

The Relationship of Digital Post-Purchase Brand Touchpoints on Relationship Quality and Self-Brand Connection in the Context of Repurchase of an Automobile

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Abstract

The purposes of this study is to investigate the effect of types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on the relationship quality and the self-brand connection within the repurchase context of the automobile. Survey research with a structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The target population of this research is all current users of the medium segment of a passenger car who are both male and female, age between 18-60 years old, and 100,000 Baht and above of monthly household income. The total number of the target population is approximately 3.6 million users as reported by the Department of Land Transportation. The sample is the current Toyota Camry and Honda Accord users who bought the cars between 2014 and 2018 in Bangkok and its vicinity. Stratified random sampling was used to select a total of 604 samples. Factor analysis was used to classify digital post-purchase brand touchpoints into dimensions. Besides, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the relationship between types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints and relationship quality, as well as self-brand connection. The rotated solution yielded three interpretable factors which include information-based, interaction-based, and service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints. Structural equation modeling (SEM) indicated that the model was

a good fit to the data. The predictors were able to account for 15 per cent of the variance in relationship quality, whereas it accounts for 8.5 per cent of the variance in self-brand connection. Interaction-based and service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints have effects on relationship quality and self-brand connection. However, information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints did not have a direct effect on relationship quality and self-brand connection.

Keywords: post - purchase buying behavior, digital brand touchpoint, relationship quality, self - brand connection

Introduction

In the quest of the business success, automobile industry in Thailand must shift its focus from customer acquisition to customer retention, since the domestic automobile market has already moved from the growth to maturity stage of the product life cycle. The domestic sales hit the peak with nearly 30 per cent of the average market growth (Thailand Automotive Statistics, 2019) during the 2009-2013 and became the largest in Southeast Asia (Maikaew, 2018) and the 12th largest in the world (Santivimolnat, 2012; Languelin, 2013). The industry had an annual output of near two million vehicles including passenger cars and pickup trucks, more than countries such as Belgium, the United Kingdom, Italy, Czech Republic, and Turkey. However, the market showed to play down with the average growth rate at less than 10 per cent from 2014 to date.

Besides, the business must transform itself into digital, as the digital penetration has been increasing. The number of internet users in Thailand increased by 1.0 million (+2.0 per cent) between 2019 and 2020. As of January 2020, internet penetration in Thailand stood at 75 per cent, while social media penetration in Thailand stood at 75 per cent, and the number of mobile connections in Thailand was equivalent to 134 per cent of the total population (Kemp, 2020). The proliferation of

digital as a new format of brand touchpoints has switched consumers to digital life in which it speeds up the desire for information and connectivity.

Under the circumstances of the hyper-competitive market, marketers must investigate how to harness digital post-purchase brand touchpoints to influence such determinants as relationship quality and self-brand connection that could drive repurchase behavior of automobile. Relationship quality and self-brand connection are those drivers of repurchase behavior. Popjaney (2016) found that relationship quality might lead to the repurchase in the context of automobile purchase, as it guaranteed that consumers who rated with high relationship quality would go to other brands in their next purchase. Furthermore, the self-brand connection drove repurchase intention among shopping goods (Hapsari & Adiwijaya, 2014).

To ensure the marketing effectiveness, marketers have to optimize the usage digital post-purchase brand touchpoints by finding effective type of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints that can promote relationship quality, and self-brand connection to enhance repurchase of automobile. Suthongwan and Kuntonbutr (2020) found that the traditional post-purchase brand touchpoints were significant to the relationship quality and the self-brand connection. This research extended Suthongwan and Kuntonbutr (2020) by investigating the effect of types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on the relationship quality and the self-brand connection within the repurchase context of the automobile.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research were as follows:

1. To determine the effect of types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on the relationship quality in the repurchase of the automobile.
2. To determine the effect of types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on the self-brand connection in the repurchase of the automobile.

