

Impact of Customer Value, Public Relations Perception and Brand Image on Customer Loyalty toward GSM Operators in Turkey

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of customer value, public relations perception and brand image on customer loyalty towards GSM operators in Turkey. Primary data were collected through an online survey from 360 participants. Pearson correlation test and regression analysis were conducted to test the study hypotheses. The findings of the study showed the existence of a strong relationship between public relations and brand image, a moderate relationship between public relations and customer value, and brand image and customers value. Moreover, the findings showed that brand image is the most significant factor affecting customer loyalty, followed by customer value and public relations perception respectively.

Keywords

Customer Value
Public Relations
Brand Image
Customer Loyalty

About Article

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Müşteri Değeri, Halkla İlişkiler Algısı ve Marka İmajının Türkiye'deki GSM Operatörlerine Yönelik Müşteri Sadakatine Etkisi

Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki GSM operatörlerine yönelik olarak müşteri değeri, halkla ilişkiler algısı ve marka imajının müşteri sadakati üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır. Birincil veriler, 360 katılımcıdan çevrimiçi bir anket kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Çalışma hipotezlerini test etmek için Pearson korelasyon testi ve regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın bulguları, halkla ilişkiler ile marka imajı arasında güçlü bir ilişkinin varlığını, halkla ilişkiler ile müşteri değeri arasında orta düzeyde bir ilişkinin varlığını ve marka imajı ile müşteri değeri arasında yine orta düzeyde bir ilişkinin varlığını göstermiştir. Ayrıca bulgular, müşteri sadakatini etkileyen en önemli faktörün marka imajı olduğunu, bunu sırasıyla müşteri değeri ve halkla ilişkiler algısının izlediğini göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

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Introduction

During the last decades, the relationship between the customer and the companies play an important role in a competitive economy. Commonly, a brand is considered as virtual symbols such as logo, packaging product design, identity, and marketing channels that the companies use to create a unique brand image. Customer-based reputation is perceived as “the customer's overall evaluation of a firm from his or her reactions to the firm's goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the firm and/or its representatives or constituencies and known corporate activities” (Walsh et al., 2009). Corporations that have a good reputation easily build trust and pledge with the customers. This plays a mediating role in identifying the customers and their behavioral intention (Keh and Xie, 2009). Customer loyalty to the companies' services and products is an important factor on marketing activities (Dick and Basu, 1994). Accordingly, the company's success is determined by customer loyalty (Sirohi et al., 1998). Ledingham and Bruning (1998) noted that customer consciousness of the relationship between company and customer could increase their loyalty and accordingly increase its revenue and overall objectives.

The relationship between public relation perception and customer loyalty is a key determinant in business management. Public relation perception affects customer loyalty due to a satisfactory brand image (Hsieh and Li, 2008). Reynolds and Beatty (1999) mentioned that many studies have explored the relationship between customer and corporation and the long-term effect of customer loyalty. Corporations' aspects such as citizenship, image and credibility determine the corporation's attractiveness while good image and reputation enhance the revenue of corporation (Bartikowski et al., 2011; Tsai and Yang, 2010). Hence, the corporation's image affects customer loyalty and the corporation's reputation determines the behavioral intention of the customer (Shamma and Hassan, 2009; Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001). Most Turkish studies on GMS operators focused on; service quality perception and brand loyalty (Usta and Memiş, 2009), mobile phone brand image and preferences (Yaşa and Bozyiğit, 20012; Şengün and Menteş, 2018) and brand loyalty of GSM users (Torlak et al., 2014). Other authors studied brand loyalty and consumers purchase intention (Uzunkaya, 2016), brand satisfaction and GSM operator users (Dulek, 2019), creative strategies and appeals of GSM operators during Covid-19 pandemic (Cılızoğlu et al., 2020).

