

CUSTOMER SWITCHING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

While there are many studies that review prior studies in different technology adoption, prior studies that review the switching behavior are lacking. To overcome this gap, this study reviews 53 studies about switching in different technology. The main questions that this study answered are: What countries where the subject of switching behavior studies? What dimensions of switching were studied? Do prior switching studies focused on intention to switch or on current switching behavior? What consequences of switching factors were studied? Who were the participants in the switching behavior? What studies did investigate switching behavior after introduction of Mobile Number Portability (MNP)? Do prior studies focused on switchers or stayers or on mixed? What theories were used to investigate switching behavior? This study provides answers to these questions and points to their main findings.

KEYWORDS

Switching Intention, Customer Retention, Switching Costs, Satisfaction, Loyalty

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Since June 16, 2013, the National Technology Enterprise Company (www.ntec.com.kw) has developed mobile number portability (MNP) between telecommunication mobile service providers (TMSP) to allow customers to freely switch (without paying any extra cost) between the three operators of TMSPs in Kuwait while retaining their mobile phone numbers. This is not new as many countries have already taken steps in this direction and initiated such a service long ago (table 1), and more countries continue to do so (see Xconnect 2021; MNP2021). For example, 13.31 million Brazilian consumers have changed carriers without changing their identification numbers between 2008 and 2011 (RCR wireless 2021).

The ultimate goal of implementing MNP is to promote competition among TMSP companies, and customers will definitely win in the implementation of this technology. However, it presents both risks and opportunities for TMSPs. From a customer perspective, MNP is expected to bring several benefits as they experience improvement in the quality of mobile service, decrease of service costs, and get more advanced and innovative products/services. And therefore customers can freely switch to any TMSP whom they think offer the best services. In addition, the market will become mature, with more improvements in network infrastructure as TMSPs will invest in order to offer better services and keep their base of customers. Unlike customers, MNP may present risks for TMSPs who will face more competitive marketing campaigns, severe market competitiveness, potential reduction in their market share, costs associated with improve existing technologies and keeping their brand and customers as churn rate may increase. After years of following offensive strategies to attract new customers, the introduction of MNP leads TMSPs to follow defensive strategies in order to retain their existing customers and prevent them from switching to their competitors, and keep them loyal.

Table 1. MNP in a subset of countries

Year	Countries
1997	Singapore
1999	Hong Kong, the UK, the Netherlands
2000	Switzerland, Spain
2001	Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Portugal, Australia
2002	Italy, Belgium, Germany
2003	Finland, France, Austria, Greece, Ireland, Island, Luxembourg
2004	Lithuania, South Korea, USA, Slovenia, Cyprus, Poland, Hungary, Taiwan
2005	Estonia, Latvia, Malta
2006	Slovakia, Czech Republic, Japan, West Africa
2007	Canada
2008	Brazil
2009	China
2011	Colombia
2012	Chile, Panama
2013	Republic of Moldova, Honduras
2014	Bangladesh
2015	El Salvador, Senegal
2016	Iran, Maldives
2017	Tanzania
2018	Vietnam, Bangladesh
2019	Ukraine
2020	Palestine

1.2 Research Question and Importance

In order to retain existing customers and to avoid losing them for companies that provide more attractive and innovative services, this study aims to answer the following research question: *What key potential factors may lead customers to switch to other service providers?*

This main question was split into the following sub questions that the SLR will answer

Q1: What countries were the subject of switching behavior studies? And what dimensions of switching were studied?

Q5: Do prior switching studies focused on intention to switch or on current switching behavior

Q6: What consequences of switching factors were studied?

Q2: What studies investigate switching in TMSP and what approaches they used: Quantitative, qualitative or mixed? And what were the participants in the switching behavior (students vs. real customers)?

Q3: What studies did investigate switching behavior after introduction of MNP?

Q4: Do prior studies focused on switchers or stayers or mixed?

Q7: What theories were used to investigate switching behavior?

Q8: Do prior studies included switching cost factors as independent factor vs. mediating factors?

Q9: Do switching costs (financial switching cost, perceived switching barriers, and customer lock-in) matter, i.e., do they have an impact on customer retention (loyalty vs. switching)?

This is an important search question facing executives of TMSPs in order to propose strategies to keep customers' loyalty and deter them from switching to competitors. This is in line with past studies that have shown that customer switching is an important research area for three main reasons (Parthasarathy and Bhattacharjee, 1998; Fan and Suh, 2014). *First*, for market share and revenues, both the number of new adopters and discontinuers at any period are regarded as significant. *Second*, evidence shows that negative interpersonal influence by service discontinuers is generally more influential than positive interpersonal influence from continuing customers. In addition, new adopters might be influenced against subscribing (e.g. Mizerski, 1982; Mahajan et al., 1984) despite positive influence from other sources (Reichheld et al., 1990). *Third*, it is well known in marketing that it costs six times more to get a new customer than to keep and maintain existing clients.

