

# Technology Features and Social Media Influencer E-brand Influencing Customer Loyalty in Online Shopping: A Conceptual Paper

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## Abstract

The paper plans to clarify the relationship of e-customer loyalty with social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption, and perceived humanness, while keeping e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating variables. This study focus to understand what are the factors that affect customers loyalty when customers are shopping online. This study opted for quantitative study and primary data will be collected randomly in Malaysia to ensure test result is sufficiently to represent research population. Data collection will be conducted online using soft copy questionnaires. This study is limited only to Malaysia due to time and geographical limitation. The paper provides insights about the relationship of e-customer loyalty with social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption, and perceived humanness, while keeping e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating variables. This paper considers the effectiveness on e-customer loyalty level after incorporating into business strategy the aforementioned key factors which benefit brand managers who manage customer loyalties, business owners and other researchers pursuing any associated domain knowledge. This paper analyses how the relationships between social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption, and perceived humanness affecting e-customer loyalty, while keeping e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating variables.

**Keywords:** E-Customer Loyalty, Online Shopping, E-Satisfaction, E-Trust, Social Media Influencer E-Brand, Gamification Adoption, Perceived Humanness

## Introduction

The growth in online shopping is undeniably significant for the past 10 years across all countries in this world. In addition, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has accelerated the switch of shopping behaviour from brick & mortar stores to online stores. Although many shoppers are returning to physical stores for their daily purchasing, there are

many customers choosing to continue shopping online despite COVID-19 situations in their countries have improved. From research conducted by Forbes Technology Council, nearly 40% of grocery shoppers plan to stay active in online shopping despite they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 virus strains amid the spread of other COVID-19 variants (Tal, 2021).

The observation of growing trend of online shopping is supported by the 'Southeast Asia, the home for digital transformation' report published jointly by Facebook and Bain & Company, (2021) showing Southeast Asia digital consumers were growing from 310 million people in 2020 to forecasted 380 million people by end of 2026 as illustrated in Figure 1. The report also mentions almost 80% of Southeast Asia consumers choose to shop online when given a choice. In the same study, Malaysia is reportedly leading the region with highest percentage of digital consumers which reach 88% by end of 2021, compared to 86% in 2020.

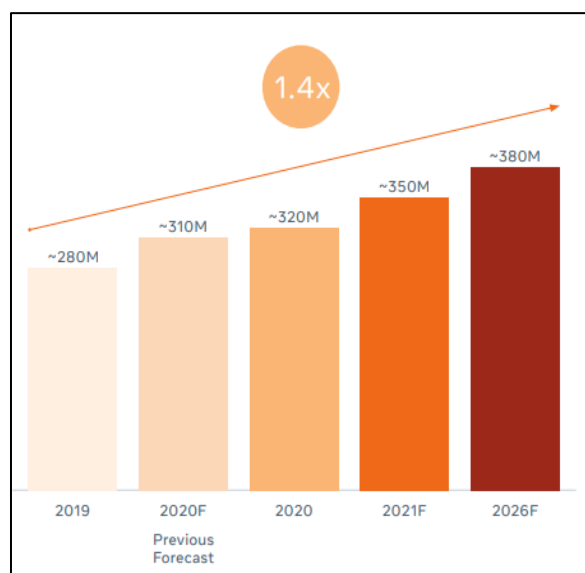


Figure 1

Number of digital consumers in Southeast Asia who are 15 years old and above  
(Source: Facebook and Bain & Company, 2021)

In another report, Malaysia e-commerce performance has recorded an all-time high in 2022 with a value of RM1.1 trillion in 2022. In 2022, the e-commerce sector grew by 6% from 2021 and 63% from 2019 as presented in Figure 2 (DOSM, 2023). This trend is showing the growing acceptance of online business in Malaysia even after the series of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Business owners have no choice but to maintain and expand their business in both offline and online channels, or even transforming businesses into omni-channel model. Naturally, business owners would face new challenges on how to retain their customers in both offline market and as well as online market. Improved shopping experience and loyalty within customers would directly boost the business turnover. So now the races to improve on customer experience and customer loyalty in online businesses are intense in competition and complicated in its execution. It is expected of business owners to provide good customer service by knowing what their customer want, what the customer do, and why they do it (Leachman and Scheibenreif, 2023). Gone are the days of passive consumerism whereby consumers are actively engaging in the brands that they like. Brands consistent active

engagements allow consumers to grow the sense of belonging and ownership which directly impacting sense of brand loyalty (Carter, 2023). Therefore, understanding the factors, especially the shopping technology features that affect customer loyalty, is mission-critical for the business owners to improve turnover and margin. Unlike offline business, digital consumers made purchases based on snap decision rather than thorough product comparison and research (Vogel, 2022).