With respect to the above studies, it is evident that customer loyalty is a key factor in the success and profitability of the company. Customer loyalty is an essential central topic in marketing as it guides companies to adopt effective strategies to strengthen customer trust towards their products/services. In this view, this study aims to investigate the factors determining customer loyalty with a focus on Turkey GSM operators' brands. Especially, it seeks to explore how these GSM operators could build customer loyalty through customer value, public relations perception, and brand image.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Brand Image

For a long time, brand image has become an important concept in customer behavior studies (Riaz, 2015). Brand image is a central aspect of the brand, which influences the customer behavior towards a given product or service (De Chenatony and Riley, 1998; Keller, 1993). Brand Image (BI) refers to customer perception of the brand and its meaning in his/her memory (Herzog, 1963). Brand image denoted the overall impressions such as observations and consumption between the consumer and a brand (Dichter, 1985). In addition, BI refers to the consumer perception of the motivation and emotion towards a specific brand (Malhotra,

2010). Therefore, brand image is the most important resource of the company as it builds its competitive advantages and maintains its customers (Deheshti et al., 2016). Corporate responsibility is socially effective in the forms of brand image. Corporate social responsibility creates a sense of trust towards the brand in the undertaking and business of the brand image (Sharabati et al.2023).

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is an important aspect for companies that determine their success. A brand loyal customer is defined as the most valuable customer for a company (Ganesh et al., 2000). Customer loyalty enhances the customer trustworthiness towards a brand or product (Bauer et al., 2005). Therefore, customer loyalty improves premium price sales, market share, and accordingly the company productivity (Brown et al. 1997). In addition, it plays a vital role in business growth and sustainability (Berry et al., 1985). Commonly, people trust other consumers more than the company agents and advertisements (Gerdt et al., 2019; Hirata, 2019; Liu et al., 2019). A loss of one unsatisfied customer could lead the company to lose more than 20 customers because this customer bad experience spreads rapidly through word of mouth (Basha et al., 2015). However, satisfied customers would be a good promoter of a brand because they are considered as an indicator of effective corporate operation.

Public Relation Perception

With a unified economic system, the understanding of the preference of the consumers especially the company brand, localization and other aspects is essential. Public relation improves brand information and creates brand awareness through appreciation. This increases the brand image, draws brand emotions, and builds brand attitude and knowledge (Keller, 2003). Customer loyalty results from their understanding of the brand, which can be enhanced by public relations. (Keller, 1993; 1999). For instance, customer satisfaction and perception of public relations determine those who stayed and who leave (Bruning and Ledingham, 2000). The consumer awareness of the relationship between company-customer plays a significant role in reinforcing customer loyalty and contributes to increasing the company revenue and overall objectives (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998).

Customer value

The satisfaction of consumers' needs and wants is the core of marketing whilst each company aims mainly to provide value to the customer to make profits. A competitive economy implies numerous rational consumers and choices which require a company to propose, provide and communicate a great value to achieve its overall objectives (Kotler and Keller, 2009). Consequently, customer value is an essential concept of marketing that shapes the company principle (Webster, 2002). Moreover, customer value can be perceived as an estimated benefit the customer obtained from the products/services (Zeithaml, 1988). Customer value is the company's capability to create and improve value to goods and services, especially the services or the aspects of the services provided to customers (Johnson and Weinstein, 2004). It is obvious that customers' observed value depends on the perceptions of what they obtain from a product and what the product provides to them. The customers estimate the offers that bring the maximum value so that likely the offer would satisfy the customer, the higher the chance the product or service would be used or purchased (Kotler and Keller, 2009). Reliability, performance, appearance, durability, etc. of the product in the formation of customer value. factors come into play (Sokoslowa and Caputa, 2023, s.3)

GSM Operator in Turkey

Telecommunications in Turkey has a long history. Since, 1865, the country was amongst the forefather memberships of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). In 1847, Turkey was connected to the telegraph line and Ankara has seen the installation of the first automatic exchange in 1926 (Minges, 2002). In 1993, Turkcell becomes the representative of the General Directorate of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone (PTT) and by 2000, the country enforced Law No 4502 enabling the establishment of the Telecommunication Authority (TA) and the communication higher council. The TA was an anonymous and regulatory institution of Turkey telecommunication, which keys role includes reporting to the Ministry of Transport guarantor of granting licenses, implementing policies and activities according to the Telecommunication Authority (Evcı et al., 2004). The telecommunication market was liberalized in 2004 and recently Turkish Telecom attracted increasing interest from international operators and investors. The company experienced several readjustments and then it was sold under the conditions that the government retains 'golden share' to protect the national interests (Anonymous, 2003). Turkey Mobile network occupies a smooth competition in telecommunication sector excepted the mobile telephony, which gained growing marketing during the last decades. Accordingly, in 1986 Türk Telekom launched Nordic Mobile Telephone (NMT) one of the prior wireless operations in Turkey. Türk Telekom launched Turkcell and Telsim GSM operators under GSM900 service under shared-revenue agreement. In 1998 a revenue-sharing agreement turned into a 25-year license so that each company (Turkcell and Telsim) has to pay \$500 million and invest about \$3 billion to support the country's infrastructure development (Anonymous, 2003).

