	.38	.41			
Security (4)	3.92	.67	.57	.61	.52		
Loyalty (5)	3.68	.75	.55	.52	.37	.51	
Satisfaction (6)	4.06	.68	.64	.61	.45	.66	.62

All correlations are significant at .01 level.

Table 2 shows the hierarchical regression analysis results. Model 1 shows that, in order of strength, the four positive and significant predictors of loyalty are website usability, security, perceived performance, and privacy. They collectively explain 58 percent of the variance explained of loyalty. Hypothesis 1 predicts the negative moderating effect of the relationship between website usability and satisfaction. Model 2 of Table 2 shows that the moderating variable is significant and negative. It means that the relationship between website usability and satisfaction is less strong as loyalty increases. With the inclusion of the moderating variable, the variance explained slightly increases. It is also statistically significant.

Table 2: Results of Multiple Regression Models Predicting Satisfaction

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Website Usability	.32***	.53***	.25***	.23***	.24***
Perceived Performance	.22***	.17***	.44***	.17***	.16***
Privacy	.07*	.06	.06	.41***	.06
Security	.31***	.25***	.25***	.26***	.58***
Loyalty		.66***	.53***	.57***	.64***
Loyalty X Website Usability		-.62**			
Loyalty X Perceived Performance			-.49**		
Loyalty X Privacy				-.56**	
Loyalty X Security					-.62***
Multiple R	.76	.78	.78	.79	.79
R2	.58	.61	.61	.62	.62
Adjusted R2	.58	.60	.61	.61	.61
Incremental R2 from Model 1		.01**	.01**	.01**	.01***

*** $p < .01$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .1$.

Hypothesis 2 predicts the negative moderating effect of the relationship between perceived performance and satisfaction. Model 3 of Table 2 shows that the moderating variable is significant and negative. It means that the relationship between perceived performance and satisfaction is less strong as loyalty increases. With the inclusion of the moderating variable, the variance explained slightly increases. It is also statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3 predicts the negative moderating effect of the relationship between privacy and satisfaction. Model 4 of Table 2 shows that the moderating variable is significant and negative. It means that the relationship between privacy and satisfaction is less strong as loyalty increases. With the inclusion of the moderating variable, the variance explained slightly increases. It is also statistically significant.

Hypothesis 4 predicts the negative moderating effect of the relationship between security and satisfaction. Model 5 of Table 2 shows that the moderating variable is significant and negative. It means that the relationship between security and satisfaction is less strong as loyalty increases. With the inclusion of the moderating variable, the variance explained slightly increases. It is also statistically significant.

IV. Theoretical Implication

In the era of social media, customer relationship development is more complex and the study of satisfaction and loyalty becomes more important. Researchers have examined the predictors, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of online satisfaction. It is one of the most important predictors of online loyalty. Collectively, the extant literature has significantly improved our understanding of online satisfaction.

Current literature suggests that some important predictors of online satisfaction are website usability, perceived performance, privacy, and security. These relationships might be mediated or moderated by other variables. Mediating variables include trust, commitment, switching costs, and attractive alternatives. Moderating variables include purchase size, customer segment, industry, age, and income.

This study shows that the four predictors of satisfaction accounts for 58 percent of the variance explained of satisfaction. In general, satisfaction accounts for 25 percent of the variance explained of loyalty (Szymanski and Henard, 2001). However, the relationship does not hold for all contexts; in some contexts, the relationships are stronger and in others they are less strong. For example, for high relational customers, trust and commitment are better predictors of loyalty. Satisfaction might not lead to loyalty if attractive alternatives are easily available. However, unsatisfied customers are loyal if the switching costs are high. We might speculate that the study of trust and commitment would become more important in the future.

The current study extends the literature by examining the feedback effect of loyalty. Instead of treating loyalty as a dependent variable, it is treated as a moderating variable. This is consistent with the dynamic system approach and more specifically the expectation disconfirmation theory. Dynamic system analysis includes the feedback loop of the dependent variable. Similarly, the expectation disconfirmation theory would predict the increasing gap between the comparison baseline and the expectations of loyal customers. This study shows how the feedback effect of loyalty changes the relationships between online satisfaction and its predictors.

Furthermore, examining the feedback effect of loyalty is consistent with the call for the reverse logic approach to studying satisfaction. With the rise of the customer lifetime value approach, managers shifted their attention and resources to focus on satisfaction investment that aims at loyal customers who are usually more profitable. Given empirical studies that show the complexity of loyalty and how satisfied customers are not loyal for many reasons that are out of managers' control, I believe that studying the feedback effect of loyalty is complementary and equally important. It is even more important for firms that embrace the concept of customer lifetime value.

More specifically, the empirical results of this study support the feedback loop hypotheses. I found the negative moderating effects of loyalty on the relationship between satisfaction and its predictors. The results might suggest that loyal customers have better knowledge about site navigation and transactions. This knowledge increases their expectations. Similarly, loyal

customers have better knowledge about price competitiveness, quality, on time delivery, and after sales service. This knowledge helps them identify subpar performance.

