

Insights from Universiti Teknologi MARA Students on e-CRM in Telecommunication Companies

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ABSTRACT

Consumer loyalty remains a key driver of consistent and long-term revenue growth, even amidst intense competition in industrial marketing. e-Customer Relationship Management (e-CRM) extends traditional CRM by utilizing internet-based platforms, social media, mobile applications, and other digital tools to enhance customer engagement and experience. This study explores the perspectives of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) students on the implementation of e-CRM strategies by telecommunication companies and their impact on student loyalty. The case study explores key e-CRM features—pre-purchase, at-purchase, and post-purchase—that contribute to student loyalty and examines how these elements are applied by telecommunication firms. Surveys were conducted among Faculty of Business Management students at UiTM Peninsular Malaysia to gather empirical data and insights. The findings reveal a significant relationship between the effective use of e-CRM features and increased student loyalty. By analyzing theoretical frameworks and real-world applications, the study provides valuable insights into how telecommunication companies can enhance their brand image, foster customer trust, and build long-term relationships through e-CRM. The results underscore the importance of delivering high-quality products and services throughout the e-CRM process to maintain a competitive edge in the industry. Recommendations include the continuous improvement of e-CRM strategies to ensure sustained student loyalty and market competitiveness.

Key words: e-CRM, University Student, Loyalty, Telecommunication Companies customer Bys rends, organizations can effectively

Introduction

In an era where digital technology blurs the boundaries between data platforms, the concept of e-CRM opens opportunities for customers to engage with companies through multiple information channels, many of which are interconnected with information and communication technologies applications available on the Internet (Kumar, Mokha, & Pattnaik, 2022). The goal of e-CRM is to be used inversely by different companies. Some of them use it to increase short-term revenue or decrease costs through the mechanization of sales or service processes, eventually putting more responsibility on the customer for self-service. In instance, technology has made communication and access to information incredibly convenient and timely for users from the comfort of their own home and office, as well as from wherever they are when on the move with their mobile phone units or PDAs (Nor Shahriza, Siti Hawa & Ramlah, 2006). e-CRM holds the potential to elevate customer-service interaction levels. The overarching objective of e-CRM is to enhance customer relationships through improved service provision and the retention of valuable customers (Dotan, 2008). Furthermore, e-CRM facilitates the cultivation of loyalty and the extension of the customer life cycle by augmenting customer value and satisfaction, as found by Dyche (2001) and Ravi & Marcia (2001).

Despite the various information services provided through mobile phone services, assessments need to be made in order to understand the needs and requirements of the mobile phone users. Many information related services provided through a mobile phone as a delivery mode are left underutilized due to lack of understanding on the users and the nature of the contents and service needed (Nor Shahriza et al., 2006). This case study explores key e-CRM features—pre-purchase, at-purchase, and post-purchase—that contribute to university student loyalty and examines how these elements are applied by telecommunication firms. As cited by DeBaillon and Rockwell (2005), university students were the heaviest users of mobile phone followed by high school students and non-students' adults. Another study conducted in Taiwan also found that the students share similar characteristics, economic ability and consumption behavior (Debaillon and Rockwell, 2005). Thus, the respondents for this study were also the students which were among university students at Malaysia.

Consequently, there is a pressing need especially among university students to prioritize service quality offered by telecommunication companies to effectively address these issues. Given the significance of e-CRM and as telecommunication companies embrace e-CRM, there is a shift towards managing customer interactions digitally, leading to enhanced technological and organizational capabilities. This evolution provides opportunities for firms to leverage big data and gain a deeper understanding of how these capabilities can positively impact performance (Swathi, 2020). The richness of big data handled by e-CRM contributes to this knowledge and facilitates more effective e-CRM strategies for telecommunication companies.