The research question we investigate is the first phase of a larger project conducted by the researcher with the objective to identify factors that lead to customer retention (loyalty and switching) while the second phase consists to design and test a customer retention model (that includes both loyalty and switching) in a telecommunication context with MNP.

Before achieving the objective of the phase 2 (development of retention model), this current study aims to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) on customer retention (loyalty and switching) in order to derive relevant guidelines to complete the second phase of the research project. The following sections present the method to implement the SLR, the result findings and discussion, and conclusions.

2. METHOD OF CONDUCTING THE SLR

2.1 Selected Databases for the SLR Search

For more than three decades, many studies have focused on the end-users switching behavior in both the marketing and the information system usage literature. This study identified scientific journals studies in four famous and well-known scientific databases: ProQuest Direct, ScienceDirect, ACM Digital Library, and Google Scholar.

2.2 Search Descriptors

To identify studies on switching behavior, we used the following descriptors "switching", "IT switching", "mobile service switching", "loyalty and switching", and "satisfaction and switching" that were to be found in the title or abstract of the paper. We retained published studies that fulfilled the three criteria: empirical research (qualitative and quantitative), peer-reviewed journals, and available in full text and. We excluded studies published in other language than English, conference studies and non-peer-reviewed papers. We limited the search to the years 2001–2020. After searching we succeeded to identify 104 studies but only 53 studies did successfully meet the requirements of the study.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 What is Switching?

There are several definitions of switching (Table 2). Based on this table this study, we define switching behavior as "the process or decision by which a customer decides to end his relationship with a service provider, for whatever reason, and enter or establish the same relationship with another one" (Rouibah, 2017).

Table 2. A subset of definitions of switching behavior

Authors	Definition
Holland (1984) in Bansal (1997)	Brand changing
Carpenter and Lehmann (1985)	Movement of buyers from one product to another
Kasper (1988) in Bansal (1997)	Non-repeat purchase behavior
Reichheld and Sasser (1990) in Bansal (1997)	Customer defections
Bucklin and Srinivasan (1991)	Inter brand substitutability
Morgan and Dev (1994) in Bansal (1997)	Changes in brand choice
Keaveney (1995)	The loss of continuing service customer
Sambandam and Lord (1995)	Inconsistency of brand choice from purchase to purchase
Yi and Zeithaml (1990); Sing 1990, in Colgate and Norris (2001)	The voluntary termination of an exchange relationship
Bansal et al (2004)	Termination of the relationship between customer and the service provider
Bansal et al (2005)	Consumers move from one country (service provider) to another.
Lopez et al (2006)	Losing a customer (from the firm's point of view)
Shin and Kim (2008)	Migrating of customers from one provider to another

3.2 Main Results

These studies have investigated different factors affecting intention to use, current use, continuous use, satisfaction, loyalty and switching/retention behavior. The literature review includes 53 studies focused on different sectors, including the IT sector, services, and telecommunication, which include a type of switching cost either as independent, latent or dependent variables. Based on the previous literature review, we can infer the following remarks and observation.

Answer to Q1: The literature review reveals that switching behavior was studied in some countries including the United States (Shin, 2006), Australia (Gray et al., 2012), New Zealand (Ecommerce Commission New Zealand, 2012), Korea (Geong and Park, 2003; Yuan and Choi, 2003; Kim et al., 2004; Park and Kim, 2007), Germany (Gerpott et al., 2001), China (When-Hua and Jing-Yi, 2010), Finland (Smura, 2004; Björkroth, 2005), India (Gupta and Sharma, 2009), Pakistan (Iqbal, 2010), Taiwan (Chen et al., 2007), and Central America (Garcia-Murillo, 2007). But we found only four studies focused on factors that affect switching behavior after MNP was introduced such as in China (Shi, Zhou, and Liu, 2010), USA (Shin 2006), South Korea (Lee, Kim, Lee and Park, 2006) and Ghana (Nimako, Ntim and Mensah, 2014) while another study discussed the process of introducing MNP in Japan (Otsuka and Mitomo, 2013). In addition, while most reviewed studies focused on switching behavior in developing countries, we found very few were carried out in less developed countries (Nimako, Ntim, and Mensah, 2014; Iqbal, 2010) and Arab countries (Bashir, 2011). We found several dimension of switching were studied under different names including switching cost, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, trust, perceived value, switching experience, financial switching cost, procedural switching cost, relational switching cost, switching benefit, perceived switching value, switching cost, expected switching benefits, expected switching cost, expectation, disconfirmation, product quality, overall mobile provider service quality, mobile device quality, mobile software quality, overall mobile product quality, and network quality.