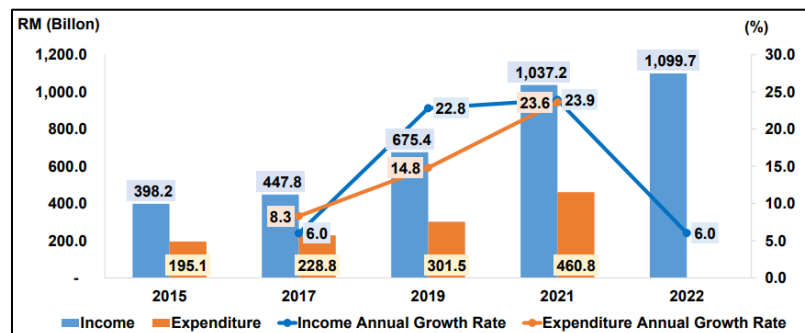


Figure 2: E-Commerce Performance, Malaysia, 2015 - 2022

(Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023)

According to a report from Forbes Technology Council, 56% of CEOs believe that digital improvement for customer journey is important to improve customer loyalties which lead to revenue growth eventually (Morgenstern, 2021). The more customer trusts in a brand, the easier companies build positive customer relationship and garner customer loyalty. Eventually these relationships contribute to opportunities of retaining, upselling or even cross-selling to the loyal customers (Duke, 2023). A research was done in Saudi Arabia and the result showing loyalty programs are getting more popular in the country due to the increase of adoption rate in recent years. Generally, the popularity of loyalty programs increases due to the expansion of e-commerce and digital payments (Wood, 2023). However, weaknesses are present in loyalty programs structured and administered in a traditional manner. Such typical loyalty programs offer point earns depending on the amount spent in purchases. These points can be used for redemption of various reward programs like free products or additional price discounts for next purchase. Key weaknesses of traditional loyalty programs are lack of ease of use and poor accessibility & tracking across multiple loyalty programs (Carter, 2023). One example of innovation was the implementation of decentralised loyalty program. Decentralised loyalty program can overcome the challenges that traditional loyalty program possesses. Brands like Starbucks and Nike have introduced such loyalty program (Carter, 2023). Nevertheless, questions were raised by companies to consider the effectiveness and desirable outcome of such marketing campaigns, notwithstanding the significant investments made upfront (Leung *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, selecting the right factors that affecting customer loyalty are vital to address the concerns discussed above.

The Forbes Technology Council report also summarised there are several important factors that affects customers loyalty in online platform (Morgenstern, 2021). First and foremost, social media influencer e-brand is a factor that affects customer loyalty in online business. Social media influencer e-brands are online personalities who promote endorsed products and services to their followers, and at times even to wider audiences. The former is influencing and impacting the latter's purchasing intention by leveraging the former's reputation and fame. Social media influencer e-brands usually promote the endorsed

products or services by creating digital media contents in the form of videos, posts and stories which establish customer loyalty and increase sales revenue as a result (Times Now Exclusive, 2022).

Furthermore, in the United States of America (U.S.A.), the total revenue generated in social media influencer e-brand industry is \$16.4 billion in 2022. More than 75% of top brands in U.S.A. including Coca Cola and Dior are investing in social media influencer e-brand marketing, thereby illustrating the pervasiveness importance in marketing (Leung *et al.*, 2022). A study was carried out in China, with the focus on social media influencer e-brand marketing posts in social media platform Weibo. The study analyse around 5,800 posts written by 2,412 influencers for 861 brands across various categories. In average the result shows every 1% increase in social media influencer e-brand spends commensurate with the increase in consumer engagement of 0.46% which the study concluded that it is a positive return of investment sign. The study also shows that some businesses have achieved 16.6% increase in consumer engagement by optimising their social media influencer e-brand marketing spending (Leung *et al.*, 2022).