Important of e-CRM in Chosen Telecommunication Companies (CELCOM, MAXIS, DiGi)

In Malaysia, CELCOM, MAXIS and DiGi are among of the famous and established telecommunication companies. Three of these companies competed to each other to ensure they are able to attract more customers and make customers were loyal to their products and services. The products offered by these companies like prepaid (pre-) and postpaid cards, number phone packs and broadband. Additionally, there were many services provided by them to the customers like service center around Malaysia for any problems associated or contact center for received any

queries from their customers. Despite the important of e-CRM, in the important of area of customer service, CELCOM Company implemented a new billing system and introduced the Integrated Customer Care System (ICCS) under a e-CRM initiative, both initiatives were designed to improve the efficiency of CELCOM's customer service (<https://www.celcomdigi.com/>). The evidence found also as Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Maxis Berhad Jean-Pascal Van Overbeke (2010) cited Maxis also differentiates itself from its competition through its forward investments in the working environment of and cutting-edge technology used by its customer service staff. They were working to roll-out their new and enhanced e-CRM technology tools (<http://www.maxis.com>, 2010). For DiGi Company, one of the e-CRM adaptations was introducing the loyalty program which we called YOURDiGi Loyalty Program for both the pre- and postpaid customers (<http://www.digi.com.my>, 2011). Based on all evidences about e-CRM on these three telecommunication companies, it can be concluded that these companies were aware about the important of e-CRM and implement their own strategy to adopt with e-CRM.

Digital transformation plays a crucial role in enhancing students' loyalty and competitiveness for telecommunication companies. By leveraging digital technologies and strategies, CELCOM, MAXIX, and DiGi can create a strong online presence, engage with their target audience, and differentiate themselves from competitors. Through effective digital marketing efforts, such as social media campaigns, search engine optimization, and content marketing, they can build strong connections with students, attract their attentions more, reach a wider audience, and communicate their unique value propositions. By embracing digital transformation, they can also optimize their administrative processes, streamline operations, and provide seamless online services, enhancing overall efficiency and customer satisfaction. Ultimately, by staying ahead in the digital landscape, they can establish a positive brand image, foster competitiveness, and attract students in an increasingly digital-driven world. This transformation involves the adoption of advanced digital tools and platforms such as online management systems, online delivery methods, virtual discussion, and interactive e-learning resources to facilitate remote learning, collaboration, and engagement among staff and their customers.

To sustain their presence in the industry, these telecommunication companies must adopt a more creative approach in promoting their services and embrace digitalization as a strategic imperative (Oppong, Singh, & Kujur, 2020). By leveraging modern technology, these telecommunication companies can tap into the transformative potential of digital technologies, particularly in the context of e-CRM. These technologies have emerged as instrumental factors in driving global transformations in both business and society, offering numerous benefits for companies and customers alike (Swathi, 2020). Through the implementation of e-CRM practices and the utilization of digital tools, these telecommunication companies can enhance their ability to deliver tailored and personalized experiences, build stronger relationships with students, and ultimately improve their overall satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, it is important for business organizations as well as CELCOM, MAXIS and DiGi to have their own loyalty programs to attract customers to be interested with their products and services. In addition, based on Al-Hazmi (2020), to retain loyal customers, care must also be focused on integrating market communications and then able to improve the relationship with customers. This one also guarantees the achievement of the common aids of the company on one side and their customers on the other side.

e-CRM and Students' Loyalty in Telecommunication Companies

As to telecommunication companies' industry, the customer's assessment and judgments have sizable influence on loyalty. In the service business that always needs to have a close contact with customers, it is important for telecommunication companies to know the importance of e-CRM implementation. More and more enterprises adopt e-CRM to collect and combine customers' information, analyze and apply the information to marketing, selling and servicing activities in order to strengthen the competitiveness (Hsiu, 2007). For many companies, the chief business value becoming a customer-focused business lies in its ability to help them keep customers loyalty, anticipate their future needs, respond to customers concerns, and provide top-quality customers services.

By leveraging digital technologies and implementing e-CRM strategies, CELCOM, MAXIS and DiGi can enhance their interactions with students, provide personalized support, and foster long-lasting relationships. e-CRM enables them to collect and analyze valuable data about students' preferences, behaviors, and feedback, allowing them to tailor their offerings and services to meet individual needs (Setiawan & Widaryanto, 2018). This personalized approach not only enhances the student experience but also contributes to a positive brand perception and reputation. According to a study by Azila (2011) and Prima Zani (2013), the effective implementation of e-CRM in the telecommunication companies positively influences students' perceptions of service quality. Moreover, e-CRM enables timely and targeted communication with students through various digital channels, such as email, chatbots, and social media, fostering engagement and building a strong brand image (Kumar et al., 2022; Matarazzo, Penco, Profumo, & Quaglia, 2021).

