

## Factors influencing customer loyalty in Malaysian petrol stations: moderating effect location

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**Abstract:** Intense competition has forced petrol stations to be more competitive. Businesses engaged in marketing strategies to improve business performance. Customer loyalty is one of the important approaches for retailers to improve competitive edge. Despite the importance of customer loyalty, some retail stores lack service quality and product quality thereby creating a need of comprehensive measures to explain how customers develop loyalty to a particular store. Many empirical studies have centered on factors influencing customer loyalty in different industries, but this is lacking in the petrol station business. This paper fills the gap by examining the influence of service marketing strategies (sales promotions, service quality and product assortment) on customer loyalty through the mediating effect of customer satisfaction. The paper also investigates the moderating effect of petrol station location on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. Using convenience non-probability sampling, data was collected from 223 customers of petrol stations using self-administered questionnaires. Descriptive statistics; Correlation and regression analysis were used to analyze data using IBM SPSS statistics Version 21. Results show positive significant correlation between service marketing strategies (service quality, sales promotion, and product assortment) and customer loyalty and customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between variables. On the other hand the location of petrol stations moderates the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty.

**Key words:** Sales promotion; Service quality; Product assortment; Location; Customer satisfaction and loyalty

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### 1. Introduction

The effect of market forces, dynamic market environment, globalization and highly competitive markets has forced petrol stations to be highly competitive to sustain their marketability locally and internationally. The intense competition in the markets has made businesses search for better methods to retain existing customers in order to remain competitive. Marketing is very important in commercializing ideas and inventions successfully. Therefore, it is very risky for companies that fail to consider the importance of marketing [1]. Successful marketing provides significant inputs to the firm's overall strategies, retention and attracting the customer and enhance sales.

From identification of brand loyalty till now it has been very debatable and a researchable topic among marketers and researchers in a world. In today's market environment the competition has become too huge to face scarce resources and sustain profitable customers for a longer period of time. As a result customer loyalty becomes the heart of brand customer relationship. Relationship marketing concept is widely discussed in both academic and marketing environment.

The existing national and multinational companies are facing intense competition, it even

more intense because companies are making value for customer to gain market share, which is only possible through customer's loyalty to the brand. This emphasizes the petroleum companies to give more time to customer's orient marketing strategy to gain market share. One of the primary concerns in the petroleum sector of Malaysia is customer loyalty. Customer loyalty is used among almost every profit organization. In a normal situation each company wants to have loyal customers. 'Loyal customers have a high repeat purchase behavior and a positive attitude towards a company' [2]. It is often hard to identify which factors affect loyalty. This research has been conducted in order to find the affiliation between sales promotions, service quality, product assortment and loyalty of the customer with mediating effect of customer satisfaction in this affiliation. In previous literature this research has been conducted in different sectors and customer contents, but in our knowledge no such study conduct in petroleum sector of Malaysia, though that a similar study was done in convenience stores attached to petrol stations but using different factors that influence loyalty which makes it totally different with the present study.

However, the relationships between the factors remain unclear. To uncover the relationships of the factors, this study will focus on the effect of (sales

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promotions, service stations and assortment on loyalty through customer satisfaction. The study reveals that sales promotions, service quality and product assortment affect customer loyalty in the petrol stations and customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between variables.

Petrol stations have been searching for different kind of marketing strategies to attract and satisfy customers in order to expand market share [3]. Therefore this research will uncover the following relationships:

- 1) To examine the effect of marketing strategies (sales promotions, service quality and product assortment on customer loyalty) in the petrol stations.
- 2) To examine the effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty in the petrol station.
- 3) To investigate the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between marketing strategies (sales promotions, service quality and product assortment) and customer loyalty.
- 4) To investigate the moderating effect of location on Satisfaction-loyalty relationship.

The study findings can later guide in formulating comprehensive marketing strategies in developing a marketing plans.

Although customer satisfaction and loyalty has been widely studied across the world. The scope for research and analysis is still vast since the service retailing industries are evolving. This study will provide to some extent the better understanding the influence of these strategies on customer satisfaction towards customer loyalty to patronize the petrol station.