Next, according to Matthews-EL and Bottorff (2022), introducing gamification adoption into customer purchase journey is crucial to retain customer loyalty. The notion of 'money spent by customers yesterday becomes the discount for their purchases tomorrow' shapes up customers as potential repeat purchase customers. In addition, the gamification adoption strategy transforms the customer shopping experience into a long-term conquest for them to collect rewards which motivates customer by offering future purchase discount.

A study has considered it important to create personalise experience in gamification adoption for shoppers which would lead to strong and emotional connection with the brand or shop (Selchau-Hansen, 2022). For that reason, businesses are continuous introducing new features to reward their customers in order to endure loyalty to their brands in Saudi Arabia. Cenomi, which is one of the biggest retailers in Saudi Arabia, introduced a new exclusive loyalty program in March 2023. Members could earn loyalty points by completing their profiles, making referrals to acquaintances, and participating in gamified activities. The author believes that Saudi Arabia players will continue to improve their customer loyalty program especially in gamification in order to accomplish higher engagement with the customers and eventually contributing to the increase of sales (Wood, 2023).

Similarly to another company, Dsquares which is a well-known company specialises in providing loyalty programs across Africa and Middle East has incorporating gamification elements into their engagement program in November 2022. They are hoping to maximise their customer experience by offering tailored programs to match their customers' preferred brands. The integration of gamification eventually targeted to drive sales by enhancing the customer engagement, loyalty and deliver personalised experience for different customers (Wood, 2023). Nike introduces gamification adoption into their new loyalty program. In Nike's program, consumers are pitted against other consumers to compete in a community challenge in order to gain rewards. Such activities tend to make their consumers feeling more engaged and valued by the brand, and therefore leading to improved level of loyalty after all (Carter, 2023).

Lastly, Morgenstern (2021) also mention platform users expect responsive experience from the platform by providing real time and accurate feedback with humanness elements relating to the brand. Some of the solutions, like chatbot and live customer service, respond and fulfil the customer needs in that regard. The perceived humanness element is one of the factors that affect customer loyalty in online business. For instance L'Oreal introduces a new mobile

application, Skin Genius which an AI-powered assessment tool to evaluate customers skin conditions using a privacy-protected picture of customer face. The same mobile application also employs an in-beauty advisor through simulated virtual persona who provides personal advice and plans for better skin care. In return, customers would have a better understanding on their skin condition and better management plan & guidance to purchase the suitable products on a personalised level. With such personalised service and experience, customers tend to increase their loyalty towards the brand (Leachman and Scheibenreif, 2023).

For another example, LEGO group has debuted their new products virtually during COVID-19 pandemic period. Initially, LEGO has launched a self-serviced online catalogue for customers. However, the Danish owned toy company considers the initial approach is ineffective as the approach did not provide good shopping experience for the customers. LEGO determines that the solution design is insufficient to cater customer's unique needs that were previously addressed in-person by sales employee before the onset of COVID-19 lockdowns. Therefore, LEGO group introduced a virtual showroom that provides immersive product viewing experience to their customers. With these technologies, the company allow their employees to serve their customers better and more importantly improve the overall shopping experience with smoother interaction between both (Leachman and Scheibenreif, 2023).

Since e-customer loyalty is very important in online business, it is a must for business owner to understand the technology features and social media influencer e-brand that affecting e-customer loyalty. It is crucial factor for business owners to master in order to improve their business turnover and margin. It also may lead to chances for retain, upselling, or even cross-selling to the loyal customers (Duke, 2023). The earlier sections have explained that social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness are the variables that affect e-customer loyalty with e-trust and e-satisfaction as the mediating variable. This research intends to clarify the relationship of e-customer loyalty with social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption, and perceived humanness, while keeping e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating variables.

### **Background of the Problem**

The need of customers today has evolved much as compared to the past. Today, customers expect more proactive services, personalised interactions & experience while looking for seamless shopping experience in both brick & mortar stores and online stores, all of which are a far cry as compared to the past behaviour where customer focuses only on attractive pricing and good quality services. The advancement of information and technology allows customers to gather information easily, and thus turning themselves into more knowledgeable consumers when choosing a brand for any product or service (Abouelkheir, 2021).