Literature Review

1. Brand touchpoints and their classifications

Past related research on brand touchpoints were categorized into four categories: customer purchase experience-based brand touchpoint; ownership-based brand touchpoint; task-based brand touchpoint; platform-based brand touchpoint. First, Dunn and Davis (2004) classified brand touchpoints according to the stage of customer purchase ranging from pre-purchase, during-experience, and post-experience brand touchpoints. Second, Mårtenson (2008) categorized brand touchpoints into controllable, and uncontrollable. The controllable brand touchpoint comprised all brand touchpoints that a company was able to completely control in its implementation, and the uncontrollable brand touchpoint comprised all brand touchpoints that could not be controlled at all. Third, Hallikainen et al.(2018) identified digital brand touchpoint into such categories as functional brand touchpoint, social brand touchpoint, and community brand touchpoints. Besides, Cook (2014) asserted that customers now became connected customers where they had interaction with multiple touchpoints throughout their shopping journey, as the results, the platform-based brand touchpoints were also categorized into online and offline brand touchpoints.

2. Digital post-purchase brand touchpoints and relationship quality

Trust, satisfaction and commitment had also been referred to as the building blocks of relationship quality (Crosby et al., 1990; Kempeners, 1995). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) discovered the relationship among brand trust, brand affect, and brand performance outcomes which included market share and relative price. Sahin, et al. (2012) tested the effects of brand experience and service quality through various brand touchpoints on repurchase intention with the role of relationship quality. It was found that brand experience, brand satisfaction, and brand trust were shown to have a positive effect on repurchase intention.

Baxendale et al. (2015) examined the impact of six brand touchpoints on brand consideration which included brand advertising, retailer advertising, in-store

communications, peer-to-peer conversation, traditional earned media, and peer observation. It was found that all of those brand touchpoints had a significant effect on brand consideration on a different degree. Marco and Cristina (2017) examined the relative importance of twenty-four touchpoints in contributing to customer loyalty to mobile service operators. It was found that the reach of brand touchpoint was related to customer loyalty as far as eight brand touchpoints were concerned. These included a corporate website, physical store, word of mouth, emailing, loyalty program, and mobile app. However, the reach of brand touchpoint was negatively related to customer loyalty. These were online advertising and telemarketing. As far as the nine brand touchpoints were concerned, the positivity of brand touchpoint had effects on customer loyalty. These included customer service, mobile messaging, corporate website, TV and cinema advertising, physical store, mobile app, word of mouth, staff and special event.

Besides, Dunn and Davis (2004) stated that spending money on the brand touchpoints created relationship quality and brand loyalty, which made the brand much stronger. Edwards (2009) stated that brand trust mediated the relationship between brand touchpoint and sales and profit. To be specific, brand consistency throughout the brand touchpoints provided by a company could create trust in the brand, which might lead to increased sales and profit, and vice versa. It was found that the related past literature confirmed that brand touchpoints had an impact on relationship quality; however, the mentioned effects were the results of a mixture between digital and non-digital brand touchpoints. Also, it was the mixed effects of pre-purchase, during-purchase, and post-purchase experience. As this study aims at exploring the pure effect of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on relationship quality, hence, the research hypothesis was proposed as

H₁: *There is a positive correlation between the types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints and relationship quality.*

3. Digital post-purchase brand touchpoints and self-brand connection

Self-brand connection connoted that the extent to which consumers identified with and instrumentally used a set of brand associations to construct self-identity, not emotional attachment or affection. Escalas and Bettman (2003) proposed that brand associations that were connected with self in which it gives meaning to consumers. The researchers conceptualized the consumer and brand linkage at the aggregate level of self-brand connections as the brand image became a key consequence of the constellation of the gestalt associations.

Loureiro et al. (2012) integrated the scattered brand attachment, commitment, and brand trust into a brand love model for a test of non-hedonic products. The researchers surveyed 374 samples who were owners of Toyota, Ford, Renault in Portugal. It was found that a self-expressive brand and brand attachment had an impact on brand love. The brand love was shown to have a direct effect to brand loyalty, and indirect effect to brand loyalty through commitment and brand trust. Hazel and Vincent-Wayne (2013) examined the influence of need for achievement and brand consciousness on the self-brand connection. It showed the significant paths between achievement striving and brand consciousness and between brand consciousness and self-brand connection. Lin et al. (2017) investigated consumers' perception of a brand's green benefits which composed of utilitarian environmental and warm glow, and green transparency on their green perceived value. The self-brand connection was used as a mediating effect between green perceived value and brand loyalty. The findings showed that self-brand connection had an impact on brand loyalty. Past related research found that self-brand connection could drive relationship quality and vice versa. But most of the drivers of self-brand connection were such psycho-social attributes as need for achievement, brand conscious, brand love, and others. However, Van Der Westhuizen (2018) proposed that the self-brand connection is associated with brand loyalty through the brand experience. Brand experience through various brand touchpoints should verify the self-brand connection by acting as a mechanism through which a self-brand