## 2. Literature review

Relationship marketing has been seen as the mainstream of planning a marketing strategy both in consumer marketing and industrial marketing [4]. Brown and Lam [6] and Wisniewski [7] defined relationship marketing as "company behavior with the purpose of establishing, developing and maintaining profitable and competitive customer relationship to the benefit of both sides of the parties". Unlike traditional marketing, relationship marketing is more concerned about building customer relationships in order to achieve long-term mutual benefits for all parties involved in the exchanges. Relationship marketing essentially means developing and maintaining customers relationship i.e. developing customers as partners in the business, which is different from traditional transaction [5].

Due to the keen competition nowadays, companies are increasingly keen on sales promotion to attract consumers and retain them as loyal clients. Sales promotion is a short term incentive which encourages the purchase of sales of a product or service. Sales promotions are non-personal promotional efforts that are designed to have an immediate impact on sales. Sales promotion is media and non-media marketing communications

employed for a pre-determined, limited time to increase consumer demand, stimulate market demand or improve product availability. Some common types of sales promotion include samples, coupons, sweepstakes, contests, in-store displays, trade shows, price-off deals, premiums and rebates.

Customer-perceived service quality has been defined theoretically as the customers' experience on the actual service on various components of the service experience [6], a very similar definition to that was presented in [7]. Which states that: "customer satisfaction is the process where the service organization performed well for the customer pre-purchase expectation and after the purchase of the respective product/service". Service quality is seen as the major tactical factor for service organizations [8]. Moreover, [9] present a similar definition declaring that service quality is "just measuring of a particular service and also understanding the customer's expectation on the service". Every organization looks at customer as the main success of that organization therefore the organization have to provide the customer what they want pertaining the quality for the success of that organization [10].

Product assortment is traditionally defined as the number of products offered within a single product category[11]. Considerable consumer research has examined the influence of the choice set on consumer-decision making. Choice is define as sufficient number and variety to choose among many or the act of choosing [12]. Broad assortments increase the probability that consumers will find their ideal product and offer flexibility for variety seekers. In the 1980s and early 1990s, retailers assumed that larger product assortments better met consumer needs. Broad assortments should increase the probability that consumers will find their ideal product and offer flexibility for variety seekers [13]. Offering a broad variety of products is often a key for web merchants to keep customers coming back. Given much more choices, there will be a higher chance to sell the product. Retailers who have offered a wide variety of products and selections seem to be more successful [14]. Consumers expect retailers to offer a wide range of product variety to track down specialty goods and services [15]. Szymanski and Hise [16] indicated that wider assortment of products may be attractive to customers and satisfaction would be more positive when stores offer superior product assortments.

Customer satisfaction refers to the degree of meeting or exceeding customer needs and expectations by receiving a service or product [17]. According to [18] "satisfaction is an overall customer attitude towards a service provider, or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers anticipate and what they receive, regarding the fulfillment of some need, goal or desire". According to[18], "the service provider has great influence over the customer attitude, which is viewed as satisfaction or an emotional reaction to the difference between what customers anticipate and

what they receive, regarding the fulfillment of some need, goal or desire". Therefore the petrol stations can only maintain and maximize purchases by providing high quality service [19]. The key to long-term business success is customer satisfaction as established by literature [20]. Organizations must offer high quality product or service to ensure customer satisfaction to outperform competitors in order to protect/gain market shares [21].

**Customer loyalty:** Customer retention and customer loyalty mean the same [22]. Gremler and Brown [23] define service loyalty 'as the degree to which a customer exhibits repeat purchase behavior from a service provider, positive attitudinal disposition toward the provider, and ready to use the same provider when a need for the service arises. Zineldin and Jonsson [24] defines retention as a commitment to continue to do business or exchange with a particular company on an ongoing basis.

According to Clark [25], long-term customer retention in competitive markets requires the provider going beyond basic satisfaction to creating loyalty in order to guard against competitor attack".

Location refers to a general area within a city. [26] refer location as a choice of locating your business either in small, medium or large cities, rural or urban center. This is also link with the type of product or service the firm tend to offered, like the petrol station will be more profitable when located in an urban area rather than rural. Location is accessibility and nearness of the firm to infrastructures, raw materials, how busy the location is? And how accessible the location is to the customers etc.?[27]

[28] has reported that the strategic location of the petrol stations have assisted them in achieving a positive performance. Therefore, it is important for petrol stations to consider the strategic location in creating loyalty because location strengthen the effectiveness of satisfaction-loyalty relationship i.e. the satisfaction-loyalty relationship is more effective with the presence of strategic location.