The availability of these digital communication platforms allows students to conveniently seek support, ask questions, and provide feedback, resulting in improved satisfaction and an enhanced this telecommunication reputation. Additionally, e-CRM facilitates efficient management of customers inquiries, applications, and buying processes, streamlining administrative operations and further contributing to a positive brand image (Jafari Navimipour & Soltani, 2016). Moreover, e-CRM provides these telecommunication companies with effective tools to enhance brand image and reputation by personalizing interactions, fostering engagement, and streamlining administrative processes. High quality e-service was the key to success for any e-tailers doing business in this competitive global e-commerce environment. To overcome consumers' barriers in conducting purchases globally, companies need to make great efforts to improve e-service. With the rapid growth of electronic business and rise of Internet-based services, the internet has provided a platform to deliver e-CRM functions on the Web. Thus, the function of e-CRM was assisting the telecommunication companies to become more competitive and successful. Based on the result revealed by Mann and Sahni (2011), the web site design factors like navigation structure and information content are important antecedents to customer service quality, which further influences customer satisfaction and trust. It highlighted the important of e-service quality and in this research, it focused on the web site design factors and the way the services were delivered by e-CRM.

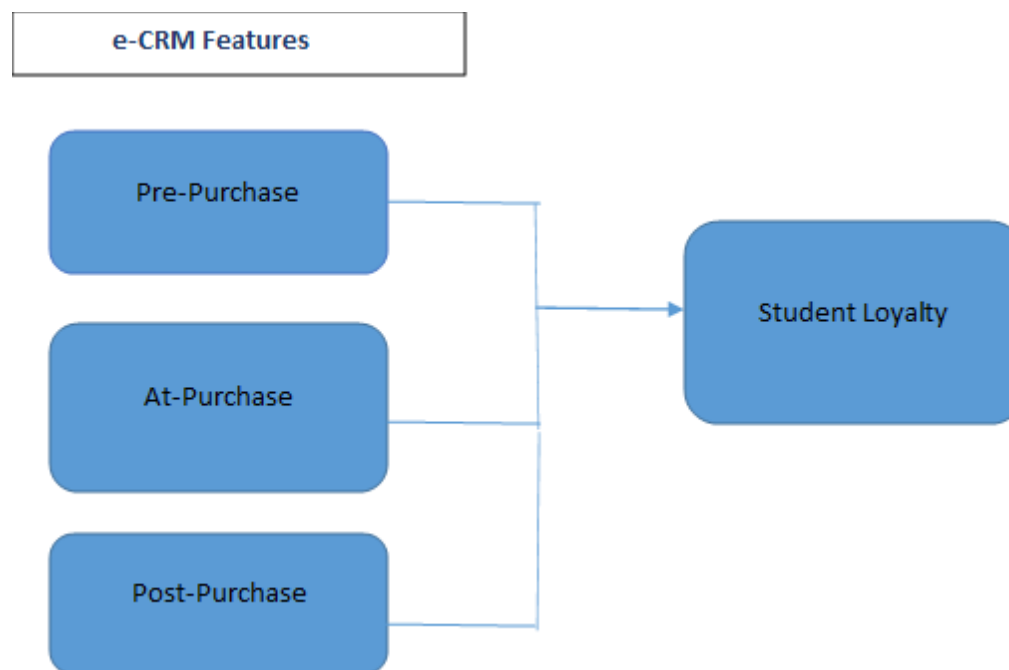
e-CRM (pre-purchase, at-purchase and post-purchase)

More and more sophisticated online customers would rather pay a higher price to e-tailers who provide high quality e-service (Schneider, 2002). To build customer trust and loyalty, and keep customer retention, e-tailers must shift the focus to e-service quality before, during and after

transactions. This had become especially important in the global e-commerce environment. When consumers conduct a purchase across the border, they will have more concern as to whether they will receive quality services from a ‘foreign’ e-tailer (Wang, 2003).