On the other hand, the Mobil market was opened in 2001 with the introduction of GSM 1800 services (Evcı et al. 2004). During the periods 2012-2017s, the country accounts for 77.9 million mobile phone subscribers while the key cities recording the largest number of phone subscribers include Istanbul (25%), Bursa (16%), Ankara (13%), Antalya (10%) and İzmir (6%) (Turkey Ministry of Technology, 2018).

Methodology

Hypotesis Development

The company's marketing function aims to sustain the brand image and strategy (Keller, 1993; Roth, 1995). The company's positive and popular image is a vital asset as it influences its consumer perception (Grönroos, 2002). Kwun and Oh (2007) and Ryu (2008) indicated that BI is a single-dimensional concept. However, Keller (2008) considered BI as an emotional and rational dimension. In the same context Park and al. (1986) added that BI is a tridimensional construct that includes symbol, function and experience whilst Wijaya (2013) noted that BI includes identity, personality, association, behavior, attitude, competence and benefit.

Based on the above argument the first hypothesis is:

H₁- Brand image positively affects customer loyalty.

Consumer perception of the company's use of public relations allows the company to achieve profit and avoid damages (Webb and Mohr, 1998). The levels of self-congruence of the consumer and how the company satisfies his/her expectations through public relations efforts determine consumer perception of public relations (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

From the above argument, the following is hypothesized:

H₂- Public relation perception positively affects the customer loyalty

The companies that care about the customer should avoid the customer's negative word of mouth as it spreads easily and reaches many other customers in a short time (Basha et al. (2015). Therefore, Shamsudin et al. (2018) highlighted that word of mouth has become more essential as it is a means through which the customers spread their emotions, negative and positive experiences, particularly via social media. Additionally, many factors such as physical facilities, product location and customer satisfaction influence customer loyalty (Farida et al., 2018). Furthermore, customer perceived value and satisfaction, service quality, price, promotion and consumer satisfaction affect customer value (Saputri et al. 2019; Jati Prabowo and Sitio, 2020). With the above, it is hypothesized that :

H3- Customer value positively affects customer loyalty.