### 3. Research framework

The research framework shows the link between research variables, where sales promotion, service quality and assortment affects loyalty.

### 4. Hypothesis

Based on the above discussion in literature review the following hypothesis was been developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in petrol stations

H2: There is a positive relationship between sales promotions and customer satisfaction in the petrol stations

H3: There is a positive relationship between product assortment and customer satisfaction in the petrol stations

H4: There is a positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in petrol stations

H5: There is a positive relationship between sales promotions and customer loyalty in the petrol stations

H6: There is a positive relationship between product assortment and customer loyalty in the petrol stations

H7: There is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty

H8: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty

H9: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between sales promotions and customer loyalty

H10: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between product assortment and customer loyalty.

H11: Location moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty.

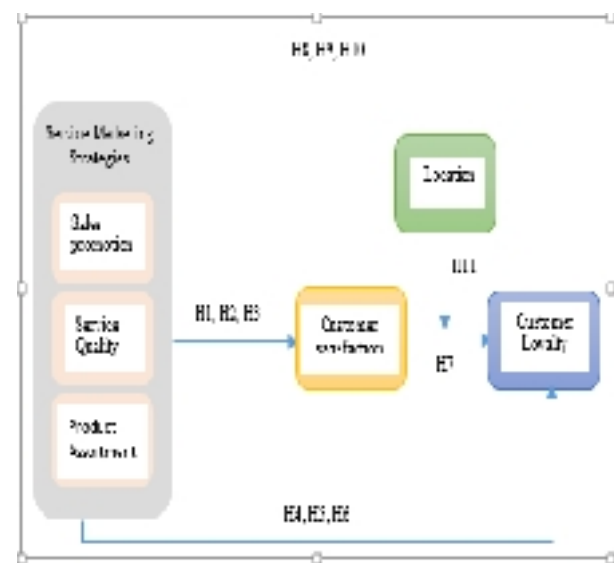


Fig. 1: Research framework

### 5. Methodology

The unit of analysis in the research was consumers of the petrol stations in Malaysia limiting to PETRONAS, ESSO and SHELL. The respondents are undergraduate student from UTP. This study employs the non-probability because probability is more expensive and time-consuming than non-probability sampling. The researcher used convenient sample in order to enable finish the research at the expected time. According to Roscoe's, as a rules of thumb good maximum sample size is usually 10% as long as it does not exceed 1000.

Therefore; the study used 10% of number of undergraduate students, that is; 10% of 2232 = 223. This is supported by [39] who recommended a 'critical sample size' of 200. Furthermore, as a rule of thumb, any number above 200 is assumed to be appropriate for data analysis. In order to get 223 valid responses 400 questionnaires were distributed.

223 respondents from convenience sampling were selected and Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the direction, strength and

significance of following relationships and multiple regressions was used to measure mediating and moderating effects using SPSS version 21.

**6. Result and discussion**

**Table 1:** Respondent's profiles

Profile	Description	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 18	17	7.6
	18-20	54	24.2
	21-23	93	41.7
	24-26	59	26.5
Gender	Male	126	56.5
	Female	97	43.5
Race	Malay	129	57.8
	Chinese	41	18.4
	Indian	38	17.0
	Others	15	6.7
Frequency of visit	Daily		
	Once a Week	7	3.1
	Twice a Week	76	34.1
	Once in 2 Weeks	40	17.9
	Once in a Month	26	11.7

**Table 2:** Reliability result

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Interpretation
Service quality	0.853	15	Good
Sales promotion	0.762	5	Acceptable
Product assortment	0.867	11	Good
Location	0.765	7	Acceptable
Customer satisfaction	0.831	12	Good
Customer loyalty	0.938	15	Excellent

The reliability of the research variables was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The alpha for the dependent variable and all independent variables are above 0.7 which exceeded the minimum value. Therefore, no item was deleted.

**Table 3:** Correlation between research variables

Pearson Correlation	Service Quality	Sales Promotion	Product Assortment	Customer Satisfaction	Customer Loyalty
Service Quality	1	-.011	.009	.252**	.170
Sales Promotion	-.011	1	.456**	.420**	.451**
Product Assortment	.866	.866	1	.547**	.568**
Customer Satisfaction	.009	.456**	.009	1	.752**
Customer Loyalty	.893	.420**	.893	.547**	1

Correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the predictors and customer loyalty (service quality (0.170), sales promotions (0.451), and assortment (0.568), satisfaction (0.752)). The correlation table shows that all predictors were positively and significantly correlated with customer loyalty, indicating that those with higher scores on these variables contribute more to customer satisfaction and loyalty. The result shows positive and significant

relationship between variables. The analysis finds hypotheses 1-11 were supported. It is also found that among the three independent variables, product assortment (0.568) is the best predictor of customer loyalty followed by sales promotion and service quality (0.170) is the least predictor among them. The results are consistent with some of the previous studies. However, there are literatures that support the results in this study.