Brands are struggling to maintain and increase their customers loyalty, particularly for the same under the online platform. As customers loyalty poses direct impact to the business revenue, one may ponder the importance to understand what are the factors that affect customers loyalty when customers are shopping through online.

“The biased, behavioural response, expressed over time, by some decision-making unit, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluation) processes” is how Jacoby and Kyner (1973) define customer loyalty. In other word, consumers who show positive interests over time towards their preferred brand could be considered as brand loyal customers. E-customer loyalty should not be drawing similarity with repeat purchase behaviour because customer loyalty

invokes emotional factors between the purchaser and the brand, throughout the customer journey.

E-customer loyalty is no longer a niche focus but an integral part of the brand's ability to attract customer demands. The significant growth of online shopping for the last decades leaving business owners little choice but to compete in this segment in pursuit of business growth.

From the 'Southeast Asia, the home for digital transformation' report by Facebook and Bain & Company (2021), importance of e-customer loyalty remains crucial in e-commerce market as the study also showing an average Malaysian shop-hopping from 4.8x websites in 2020 to 7.0x websites in 2021 before making a purchase as illustrated in Figure 3. In addition, the report also mentions that 45% of Malaysian shoppers switch their most purchased brand in the last 3 months shown in Figure 4.

These observations infer a low degree of e-customer loyalty held for online businesses. Therefore, such inference has amplified the importance of understanding customer loyalty especially during and post COVID-19 pandemic era – no less in its significance in the betterment of online business as opposed to the rising demand in online shopping. Vogel (2022) also added that online purchases usually happened due to snap decisions, unlike offline store purchases. Therefore, online business customer loyalty is more difficult to build and more challenging to secure the sales revenue compared to offline business.

Online customer loyalty, or better known as e-customer loyalty, can be defined as the willingness of customers purchase a product only from a platform and the resistance to shift to and/or complete the purchase on another competitor platform (Flavián et, al, 2006). Al-Adwan *et al.*, (2019) had concluded that e-customer loyalty is extremely important to business to increase their survival chances from stiff competition in the online shopping environment.

	2020		2021	
SEA	5.2	→	7.9	<b>1.5X</b>
ID	5.1	→	8.2	<b>1.6X</b>
MY	4.8	→	7.0	<b>1.5X</b>
PH	4.3	→	7.8	<b>1.8X</b>
SG	5.1	→	6.2	<b>1.2X</b>
TH	5.5	→	8.6	<b>1.6X</b>
VN	5.7	→	8.2	<b>1.4X</b>

Figure 3: Average number of websites used per respondent before online purchase (Source: Facebook and Bain & Company, 2021)



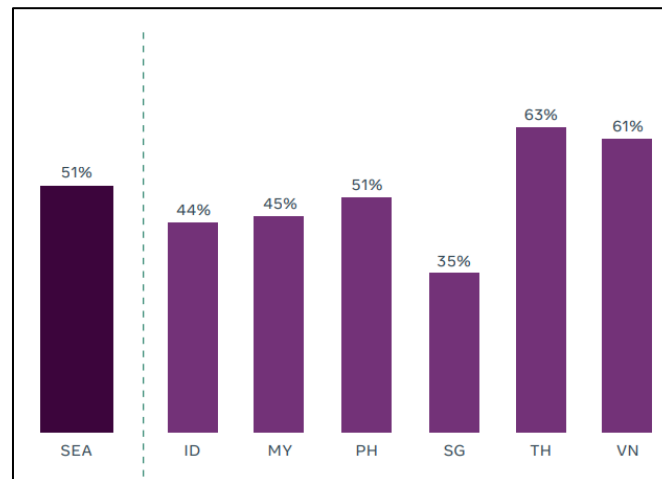


Figure 4: Responses who switches their most purchased brand in the last 3 months  
(Source: Facebook and Bain & Company, 2021)

In general, insights on understanding the online features affecting e-customer loyalty would improve sales income for any online business operating in various industries due to an increase in customers. As for business owners, this research would help them by investing on the important features to boost their e-customer loyalty base (Monae, 2023). In other word, they can avoid unnecessary spending on other less important features when they are developing a new or upgrading their existing online shopping platform. As for brand managers, they could design specific e-customer loyalty program to attract targeted customer segments. These targeted segmentation strategy would promise higher marketing campaign effectiveness with better return of investment (Monae, 2023). Lastly, academics could expand this research on other online features that impacting e-customer loyalty as future researches.