connection is associated with brand loyalty. In short, it concluded that an accumulation of brand experience can lead to a formation of self-brand connection, hence this research would like to study the direct effects of post-purchase brand experience through digital brand touchpoints on the association of perceived self-concept of consumers and brand within the repurchase context of automobile. Hence, the research hypothesis is proposed as

H₂: *There is a positive correlation between the types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints and self-brand connection.*

Based on the aforementioned hypotheses, research framework is exhibited in Figure 1 below.

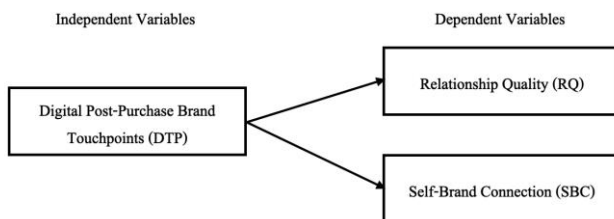


Figure 1: Research Framework

Methodology

1. Research design

This study was designed to investigate the existing facts in the market without creating any research intervention. Survey research with a structured questionnaire was used for data collection.

2. Population and sample

The target population of this research was all current users of the medium segment of a passenger car (including Toyota Camry, Honda Accord, Nissan Teana) in Thailand. The sample of this study was both male and female, age between 18-60 years old, living in Bangkok and its vicinities who bought Toyota Camry or Honda Accord branded cars between 2014 and 2018. All of them were the main buying decision-maker of the automobile at the purchase. Since the population was known, the stratified random sampling was chosen as the sampling method for this study. The sample consisted of 604 current passenger car users of the medium segment in Thailand.

3. Sample Size Determination

Sample size determination used by most research conducting for SEM were often considered in light of the number of observed variables. For normally distributed data, Bentler and Chou (1987) suggest a ratio as low as 5 cases per variable would be sufficient when latent variables have multiple indicators. A widely accepted rule of thumb is 10 cases/observations per indicator variable in setting a lower bound of adequate sample size (Nunnally, 1967). There were six latent variables with 93 observed variables. Then, the acceptable range of sample size must be between 465 and 930. Since the model size was moderate, this study collected data from a total of 650. However, at the later stage of source accuracy assessment, 46 sets of questionnaire were dropped, whereas 604 sets of questionnaire were further used for data processing. However, a total sample size of 604 could meet the aforementioned requirement of sample size determination.

4. Research instrument

The survey instrument consisted of such five sections as (1) qualification screening, (2) digital post-purchase brand touchpoints, (3) relationship quality, (4) self-brand connection, and (5) the profile of the respondent. The reliability of the

questionnaire was determined to ensure that the responses collected through the instrument were reliable and consistent. According to the pre-test, the Cronbach's Alpha for digital post-purchase brand touchpoints was 0.964, relationship quality was 0.961, and the self-brand connection was 0.970, so the questionnaire was highly reliable.

Such key measures as digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (DTP), relationship quality (RQ), and self-brand connection (SBC) were derived from past related literature with high-reliability scores. First, we measured digital post-purchase brand touchpoint by adapting the measurement scale of the frequency of brand touchpoint from McFarland and Buehler (1998) and Baxendale et al. (2015) respectively. Some of them were "how often did you encounter website, social media, online user review and others of Toyota Camry/Honda Accord?" and others. The five-point scale response ranging from most frequent and the least frequent was used. Second, the measurement of relationship quality was developed by adopting Kim et al. (2012). Some of these items were "the product quality of the Toyota Camry/Honda Accord is exactly what I want," "I don't regret choosing Toyota Camry/Honda Accord" and others. The five-point scale response ranging from most to least was used. Last, the measurement of self-brand connection was adopted from Escalas (2004). Some of them were "Toyota Camry/Honda Accord could reflect who I am," "I could identify with Toyota Camry/Honda Accord" and others. The five-point scale response ranging from most to least was used.

5. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was administered in such three phases as pretest, questionnaire distribution, and followed by source accuracy. First, we conducted the pre-test to find the reliability of questionnaires by examining Cronbach Alpha. Thirty staffs from three divisions (Compliance Division, Internal Audit Division, and Credit Management) and six staffs from CEO office were administered the questionnaire for

the pre-test. In total, 30 participants were selected for the pre-test. Second, after the validity and reliability of questionnaires had been completely controlled and checked thoroughly, we administered the questionnaires to 650 respondents. Last, once the completed questionnaire was sent back, data source accuracy was also traced. At the total, 46 sets of questionnaire were terminated due to the missing data in some items. Six hundred and four sets of questionnaire were further used for data processing.

6. Data Analysis

Data collected was administered in two stages. First, to classify specific digital post-purchase brand touchpoints into dimensions of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints, such data-reduction technique as factor analysis was used to classify digital post-purchase brand touchpoints into factors. It was an appropriate method because it was used to identify factors that statistically explain the variation and covariation among measures. The number of factors is smaller than the number of measures, and the factors succinctly represent a set of measures. Second, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the relationship between types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints and relationship quality, as well as self-brand connection, as proposed in the hypotheses. Structural equation modeling was selected for use in the current study, as the researchers are allowed to specify and test both the measurement model between latent and observed variables and the path (structural) model of the latent variables (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2006). The authors constructed an analysis of the proposed model using AMOS 24 (IBM, Armonk, NY). Prior to beginning the structural equation modeling analysis, bivariate correlations were calculated across each of the scaled measures. Also, Cronbach's alpha for each scale was computed to assess internal consistency and reliability within the current sample.

Results

In this section, there were five sections: profile of the respondent; a classification of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints; model fit for structural model; the effect of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on relationship quality; the effect of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on self-brand connection.

1. Profile of the respondent

Over half the respondents (55%) self-identified as male, and the rest (45%) was female. The age range of the respondents was between below 26 years old and 60 years old and above. The majority of the respondents (40%) was between 31-40 years old, followed by 21% of the respondents between 41-50 years old. The largest proportion of respondents (74%) self-identified as company employee and business owner, whereas most of them (43%) self-reported their monthly personal income was between less than 30,000 THB and 49,999 THB.

2. A classification of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints

The 15 items from the digital post-purchase brand touchpoints were analyzed using unweighted least squares factor analysis. Three criteria were used to determine the number of factors to rotate: the a priori hypothesis that the measure was unidimensional, the scree test, and the interpretability of the factor solution. The scree plot indicated that the initial hypothesis of unidimensionality was incorrect. Consequently, three factors were related using a Varimax rotation procedure. The rotated solution, as shown in Table 1 below, yielded three interpretable factors, information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (InfoDTP), interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (InterDTP), and service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (SerDTP). The information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (InfoDTP) accounted for 6.5 per cent of the item

variance, interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (InterDTP) accounted for 63.0 per cent of the item variance, and service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (SerDTP) accounted for 9.0 per cent of the item variance.

Table 1

Correlations between DTP Items and the DTP Factors

	Factors		
	Information-Based	Interaction-Based	Service-Based
	Digital Post-Purchase	Digital Post-Purchase	Digital Post-Purchase
	Brand Touchpoints	Brand Touchpoints	Brand Touchpoints
	(InfoDTP)	(InterDTP)	(SerDTP)
Website	.65	.21	.42
Social Media	.80	.13	.27
Online User Review	.86	.26	.20
Online Guru Review	.82	.29	.22
Brand Online Community	.53	.63	.29
Car Club Online Community	.52	.65	.25
Email	.23	.84	.30
SMS	.16	.84	.33
Social Chat	.30	.75	.40
Installed Car Telematic	.16	.67	.45
Electronic Installment Payment	.22	.37	.75
E-car Insurance Reissuing Service	.25	.27	.84
Mobile App for Customer Privilege	.32	.33	.78
E-Showroom for Car Selling	.33	.39	.75
Online Trade-in Service	.33	.37	.74

Based on the three factors of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints, as shown in Table 1 above, each hypothesis was broken into three sub-hypotheses according to types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints which include information-based, interaction-based, and service based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints.