**Table 4:** Mediation Test

Model	R	R Square	Change Statistics				
			R Square Change	F Change	df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.631 <sup>a</sup>	.398	.398	48.291	3	219	.000
2	.782 <sup>b</sup>	.611	.213	119.244	1	218	.000

**Table 5:** ANOVA for mediation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	41.425	3	13.808	48.291	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	62.621	219	.286		
	Total Regression	104.045	222			
2	Regression	63.567	4	15.892	85.585	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	40.479	218	.186		
	Total	104.045	222			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty

- b. Predictors: (Constant), Product Assortment, Service Quality, Sales Promotion
- c. Predictors: (Constant), Product Assortment, Service Quality, Sales Promotion, Customer Satisfaction

**Table 6:** Coefficients for mediation

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	Constant	-.911	.512		-1.780	.076
	Service Quality	.343	.107	.169	3.220	.001
	Sales Promotion	.301	.072	.246	4.178	.000
	Product Assortment	.659	.085	.455	7.720	.000
2	Constant	-1.328	.414		-3.206	.002
	Service Quality	.040	.090	.020	.440	.661
	Sales Promotion	.140	.060	.115	2.345	.020
	Product Assortment	.276	.077	.191	3.578	.000
	Customer Satisfaction	.899	.082	.595	10.920	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty

As seen from the Table 4 (Model summary), under for 'R Square Change' (Model 1), the main effect of Product Assortment, Service Quality, Sales Promotion accounted for (0.398) of the variance in customer loyalty which was significant (Sig F Change = 0.000).

Also, it can be seen from (Model 2) that the effect of Product Assortment, Service Quality, Sales Promotion when add Customer Satisfaction accounted for an additional (0.213) of variance in customer loyalty which was significant (0.000) too. The ANOVA table was significant too as seen in Table 6.

Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between independent and dependent variable and location moderate the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. The study finds that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between all independent variable and dependent variable. Customer satisfaction fully mediates relationship between service quality and loyalty (p=.001) while it partially mediates the relationship between sales promotion and customer loyalty (p=.000). The study also finds partial mediation between product assortment and customer loyalty (p=.000). This result support some studies like that of [29] who asserted that, the application of

customer satisfaction is very important because it plays a crucial role in gaining customer loyalty.

**Moderation Test**

In order to test the moderator, there was a need to center and compute the predictor variables (customer satisfaction and location) and multiplied centered variables and that would give the interaction effect (Kim et al. 2001). To center the variables, the means of the predictor variables were calculated.

To compute the centered variables for each response, the mean of each predictor variable were subtracted from the respective variable. The resulting variables were coded as CI and Ccs respectively for location and customer satisfaction. To calculate the interaction effect, the centered variables (CI and Ccs) were multiplied. To check if location has a moderating effect on the relationship between the customer satisfaction and the loyalty the linear regression was run.

**Table 7:** Descriptive statistics of means

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Location	223	3.97	.570
Customer Satisfaction	223	3.94	.453
Customer Loyalty	223	3.85	.685
Valid N (listwise)	223		

**Table 8:** ANOVA for moderation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	63.717	2	31.859	173.798	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	40.328	220	.183		
	Total	104.045	222			
2	Regression	65.686	3	21.895	125.005	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	38.359	219	.175		
	Total	104.045	222			

**Table 9:** Coefficients of moderation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	-1.200	.275		-4.361	.000

1	Customer Satisfaction					
	Location	.998	.069	.661	14.504	.000
	Constant	.281	.055	.234	5.140	.000
2	Customer Satisfaction	-1.412	.276		-5.110	.000
	Location					
	CICCs	.942	.069	.624	13.592	.000
		.400	.064	.333	6.235	.000
		-.375	.112	-.165	-3.353	.001

Looking at the p-value (Model 1) in Table 9 of the t-test for each Looking at the p-value (Model 1) of the t-test for each predictor, we can see that customer satisfaction (0.000) and location (0.002) significantly contributes to the model. When the interaction term was entered into the model (Model 2) in Table 9 as a moderator, it is still significant ( $p=.000$ ). According to [38], we can then conclude that location is a moderating variable between (customer satisfaction and customer loyalty) hence we support the hypothesis.