### Research Gaps

Staying competitive in business especially in online market is getting more and more difficult. As discussed in the previous segments, the importance of customers' loyalty to improve sales revenue would be the key challenge for stakeholders. Implementing the right online platform strategy would certainly improve the customer loyalty towards the business but successfully implementations are few and far between.

There are several issues that motivate the onset of this research. The fast-growing online shopping market has increased the chances of brand switching from customers which create a practical-knowledge gap that needed to be addressed through this study. Different company reputation, size of sector, and multichannel presence would impact the determinant to the customer loyalty (Toufaily et.al., 2013). Businesses stand to benefit from a research that would test customer loyalty impact against different sectors, in hope to uncover different outputs and draw meaningful conclusions.

Another knowledge gap from the previous research also lead to this necessity of this research is including e-Satisfaction and e-Trust as mediating variables that affect e-customer loyalty. E-customer loyalty may vary when mediating factors like e-Satisfaction are considered (Moe, 2003; Senecal et. al., 2005). There are limited researches to include mediating variable impact on the customer loyalty. Giao et. al (2020) also suggested to include e-Trust as mediating variables that may tamper with the customer loyalty. Therefore, study should be carrying out in order to examine the role of e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating factors that will affect e-customer loyalty.

Business owners still struggle to grow their business through online market, even after learning the valuable link between e-customer loyalty and their revenue. However, the greatest endeavour for business owners remains to be identifying and implementing the technologies features in online sales platform that affect customer loyalty to its intended efficacy and scale.

Besides that, this study considers the effectiveness on e-customer loyalty level after incorporating into business strategy the aforementioned key factors like social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness. The answers for these questions are necessary as it will directly helping business owners to engage with their customers better and stay competitive in this digital shopping world that remains ever-changing to date.

As has been increasingly argued, loyalty is becoming more elusive especially with the AI based digital era.

### **Scope of Study**

This study aims to determine the technologies features in online sales platform that affect e-customer loyalty, with a primary focus on technological features that affect e-customer loyalty during online shopping. The quantitative study would explore the relationship of e-customer loyalty with social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness, while keeping e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating variables.

The primary data will be collected randomly in Malaysia to ensure test result is sufficiently to represent research population. Boundaries have to be set to make sure the cohesion between analysis and result throughout the research process. Respondents in this study must fulfil following pre-requisites in order to participate to answer the questionnaire:

- 1) had made online purchase before through website or mobile app in the last 12 months,
- 2) had purchased anything at least twice through the same online platform, and
- 3) residing in Malaysia.

The citizenship status of respondent will not be a factor in the study. Data collection will be conducted online using soft copy questionnaires. This study is limited only to Malaysia due to time and geographical limitation.

### **Proposed Research Framework**

The objective to developing a conceptual framework is to construct all variables and identify their relationships as guideline for the formation of hypotheses. The conceptual framework as a diagram serves as a simplified overview to illustrate the complex relationship between the variables, for the benefit of readers. A well established and constructed framework would clearly explain the network of associations among the variables related to the problem (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The associated theories have been merged with the models to support this framework. The independent variables in this research are social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness. E-satisfaction and e-trust acts as the mediating variables and the e-customer loyalty is the dependent variable for this study. The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 5 as below.

The key objective is to identify the most important online technology features that will affect e-customer loyalty. In addition, the objective of this research is to test the relationships between user social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness affecting e-customer loyalty, with e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating



variables. Below are the detail research objectives for this research with regard to the research questions

1. To determine the influence of social media influencer, gamification adoption, and perceived humanness to e-customer loyalty.
2. To examine the significance of the relationship between social media influencer, gamification adoption, perceived humanness, e-satisfaction, and e-trust with e-customer loyalty.
3. To determine the mediating effect of e-satisfaction on social media influencer, gamification adoption, perceived humanness and e-customer loyalty.
4. To determine the mediating effect of e-trust on social media influencer, gamification adoption, perceived humanness and e-customer loyalty.
5. To investigate the influence of e-satisfaction to customer loyalty.
6. To investigate the influence of e-trust to e-customer loyalty.