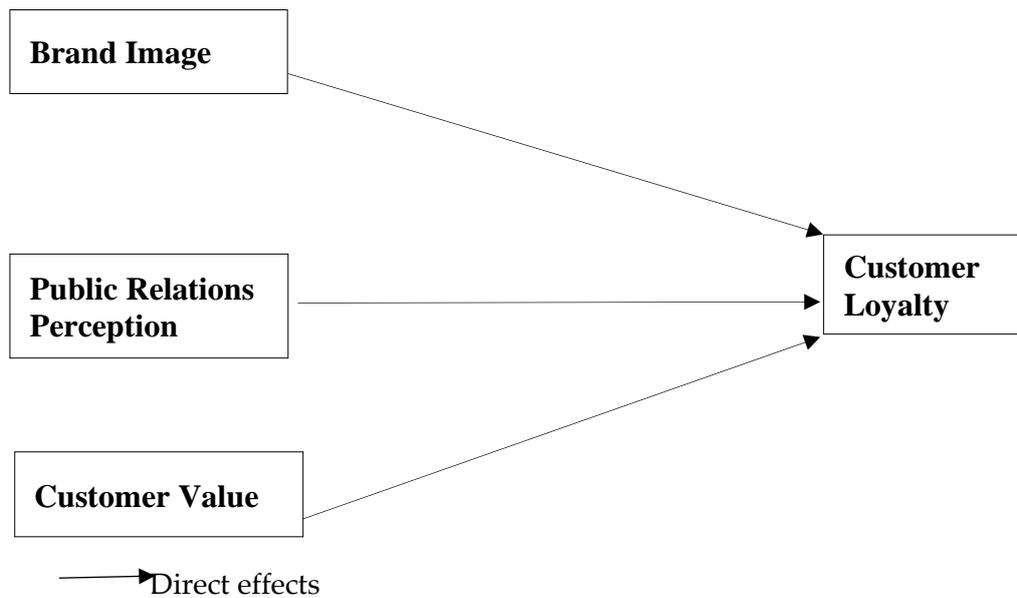


Figure 1. The proposed framework of the effect of brand image, public relations perception and customer on customer loyalty

Study Data

The data of this study were collected from the users of GSM brands living in Turkey. Convenience sampling was used as the study did not target a specific respondent as a consumer and this type of sampling allows a faster gathering of data. In addition, the questionnaire was designed by using Google Forms according to the public relations perception (Hsieh and Li, 2008), brand image (Sasmita and Suki, 2015), customer value and customer loyalty (Yang and Peterson, 2004). An online questionnaire was used because it is time-saving and could reach numerous respondents regardless of their geographic location. Survey data were collected between February 2022 and May 2022. Moreover, the participants in the survey are free to complete the questionnaire at the time of preference (Neuman, 2014; An et al., 2019; Kotler et al., 2019). The study data were collected from a total of 360 respondents. 360 respondents were accessed using the online survey.

Data Analysis

A reliability test was conducted to check the adequacy of the study sample. In addition, the Pearson correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between factors of the study. Then multiple regression analysis and SPSS.18.00 package were used to test the study hypotheses and for data analysis respectively.

Results

Respondents Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 showed that most respondents were women (55.3%) and used Turkcell as GSM operator (45%). In addition, most respondents had undergraduate education (49.7%) and aged between 25-30 years (22.5%).

Table 1. Respondents Demographic Characteristics (N=360)

Variables		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
GSM Operator	Turkcell	162	45
	Vodafone	117	32.5
	Turk Telekom	81	22.5
Gender	Female	199	55.3
	Male	161	44.7
Age	18-24 years	59	16.4
	25-30 years	81	22.5
	31-36 years	68	18.9
	37-44 years	69	19.2
	More than 44 years	83	23.1
Education level	Primary education	4	1.1
	High school education	27	7.5
	Undergraduate education	179	49.7
	Master	81	22.5
	Doctorate	69	19.2

Study Data Reliability

A reliability test was conducted to measure the consistency of the results of the study. Chronbach alpha (α) values of the study variables were greater than 0.60, which indicated that the study data are reliable (Table 2). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett Sphericity tests were conducted to determine the sampling adequacy. The values of KMO were 0.899 (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 1840.679; df=28; Sig=0.000) for public relations perception, 0.732 (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 583.317; df=3; Sig=0.000) for brand image, 0.797 (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 1572.385; df=10;

Sig=0.00) for customer value and 0,898 (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 2729,996; df=15; Sig=0,00) for customer loyalty. It can be noticed that a KMO value of ach study factor was greater than 0.50 and according to the Bartlett Sphericity test shows a significance at 1%.

Table 2. Reliability of Instrument

Concepts	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO
Customer perception of Public Relations	8	0.916	0.899
Brand Image	3	0.877	0.732
Customer Value	5	0.898	0.797
Customer loyalty	6	0.917	0.898

Relationship Brand Image, Public Relation Perception, Customer Loyalty And Public Relation Perception

Pearson's correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between customer value, public relations perception, brand image, and customer loyalty. Table 3 showed that there were positive, strong and significant relationships between public relation perception and brand image ($r=0.756^{**}$), public relation perception and customer loyalty ($r=0.654^{**}$), customer value and customer loyalty ($r= 0.654^{**}$) and between brand image and customer loyalty ($r=0.741^{**}$). In addition, it showed there were positive, weak and significant relationships between public relation perception and customer value ($r=0.419^{**}$), and between brand image and customer value ($r=0.451$).