In summary, the result shows that service quality, sales promotion, product assortment influence customer loyalty directly and indirectly through satisfaction. The results show all predictors are important in determining customer loyalty in petrol station.

## 7. Contribution

The study is the only research that examines the mediating impact of customer satisfaction and the moderation impact of location on the relationship between service quality, sales promotion and assortment on customer loyalty in petrol station.

The study will benefit future researchers because it expand knowledge by providing new findings in this area because it shows the effect of sales promotions, service quality, product assortment on customer loyalty, it also shows the mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the relationship between predictors and outcome and lastly it shows the moderating effect of location on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Service stations: the petrol stations will benefit from the study by getting more ideas on where to spend their money base on the different marketing strategies in order to expand business and the study also provide recommendations for petrol stations based on results and findings. No specific study of this nature has been carried out before in the petroleum retail sector of Malaysia.

Oil and gas industry: The study will also benefit the oil and gas industry as a whole because most of the income comes from the downstream industry.

## 8. Limitations and Suggestion for future research

This study used a convenience sample rather than a random sample i.e. the study adopts non probability sampling and not probability sampling. Therefore future studies should use probability sampling like random or stratified sampling in order to generalize results obtained to a larger population.

Secondly, future studies should employ longitudinal survey rather than cross sectional survey. Because in cross sectional survey, data is collected at a single point of time from multiple cases but does not consider the issues of causality so future studies should use longitudinal in which the researcher will administer a survey to one set of respondents over multiple time points and issues of causality can be determined.

Additionally, the survey used quantitative method which is based on questionnaires. One key benefit of using questionnaires or quantitative analysis is that hypotheses can be directly tested based on the empirical data collected from questionnaires. However, a future study should incorporate qualitative analysis which will further explore this research. In-depth interviews utilizing open-ended questions could allow for deeper exploration of these measures. Further research should focus on other group of respondents and lastly compare between the different petrol stations in Malaysia and other countries.

## 9. Conclusion

Conclusively, the research found that service quality, sales promotion and product assortment are important predictors of customer loyalty therefore in order to increase customer loyalty in petrol stations service quality, sales promotion and assortment should be taken into consideration.

## Recommendations

Petrol stations should conduct more sales promotions because it helps in attracting more customers to the petrol stations. They should also try as much as possible to communicate their products to customers through different social media because most of the customers are not aware of the sales promotions they conduct. They can retain customers by engaging in giving discounts, coupons, contests and through email blasting. When customers patronizing the petrol station are familiar with it, they may continue using it if they are satisfied. This will reduce switching behavior to the rivals and increase the possibilities for attracting/stealing customers from rivals.

Petrol stations should improve their service quality, some customers complain about the service quality especially in terms of accurate transactions; they sometimes have long queues. Petrol stations can improve service quality in terms of politeness of employees, quick response to customer complaints,



fast delivery in transaction, modern equipment and technology, neat appearance employees, secured transactions and parking space, excellent fuel and air pumps, convenient operating hours, employees should be consistently courteous and polite with customers, provide service at promised time, consistent fuel and diesel availability and good attitude of employees.

Product Assortment is very important in choosing a petrol station therefore petrol stations should provide variety products and services in their petrol stations and in the convenient stores. Products in the store should be in sufficient number of sizes to satisfy customer needs, products display should always be attractive, products should be arranged in a manner that a customer will easily find what he is looking for in the convenient store, the product arrangement should meet customer expectations, there should be enough product to choose from, new products should be frequently presented in the convenient store.

The findings of the study show that Location plays an important role in the effectiveness of satisfying customers and improving loyalty. Therefore petrol stations should consider their business location before any other thing.

In conclusion, Malaysian petrol stations should employ marketing strategies like sales promotions, service quality, products assortment and location to satisfy their customers which in turn increase customer loyalty. The loyal customer helps in attracting new customers or stealing competitors' customers by spreading positive word of mouth and recommending the brand to family and friends. These marketing strategies increase customer loyalty by changing non-users to trials, trials to users, and users to loyalist.

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