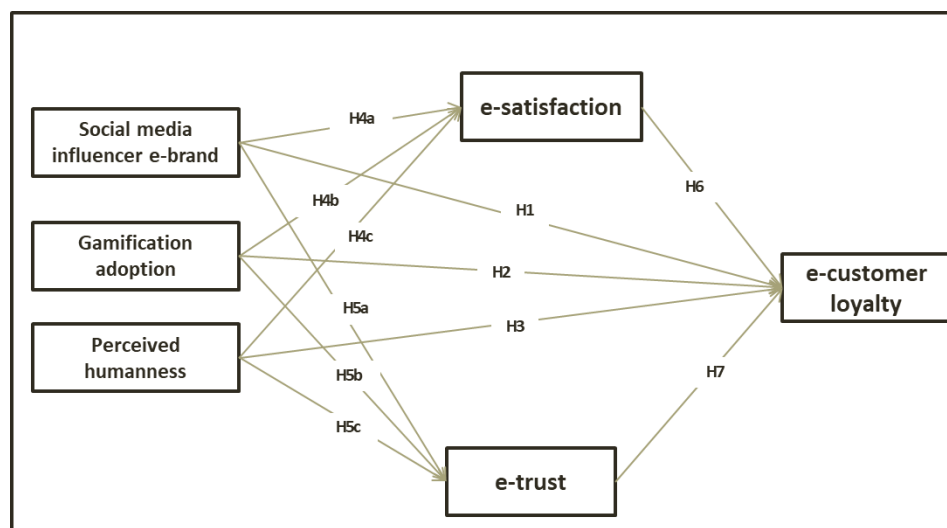


Figure 5: Research Framework

### Hypotheses Development

Hypotheses were developed to test the objective of this study since this research is using quantitative research approach. The first three hypotheses are to examine the relationship between independent variables which are social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness and the dependent variable of e-customer loyalty. Data collection through designed questionnaire survey would be modified after adopted from past related literature. Hypotheses H1 – H3 are designed to answer the first research question of this study.

*H1: Social media influencer e-brand has significant effect on e-customer loyalty*

*H2: Gamification adoption has significant effect on e-customer loyalty*

*H3: Perceived humanness has significant effect on e-customer loyalty*

The next three hypotheses are to examine the mediating effect of e-satisfaction between independent variables like social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness with dependent variable e-customer loyalty. The target questions are answered by analysing mediating effect of e-satisfaction between independent variables with

dependent variable. Hypotheses H4a, H4b and H4c are designed to answer the first research question of this study.

*H4a: e-satisfaction mediates the effect of social media influencer e-brand to e-customer loyalty*

*H4b: e-satisfaction mediates the effect of gamification adoption to e-customer loyalty*

*H4c: e-satisfaction mediates the effect of perceived humanness to e-customer loyalty*

The next three hypotheses are to examine the mediating effect of e-trust between independent variables like social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness with dependent variable e-customer loyalty. The questions are answered by analysing mediating effect of e-trust between independent variables and dependent variable. Hypotheses H5a, H5b and H5c are designed to answer the first research question of this study.

*H5a: e-trust mediates the effect of social media influencer e-brand to e-customer loyalty*

*H5b: e-trust mediates the effect of gamification adoption to e-customer loyalty*

*H5c: e-trust mediates the effect of perceived humanness to e-customer loyalty*

The next hypothesis seeks to find the direct relationship between e-satisfaction and e-customer loyalty. The question is answered by analysing the e-satisfaction influence on e-customer loyalty. Hypotheses H6 is designed to answer the tenth research question of this study.

*H6: e-satisfaction has positively effect on e-customer loyalty.*

The last hypothesis seeks to find the direct relationship between e-trust and e-customer loyalty. The question is answered by analysing the mentioned e-trust on e-customer loyalty. Hypotheses H7 is designed to answer the eleventh research question of this study.