Answer to Q2: We found that prior studies mainly focused on intention to switch (Liu, 2015; Hsu, 2014; Raitani, 2014; Peng, Scott, and Prybutok, 2014; Fan and Suh, 2014; Hsu, 2014; Bhattacharjee et al., 2012; Gray et al., 2012; Pookulangara, Hawley, Xiao, 2011; Han, Kim, and Hyun, 2011; Shi, Zhou, and Liu, 2010; Zhang, Lee, Cheung, and Chen, 2009; Coulter, 2009; Hou, Chern, Chen, and Chen, 2009; Min and Wan, 2009; Yoo, Kim, Hong, 2008; Shin and Kim, 2008; Anton et al., 2007; Hu and Huang, 2006; Kim et al., 2006; Whitten and Wakefield, 2006; Low and Johnston, 2006; Kim, Shin, and Lee, 2006; Bansal, Taylor, and James, 2005; Harvir and Taylor, 2004; Jones, Taylor, Becherer, and Halstead, 2003; Bansal and Taylor, 1999; Keaveney, 1995). While those that included current switching behavior are lacking.

Answer to Q3: There are many studies that integrated different forms of switching factors, either as independent or mediating variables, and switching consequences in term of: (i) customer satisfaction (Jones, Taylor, Becherer, and Halstead, 2003); (ii) customer complaints (Chapa, Hernandez, and Wang, 2014); (iii) customer loyalty in TMSPS (Edward, George, and Sark, 2010; Min and Wan, 2009) and customer loyalty in other technologies (Blut, Beatty, Evanschitzky, and Brock, 2014; Chebat, Davidow, and Borges, 2011; Wang, Cheng, Hui Lin, and Wang, 2011; Kheng, Mahamad, Ramayah, and Mosahab, 2010; Chou and Shan, 2009); Lee, Lee, and Feick, 2001); (iv) customer retention, i.e. both intention to switch and loyalty (Baksi and Parida, 2012; Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003; Patterson and Smith, 2003). But there are fewer studies that focused solely on switching behavior as a dependent variable (e.g. Dwivedi et al., 2010; Min & Wan, 2009; Ranganathan, Seo, and Babad, 2006). In addition, prior studies on intention to switch have included switching factors either as independent variables (e.g. Deng, Lu, Wei and Zhang, 2010; Blut, Beatty, Evanschitzky and Brock, 2014; Şahin, and Kitapci, 2013; Baksi and Parida, 2012; Wang, Wu, Lin and Wang, 2011; Chebat, Davidow, Borges, 2011; Edward, George, and Sark, 2010; Chou and Shan, 2009; Pae and Hyun, 2006; Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003) or as mediating and moderating variables (e.g. Matzler, Strobl, Thurner and Füller, 2015; Park and Ryoo, 2013; Huang and Hsieh, 2012; Chang and Chen, 2008; Kim, Park and Jeong, 2004; Lee, Lee, and Feick, 2001) (Sharma and Patterson, 2000).

Answer to Q4: Among the reviewed studies only a few (8) focused on switching between mobile service providers (TMSPs) and used quantitative approach (Peng, Scott, and Prybutok, 2014; Şahin, Hin and Kitapci, 2013, Gray, Alessandro, and Carter, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Bashir, 2011; Anton, Camarero and Carrero, 2007; Low and Johnston, 2006; Lee, Kim, Lee and Park, 2006), while studies that approached the problem from a qualitative approach are lacking. In addition, most studies have tried to understand the switching behavior using a single research approach (quantitative-based questionnaires or qualitative-based interviews). But to the best of our knowledge, and with the exception of Gray et al. (2012), no study has used the mixed or combined approaches. In addition, many studies used samples composed of students (Patterson and Smith, 2003; Bansal, Taylor, and James, 2005; Lee, Kim, Lee, and Park, 2006; Min and Wan, 2009; Bhattacharjee, Limayem, and Cheung, 2012; Park and Ryoo, 2013; Peng, Scott, and Prybutok, 2014; Fan and Suh, 2014) while the rest of the studies focused on general customers.

Answer to Q5: We have noticed fewer studies focused on switching behavior after a trigger took place such as the introduction of MNP. We were able to identify only five studies that focused on switching after MNP implementation has started (Otsuka & Mitomo, 2013; Bashir, 2011; Shin, 2006; Lee, Kim, Lee & Park, 2006; Nimako, Ntim & Mensah, 2014).