3. Model fit for structural model

To assess model fit for the structural model, the authors utilized standards recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999; i.e., CFI of .80 or greater, AGFI of .80 or greater, and RMSEA of .08 or less). The results of the structural model analysis indicate the model provided good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1720.42$, $df = 219$, $p < .000$; CFI = .89; GFI = .82; AGFI = .86; RMSEA = .08).

4. The effect of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (DTP) on the relationship quality (RQ)

Direct effects of the dimensions of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on the relationship quality, were tested with sub-hypotheses 1a-1c. Sub-hypothesis 1a predicted the direct relationship between InfoDTP and RQ. The structural model found InfoDTP does not have direct effects on RQ. Sub-hypothesis 1a was not supported. Sub-hypothesis 1b predicted the direct relationship between InterDTP and RQ. The structural model found a significant, positive relationship between InterDTP and RQ ($B=0.18$, $p < .001$), confirming Hypothesis 1b. Sub-hypothesis 1c predicted the direct relationship between SerDTP and RQ. The structural model found a significant, positive relationship between SerDTP and RQ ($B=0.34$, $p < .001$), confirming Hypothesis 1c.

5. The effect of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (DTP) on the self-brand connection (SBC)

Direct effects of the types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on the self-brand connection (SBC), were tested with sub-hypotheses 2a-2c. Sub-hypothesis 1a predicted the direct relationship between InfoDTP and RQ. The structural model found InfoDTP does not have direct effects on SBC. Sub-hypothesis 2a was not

supported. Sub-hypothesis 2b predicted the direct relationship between InterDTP and SBC. The structural model found a significant, positive relationship between InterDTP and SBC ($B=0.23, p<.001$), confirming Hypothesis 2b. Sub-hypothesis 2c predicted the direct relationship between SerDTP and SBC. The structural model found a significant, positive relationship between SerDTP and SBC ($B=0.16, p<.001$), confirming Hypothesis 2c.

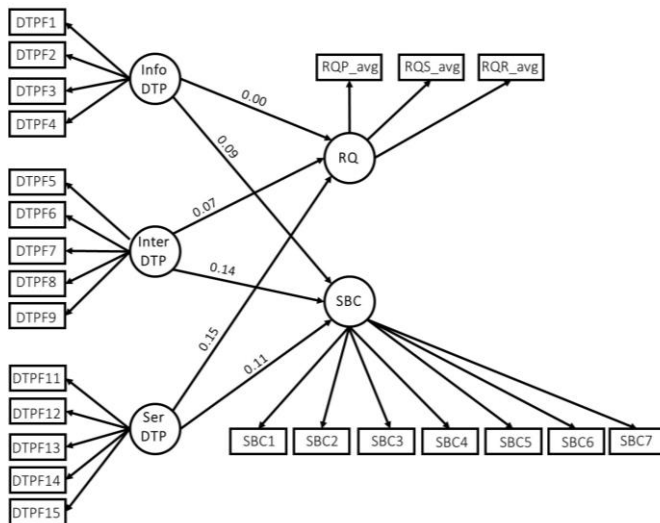


Figure 2: - Structural model with unstandardized direct effects

Note. InfoDTP = Information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints;
InterDTP = Interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints; SerDTP =
Service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints; RQ = relationship quality;
SBC = self-brand connection

* $p < .001$

*Table 2**Standardized Path Coefficients Structural Model*

Effect	Path	B weight
Direct effect	InfoDTP → RQ	-.009
Direct effect	InterDTP → RQ	.810*
Direct effect	SerDTP → RQ	.154*
Direct effect	InfoDTP → SBC	.018
Direct effect	InterDTP → SBC	.160*
Direct effect	SerDTP → SBC	.113*

Note. InfoDTP = Information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints; InterDTP = Interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints; SerDTP = Service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints; RQ = relationship quality; SBC = self-brand connection

*Significant at the $p < .05$ level.