*H7: e-trust has positively effect on e-customer loyalty.*

#### *Relationship between Social media influencer e-brand and e-Customer Loyalty*

The popularity of a social media influencer e-brand is directly proportionate with the number of fans, especially in fashion sector (Navarro, 2016). The study also found out that the primary problem for customers in e-commerce is the lack of trust which could discourage the intent of purchase. Therefore, brands are investing in quality content and storytelling techniques in order to attract customers by offering reasons to purchase (Nannini, 2020). Since customer loyalty is the longest lasting asset of a brand and company (Muniesa and Giménez, 2020), companies choose to invest on social media influencer e-brand in order improve consumer trust and loyalty for long term.

#### **Relationship between Gamification adoption and e-Customer Loyalty**

Gamification adoption has influence on satisfaction through utilitarian value and hedonic value, which indirectly affecting customers' loyalty in online business (Hsu and Chen, 2018). By understanding the effects of gamification, adjustment can be made in order to improve

customers perceptions and satisfaction which eventually lead to improved e-Customer loyalty (Hsu and Chen, 2018).

#### *Relationship between Perceived Humanness and e-Customer Loyalty*

Consumers' perceptions and attitudes are heavily affected by their interaction with Artificial Intelligence (AI) related products like chatbots. For example consumer hopes that chatbots able to show more human-like interaction to them (Schanke *et al.*, 2021). Consumers believe that if chatbots can act like human agents by showing warm care, they would build a communal and friendly relationship, hence increase the trust of the chatbots. Customer loyalty will build upon the trust that was established between the customers and chatbots.

#### *Relationship between e-Satisfaction and e-Customer Loyalty*

Numerous past researches have proven improving customer satisfaction would lead to improving on customer loyalty. Kotler (2005) research found out that improving on quality of service would improve satisfaction and subsequently on the customer loyalty. Moon (2013) added that the importance of this relationship is even stronger in online business due to customers unable to experience the product or service physically compared to offline business.

According to Torres (2017), customer satisfaction is regarded as the prerequisite for customer loyalty, and a satisfied customer tends to maintain connection with a business. What is more, customer satisfaction has a direct and positive effect on loyalty.

#### *Relationship between e-Trust and e-Customer Loyalty*

There are past researches proving the trust has positive impact on customer loyalty in retail sector. Molinillo *et al* (2017); Song *et al* (2021) also supporting the finding whereby customer trust was a significant factors to form customer loyalty. Atulkar (2020) study found out that mall shoppers' trust has significant impact on customer loyalty by way of the structural equation modelling method.

Turning to online business environment, there are also numerous past studies agreeing with the premise that e-trust has positive impact on customer e-loyalty (Ganguly *et.al*, 2009; Shainesh, 2012; Winnie, 2014). Trust can be established through the customer journey while using the online platform to purchase. The customer will purchase through the platform when they trust the technology (Kim *et.al.*, 2009). Customers trust will continue to grow when customers are repeating their purchase though the same platform which reinforce their status as loyal customers (Bhaskar and Kumar, 2016).

#### *Mediator role of e-Satisfaction*

In previous studies, there are evidence that positive mediating effect of e-satisfaction is present between e-customer loyalty and its antecedents (Al-dweeri *et al.*, 2019; Trivedi and Yadav, 2020). Besides that, there is also evidence showing e-satisfaction has positive relationship with e-customer loyalty in the internet service provider sector in Malaysia (Moorthy *et. al*, 2018). Therefore in this research, the mediating effect of e-satisfaction between social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness and e-customer loyalty will be tested.

### **Mediator role of e-Trust**

E-trust is an important factor that influences consumer behaviour as it determines the level of engagement in e-commerce transaction. The lower trust level towards the store, the less likely the customer will purchase from the store (Saoula *et al.*, 2023; Silitonga *et al.*, 2020). Past researchers have found that e-trust plays a mediating role between e-customer loyalty and its antecedents (Dang *et al.*, 2020; Irshad *et al.*, 2020). Therefore in this research, the mediating effect of e-trust between social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness and e-customer loyalty will be tested.

### **Research Design**

In general, the research design is the organisations of a research particularly on how such research would be carry out. Suitable research design remains imperative to achieve the research objectives of study and answering all of the research questions.

After decided the research philosophy, the right approach to theory development shall be selected. The research onion framework suggested several approaches such as deduction, abduction and induction methods (Saunders *et. al.*, 2009). The deductive approach is most suitable for this research because hypotheses testing has been developed by synthesis of past research literature reviews.