Answer to Q6: We found very few studies (8) that focused on mix sample of switchers and stayers (Gray et al., 2012; Dwivedi et al., 2010; Min & Wan, 2009; Shin and Kim, 2008; Shin, 2006; Ranganathan, Seo & Babad, 2006; Keaveney and Medhavan, 2001; Ganesh, Arnold & Reynolds, 2000) while the majority focused on intention to switch by one type of users (those who intend to switch) (e.g. Bhattacharjee et al., 2012). However, exploring both groups and their retention (in terms of staying –loyalty or switching) within each of the two categories (stayers and switchers) with the effect of demographic variables (level of education, gender, brand name, use of call centers, awareness of MNP, type of service (prepaid vs. postpaid), etc.) did not receive due attention. The causal relationship between these variables is a must as marketers need causal models to understand the cause and effect of switching behavior. This is important in order to keep their clients and avoid losing them compared to more proactive TMSP companies.

Answer to Q7: Several theories were used to investigate different issues related to switching and loyalty issues including the following: theory of planned behavior—TPB (Nimako, Ntim, and Mensah, 2014; Pookulangara, Hawley, and Xiao, 2011), technology acceptance model—TAM (Larkotey, Ansong, Damoah, Abandoh-Sam, 2012), expectation disconfirmation theory—ECT (Fan and Suh, 2014; Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds, 2000), innovation diffusion theory-IDT (Huang and Hsieh, 2012), Push, pull and Mooring's migration model (Gray, Alessandro, and Carter, 2012; Bashir, 2011; Hou, Chern, Chen, and Chen, 2009; Hou, Chern, Chen, and Chen, 2009; Bansal, Taylor, and James 2005), unified theory of acceptance and use of technology- UTAUT (Bhattacharjee, Limayem, and Cheung, 2012), value-based decision model (Hsu, 2014; Park and Ryoo, 2013), social movement theory (Lee, Trimi, and Yang, 2014), theory of motivation (Park and Ryoo, 2013), transaction cost theory and social exchange theory (Whitten and Wakefield, 2006), commitment theory (Harvir and Taylor, 2004; Sharma and Patterson, 2000), transactional/relational continuum (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999), cultural model of Hofstede (Chapa, Hernandez, and Wang

2014). Other studies used non-theory models. This is the case of Shin (2006) who built their model based Kim et al. (2004). In addition, while much studies focused on the antecedent of loyalty that lead to retention of customers, including trust, perceived value, habit and commitment (Sanchez-Franco et al., 2009), we found out the existing literature ignored the important role of other variables such as service quality and system quality which are two important variables that affect the continuous use and system success of different technologies (DeLone and McLean, 2003). We also noticed that while some items of these two constructs did not use reliable and validated items such as "SERVQUAL" of Parasuraman et al. (1988), none switching study did include this construct despite the fact that some studies included fewer items (Dwivedi et al., 2010). We have also observed another limitation. We did not find any past study that integrates and combines some of the well-known behavioral theories in the information system field, including ECT, SERQUAL, and information system success). Those that used a specific model theory did not have enough rationale for the choice of selected theory. The use of these theories is necessary to allow a comparison of findings across studies. Last, we did not find any prior study that provided a rationale for the chosen model.

Answer to Q8: There was also a conflict of results with regard to whether switching costs (financial switching cost, perceived switching barriers, and customer lock-in) have direct impact customer retention (loyalty vs. switching). Existing knowledge are conflicting with regard to this issue (Fan and Suh, 2014; Hsu, 2014; Park and Ryoo, 2013; Zhang et al., 2009; Shin and Kim, 2008; Kim et al., 2006; Bansal et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2004).

4. CONCLUSION

This study conducted of literature review of 53 studies related to switching and customer retention. The main achieved findings were the following:

- The literature review reveals that switching behavior was studied more in developed countries compare to developing countries
- We found several dimension and factors affect intention to switching behavior
- Most prior studies used a quantitative approach to study the intention to switch, while very few have a mixed method research (quantitative and qualitative). Also most prior studies have used mainly students as the participants, and no study has used the mixed or combined approaches.
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- Fewer studies focused on switching behavior after a trigger took place such as the introduction of MNP.
- Very few studies focused on mix sample of switchers and stayers while the majority focused on intention to switch by one type of users (those who intend to switch).
- While switching costs are important driver toward switching, results revealed mixed results. They were studied either as independent variables or as mediating and moderating variables. Switching costs were studied as independent or mediating variables and their consequences in term of: customer satisfaction; or customer loyalty (Edward, George, and Sark, 2010; Min and Wan, 2009), or customer retention, i.e. both intention to switch and loyalty.
- Most studies have approached the switching behavior using well-known theories including TPB, TAM, ECT, IDT, Push, pull and Mooring's migration model, UTAUT, but others have also used non-theory models. However, studies that integrate and combine some of the well-known behavioral theories in the information system field, including ECT, SERQUAL, and information system success are lacking.
- Many factor lead to customer retention (loyalty vs. switching). However, prior studies ignored the important role of other variables such as service quality and system quality.
- There was a conflict of results with regard to the effect of switching costs (financial switching cost, perceived switching barriers, and customer lock-in) on customer retention (loyalty vs. switching)/.

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