In conclusion, according to the results from structural equation modeling (SEM), all of the fit indexes indicated that the model was a good fit to the data. The predictor were able to account for 15 per cent of the variance in relationship quality, whereas the predictor were able to account for 8.5 per cent of the variance in self-brand connection. Interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints and service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints have effects on relationship quality and self-brand connection. However, the information-based post-purchase brand touchpoints did not have a direct effect on relationship quality and self-brand connection.

Discussion

Based on the results of this research, it concluded into three points. First, information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints does not have direct effects on relationship quality, and self-brand connection within the repurchase context of automobile, because the customers have already been aware and used

product of the brand. As the result, the brand touchpoints that mainly provide one-sided information is not necessary for current customers' repurchase consideration. Second, interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints had direct effects on relationship quality, and self-brand connection within the repurchase context of automobile, because social interaction usually provide other people's points of views in which it influences consumers' opinion themselves. That is why those interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints can well enhance perceived relationship quality and self-brand connection. Last, service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints had direct effects on relationship quality, and self-brand connection within the repurchase context of automobile, because those service touchpoints (for example, online car trade-in, mobile app for customer privilege and others) can directly accumulate positive brand experiences throughout the product usage. As a consequence, those positive brand experiences directly lead to higher perceived relationship quality and self-brand connection.

Suthongwan and Kuntonbut (2020) asserted that there was a direct effect of traditional post-purchase brand touchpoints on relationship quality and self-brand connection. This research extended Suthongwan and Kuntonbut (2020) by replacing the predictor from traditional to digital post-purchase touchpoints; however, such independent variables as relationship quality and self-brand connection were kept. As stated earlier, past research (Sahin, et al., 2012; Baxendale et al., 2015; Dunn & Davis, 2004; Edwards, 2009) indicated that brand touchpoints had an impact on relationship quality; however, the results were extracted from the mixed effects of digital and non-digital brand touchpoints. The findings of this research confirmed that digital post-purchase brand touchpoints had an effect on relationship quality. As the authors would like to explore the power of specific types of digital post-purchase brand touchpoints on relationship quality. It was found that the information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints which included website, social media, online user review, and online guru review does not have any relationship with relationship quality. Rather, interaction-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (including

brand online community, car club online community, email, SMS, social chat, and installed car telematic) and service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints (including electronic installment payment, electronic car insurance reissuing service, mobile app for customer privilege, and online trade-in service) had direct effect on relationship.

Furthermore, as Van Der Westhuizen (2018) asserted that the self-brand connection was associated the brand experience through various brand touchpoints. The findings of this research was consistent with Van Der Westhuizen (2018); however, this research provided additional perspectives to explain that phenomenon. By factor analyzing the digital post-purchase brand touchpoints into major dimensions, and related it with self-brand connection, it was found that information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints did not have effect on self-brand connection. Rather, interaction-based and service-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints had direct effects on self-brand connection. The findings was congruent with past research (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Loureiro et al., 2012; Hazel & Vincent-Wayne, 2013; Lin et al., 2017) in which they found that psycho-social factors were highly attributed to the formation of self-brand connection.

Recommendations

The findings of this research provides several insights for marketing practitioners. First, the digital brand touchpoints have impact on relationship quality and self-brand connection in which it will lead to repurchase tendency. However, not every digital brand touchpoint is equal. An investment in keeping customers in information-based digital post-purchase brand touchpoints is less effective than that of interaction-based and service-based brand touchpoints. Second, as social influence become a key in forming a perception on relationship quality and self-brand connection, influencer marketing in interaction-based channel is powerful in increasing customer retention probability. Last, it is recommended to establish

various services to improve current customer experiences through service-based brand touchpoints, as it is proven that it works well in keeping current customers.

Nevertheless, in real life, the consumers tend to encompass both traditional and digital post-purchase brand touchpoints in their purchase journey. Future research is suggested to investigate differential effects of both types of post-purchase brand touchpoints. In addition, it was found that the relationship quality and self-brand connection are associated with repurchase intention. Future research may further connect relationship quality and self-brand connection with repurchase intention. Moreover, it is interesting to study both direct and indirect effects of those variables.

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