Furthermore, loyal customers have higher stakes and are even more concerned about privacy and security issues. As customers develop relationships and loyalty with e-commerce firms, the firms accumulate more data and information about their loyal customers. The data not only include usage tracking and customer data sharing, but also data breaches and disclosure. Thus, customers would be more concerned and expect higher levels of privacy and security.

In conclusion, this study enhances the current literature and our understanding of online satisfaction by examining the feedback effect of loyalty. This complements the previous unidirectional and contextual approach. This is also consistent with the customer lifetime value approach.

V. Managerial Implications

The literature shows that there are many predictors of online loyalty. One of the core variables is satisfaction. Thus, it is important for managers to achieve high level of satisfaction. However, it is not the only consideration. Other relational mechanisms include trust and commitment. For some customers, satisfaction is important, but they are loyal to the websites because of trust and commitment. These are the main drivers of loyalty for high relational customers. Thus, managers need to pursue different approaches to relationship development for different types of customers.

There are four predictors of satisfaction. They are website usability, perceived performance, privacy, and security. They account for 58 percent of the variance explained of satisfaction. Satisfaction itself accounts for 25 percent of variance explained of loyalty. In the era of social media, we might see the decreasing effects of these factors.

Research shows that the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is not straightforward. For example, the relationship might have varying forms and strength given different contexts. Some of these contextual variables include age, income, customer segment, industry, life cycle, switching costs, attractive alternatives, and purchase size. For example, older men will be more loyal if they are satisfied with the products they bought. However, for younger buyers and especially women, sales process satisfaction is an important predictor of loyalty (Homburg and Giering, 2001). In this case, managers need to utilize social media as a relationship development tool with their young and female customers.

Research consistently shows that perceived switching costs are positively associated with loyalty. Thus, managers should utilize programs that increase the perceived switching costs such as loyalty programs.

In this study I examined the feedback effect of loyalty. It might suggest that satisfying loyal customers is more difficult than creating them. Maintaining loyal customers is not free. The implication is that managers must continuously improve what they do. Managers must find better ways to facilitate their website navigation and transactions, improve product performance, enhance privacy policies, and secure transaction systems and data management.

Furthermore, given the rise of social media and customer lifetime value, managers might want to reverse their logic of satisfaction practices. Instead of focusing on satisfying all of their customers, they are better off focusing on the right customers to satisfy and divert some the time and resources to satisfy these loyal customers. Research shows that satisfied customers might not be loyal for many reasons.

VI. Study Two

We have seen how social media transform the whole process of attracting, engaging, and retaining customers. We have seen viral videos of new products or excellent services. We have also seen what went wrong when a firm's products or services went viral and shook their loyal customers. Many of us have made buying decisions based on social media referrals from friends and families. In the era of social media, satisfying loyal customers is a very important research topic. Instead of focusing on how satisfaction creates loyalty, the idea of reverse logic is to focus on a satisfaction investment that concentrates on loyal customers who are usually more profitable and more difficult to retain.

Social media have transformed customer relationship management. But how do social media change the customer relationship management of the social media themselves? Previous research found that social media improved brand loyalty of a product (Erdoğan and Çiçek, 2012). Incite Group (2014), based on the results of the UK Customer Satisfaction Index from the Institute of Customer Service, reports that social media have decreased the level of satisfaction. A previous study has found that attitude is an important predictor of satisfaction and loyalty of social media (Currás-Pérez *et al.*, 2013).

I suspect that reverse logic applies for the social media as well. For example, the rise of social media may be responsible for the failure of MySpace. The current literature may indicate that loyal customers have the tendency to increase their expectations and decrease their perceived performance. Loyal customers are satisfied customers. Satisfied customers might not be loyal. Satisfied customers increase their expectations. With increased experience, they decrease their perceived performance. These relationships are especially true for social media. Based on the discussion above, I propose:

- P1: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between social media usability and satisfaction.
- P2: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between perceived performance and satisfaction.

Loyal customers of social media are more sensitive to privacy and security issues. Loyal customers are also better at evaluating privacy policies and security issues. This explanation suggests that online loyalty has a negative moderating effects on the relationships among satisfaction, privacy, and security. I propose:

- P3: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between privacy policy of social media and satisfaction.
- P4: Online loyalty has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between social media security and satisfaction.

VII. Limitations and Future Research

Satisfaction is just one predictor of loyalty. There are many mediators and moderators. There are also other relational mechanisms such as trust and commitment. Future researchers may want to study the feedback effect of loyalty on trust and commitment or in the presence of other mediating and/or moderators. The presence of these variables may change the feedback impact of loyalty.

Future researchers may want to use longitudinal data to examine the relationship across time. Furthermore, even though college students are appropriate subjects for this study, future researchers may want to examine whether the findings hold for the general public. One issue is that students may be more familiar with technology. This could affect their expectations and create an evaluation gap of website experience.

Future researchers may want to test the social media propositions above. Or they may have to switch and focus on the feedback loop of loyalty on trust and commitment.

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