Next, the research methodological choice that is use for this research would be mono method quantitative research design that is valued for its comprehensiveness and derivation of objectives from research question (Saunders *et. al.*, 2009). As for the research strategy for this study, the primary data will be collected via survey with representative sample of subjects under the study (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013).

This research would be using cross-sectional time horizon which is suitable for descriptive and hypothesis testing (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

In this section, the methodology of sample size calculation and population identification will be discussed. Determining sample size and handling non-bias response is essential for any quantitative survey design.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), sampling is the process of selecting a sufficient numbers of representatives from the defined population. The unit of analysis for this study is based on individuals' responses and the data aggregation was done from respondent level.

The method of data collection is through questionnaires in online and social media channels. The primary data of this research will be collected with a representative sample of subject of the study (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013). This method has been selected due to its cost effectiveness and expeditiousness (Mangione, 1995)

The target population would be individuals that have online shopping user experience regardless through website or mobile applications. According to Facebook and Bain & Company (2021) there are as many as 22 million of digital consumers in Malaysia as illustrated in Figure 6. Therefore, the sampling frame for this research would be 22 million people. As for the sample size, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) recommended that at least 384 samples size is needed for research population of 1 million people or more. Accordingly for this research, the sample size needed for this study would be 384 samples.

The procedure to select sampling units would be using judgment sampling. This method enables direct outreach to the target population of interest which is less time consuming and more cost effective (Marshall, 1996). As for the sampling method use would be non-probability sampling as it is more conducive and practical when recruiting respondents (Vehovar *et al.*, 2016).

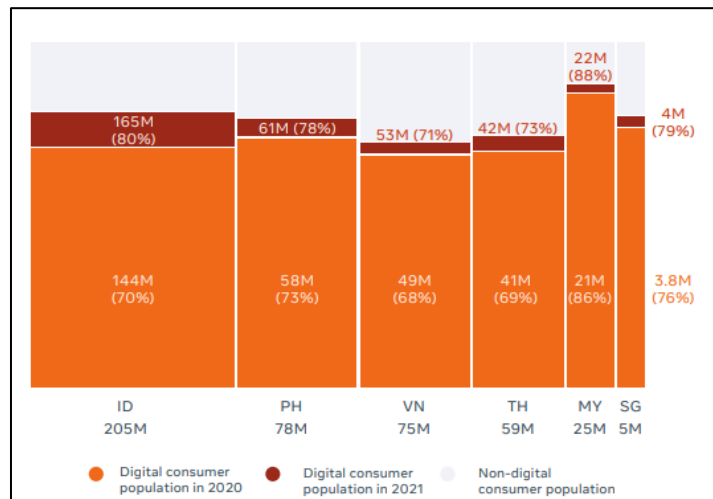


Figure 6: Digital consumers' consumer population in Southeast Asia who are 15 years old and above

(Source: Facebook and Bain & Company, 2021)

### Implication

The present research would analyse in detail how the relationships of -customer loyalty with social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness, while keeping e-satisfaction and e-trust as mediating variables. The findings will benefit brand managers that manage customer loyalties, business owners and other researches. Generally, such insights – to understand the online features affecting e-customer loyalty – would improve sales revenue for any online business across different sectors as driven by greater customer. The research will also study the feature of each variable which can be useful for both business owners and academic researches.

Brand managers would know identify the most significant features that contributed to the customer loyalty for different consumer needs. Therefore, brand managers could design specific contents to attract the targeted customer segments in order to increase their loyalty. For example, offering specific promotions to different segment of customer increasing the likelihood for the purchase. The segmentation strategy would in turn increases the effectiveness of each marketing campaign with better return of investment.

As for business owners, the present research would benefit them by investing on the most significant features to improve their customer loyalty base. In addition, knowing what the most significant online features are could avoid non-favourable spending on other less significant features instead of optimising the expenditure for developing a new online shopping platform or upgrading an existing one, which could prove effectively in achieving greater e-customer loyalty.

Lastly, academics could expand the research on the other significant online features that affecting e-customer loyalty apart from user social media influencer e-brand, gamification adoption and perceived humanness. Research on different economic sectors and locations can be carried out by future researchers to examine the output differences.

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