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Test Results

	Public relations perception	Brand image	Customer Value	Customer loyalty
Public relations perception	1			
Sig. (2-tailed)				
Brand image	0.756**	1		
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000			
Customer value	0.419**	0.451**	1	
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		
Customer loyalty	0.654**	0.741**	0.654**	1

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Sig. (2-tailed) 0.000 0.000 0.000

** States for 1% significance level

Effect Of Customer Value, Public Relations Perception And Brand Image On Customer Loyalty

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the effects of customer value, public relations perception and brand image on customer loyalty. Accordingly, with an R² value of 68.7% and an overall associated p-value of 0.000, the used regression model has a good fit. Therefore, customer value, public relations perception, and brand image affect significantly customer loyalty (Table 4).

Table 4. Summarize of Regression Model

Model	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	203.851	3	67.950	260.190	
Residual	92.972	356	0.261		0.000**
Total	296.822	359			
R	0.829				
R ²	0.687				
Adjusted R-square	0.684				

To test the study hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was conducted. It showed that customer value, public relations perception and brand image affect positively and significantly customer loyalty (Table 5). Accordingly, brand image was the most influential factor ($\beta=0.453$) affecting customer loyalty followed by customer value ($\beta=0.388$) and public relations perception ($\beta=0.149$).

Table 5. Effect of customer value, public relations perception and brand image on customer loyalty

Dependent variable	Customer loyalty				
Independent variables	Beta	t-value	P-value	Sig.	VIF
Constant		0.292	0,770	0.770	
Public Relations Perception	0.149	3.256	0,001	0.001**	2.379
Brand image	0.453	9.738	0,000	0.000 *	2.462
Customer Value	0.388	11.560	0,000	0.000**	1.278

Change F= 260.190.

Significant level= 0.000

** States for 1% significance level

Table.6 Hypotheses test outputs

Hypothesized relationships	Beta value	Sig.	Results
Brand image affects customer loyalty (H1)	0.453	0.000 **	Supported
Public Relations Perception affects customer loyalty (H2)	0.149	0.001**	Supported
Customer Value affects customer loyalty (H3)	0.388	0.000**	Supported

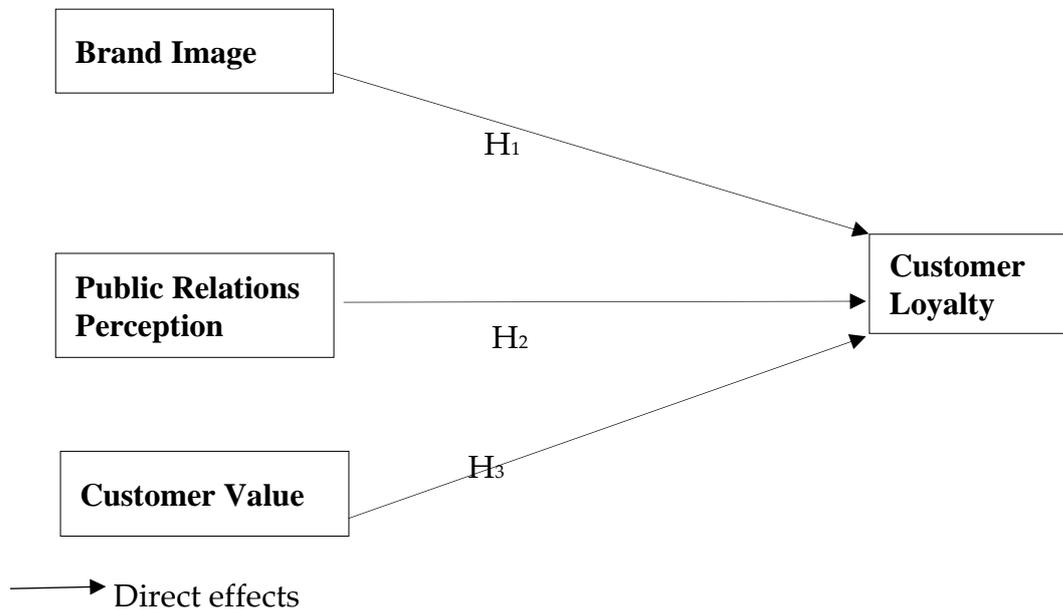


Figure 2. The proposed framework of the effect of brand image, public relations perception and customer on customer loyalty

Discussion

The study determines the effect of customer value, public relations perception and brand image on customer loyalty toward GSM operators in Turkey. Table 1 showed that most respondents were aged between 25-30 years (22.5%) and most of them were female (55.3%). In addition, most respondents had undergraduate education level (49.7%) while of them (45%) used Turkcell as a GSM operator.

Table 3 showed that there were positive and strong relationships between public relation perception and brand image, between public relation perception and customer loyalty, customer value and customer loyalty, and between brand image and customer loyalty. Commonly, corporate image is created through its public relations and is a key tool used to position the corporate into the market and reinforce customer loyalty. Similarly, Ladhari et al. (2011) noted that a brand image derived from the company's public relations and plays a vital role in retaining the corporate position in the market and enhancing the relationship with the customer. Also, a corporate relation associated with a good image could enhance the

customers' attitudes and beliefs towards the marketing products, which lead to their loyalty. This is aligned with Hanzaee & Farsani (2011) who highlighted that public relations and adequate brand image improved customers loyalty.

On the other hand, the study showed that there was a strong and positive relationship between customer value and customer loyalty. This could be due to the marketing activities, which commonly present numerous advantages to the users of GSM operators. Previously, Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) indicated that there was a strong relationship between customer value and loyalty in studying airline services and clothing retails businesses. Additionally, there were weak but positive relationships between public relations perception and customer value and brand image and customer value.

Regression analysis showed that brand image is the most significant factor ($\beta=0.453^{***}$) affecting customer loyalty. Brand image plays the role of mirror which fascinates the costumers and therefore increases their attentiveness to the corporate products. This result is similar to this of Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) who highlighted that a good perception of brand image enhanced the costumers' loyalty. Likewise, by studying the Pakistani service sector Rahi (2016) found that brand image had a great significance in enhancing customer loyalty as satisfied customers stay with the corporate. Additionally, the findings showed that customer value is a second significant factor affecting ($\beta=0.388^{**}$) customer loyalty. Indeed, customer value represents a strategy used by corporates to deliver the best service or product to the customer in a competitive market. This increases their possibility to win the customers' trust and therefore build their loyalty. This result is consistent with Webster (1988) and Woodruff (1997) who underlined that customer value represents a basis of competitive advantage for the firms.

Table 5 showed that public relations perception was the least significant factor affecting customer loyalty ($\beta=0.149^{**}$). Public relation receives very little attention if the customers do not appreciate the brand image. This would not improve either the attractiveness of the customers to the products/ services and therefore their loyalty to the corporate. These results are aligned with Hsieh and Li (2008) who stated that public relations perception affects marginally customer loyalty when the brand image is favorable.

Conclusion and recommendation

The study investigates the effect of customer value, public relations perception, and brand image on customer loyalty towards GSM operators in Turkey. The study findings showed that brand image, customer value, and public relations perception respectively affected the customer loyalty towards the mobile communication sector operating in Turkey. In an increasingly competitive market, the company strategies to improve brand image plays an important role in gaining consumer loyalty. This study proved that brand image is the most influencing factor of customer loyalty but the improvement of the brand image only is not essential to appeal costumer. Added to brand image, the study revealed that customer value and public relations perception affected the customer loyalty towards GSM operators. However, GSM operator managers need to apprehend the desire of the customers and preserve their loyalty to the GSM companies. This could keep the customers to stick with the companies on log-rum, which would contribute to the profitability of these companies. Beyond GSM operators, the findings of this study could help the managers of other sectors to apprehend the determinants of customer loyalty. Future studies could explore the role of brand reputation, brand awareness, corporate social responsibility in gaining customer loyalty in the context of GSM operators.

The findings of the study draw many important conclusions for practitioners. First of all, GSM operator brands should focus on raising the image they have with various marketing activities. For example, Vodafone has recently succeeded in taking its image to a higher level with its marketing activities on social media platforms. Again, GSM operator brands can increase their public relations activities and make their customers more loyal to them. For example, Turkcell has recently succeeded in acquiring more loyal customers with its environmental activities. Again, GSM operator brands can engage customers more by focusing on activities that demonstrate the value they give to customers.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare they do not have any conflict of interest.

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