Thus, e-CRM seen as a way to achieve customer’s loyalty in business nowadays. This case study investigated the service provided by e-CRM deeply before, during, and after that we called pre-purchase e-CRM, at-purchase e-CRM and post-purchase e-CRM. Under pre-purchase, the items were web site presentation, access to information, information quality, loyalty program and search capabilities. Under at-purchase, the items were payment methods, privacy and security, dynamic pricing, promotions, and ordering process/speed. Under post-purchase, the items were problem solving, order tracking and after sale service. The theoretical framework of e-CRM features on student loyalty explained and illustrated as below:

Framework



Opportunity and Consideration

The evidence of successful e-CRM implementation can be found in previous research (Taghipourian & Hatami, 2019; Azman & Abdullah, 2021; Snijders et al., 2019; Etcuban & Durano, 2015; Abdeldayem, Yehia & Marie, 2022; Kumar & Misra, 2020). The e-CRM is an application across all company levels that allows electronic contacts with clients, enabling firms to engage with their customer base successfully (Nguyen, 2012). Implementing e-CRM strategies in these telecommunication companies can enhance the student experience, strengthen brand image, and improve overall institutional effectiveness. How this e-CRM works for these telecommunications is when it enables institutes to establish personalized and interactive communication channels with students, fostering engagement and enhancing their overall experience.

As studied by Dubihlela & Molise-Khosa (2014), e-CRM systems have arisen as a significant improvement in marketing, focusing primarily to establish and maintain long-term customer connections. Moreover, several studies have highlighted the ability of e-CRM systems to make significant contributions to business successes and competitive advantage (Azila, 2011; Das, 2012; Dubihlela & Molise-Khosa, 2014; Mang'unyi, Khabala, & Govender, 2017), as customer can access product or service more convenient and less expensive as compare with traditional way (Kumar & Vikkraman, 2011).

Challenges

One of the primary challenges in implementing e-CRM systems is ensuring the privacy and protection of customers data. The challenges of privacy and protection of customer data have become increasingly complex as technology evolves and businesses collect more data. Some key challenges are data breaches, regulatory compliance, data minimization or user consent. To address these challenges, organizations must adopt a proactive approach to data privacy and protection, including investing in robust cybersecurity measures, establishing clear data governance policies, fostering a culture of privacy awareness, and staying informed about regulatory changes. Companies must comply with relevant data protection laws and regulations, such as the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) in Malaysia. It is crucial to establish robust data security measures, including encryption, access controls, and regular audits, to safeguard student information. Implementing transparent data handling practices and obtaining explicit consent from students will also foster trust and confidence in the institution's e-CRM initiatives (Dehghanpouri et al., 2020; Romano & Fjermestad, 2007).

Secondly, by introducing e-CRM, it can significantly enhance customer interaction and data management, but organizations often face several challenges related to resistance to change. Some of the most common challenges are cultural Resistance, fear of job loss or lack of skills and training. Common concerns in digital transformation like e-CRM may include the perceived complexity of the system, fear of job displacement, and unfamiliarity with digital tools (Anaam et al., 2021; Kitsios, Giatsidis, & Kamariotou, 2021; Rashwan, M. Mansi, & Hassan, 2019). To overcome resistance, it is essential for top management or respective person to communicate the benefits and purpose of e-CRM clearly.

Finally, other issues to consider included the requirement for continued staff training and development to create a competent e-CRM team, integration of e-CRM with current information systems and processes, and connecting e-CRM initiatives with the institution's broader strategic goals. This is because behind all the benefit gain through adopting e-CRM system, there also unsuccessful story that need to be highlight. Anaam et al., (2021) in their review had reported that the significant problem behind the failure of e-CRM organizational change, company policy, and lack of e-CRM understanding. However other study stated that the failure of e-CRM system due to the company members hard to change from traditional way or practice (Bhanu & Magiswary, 2010; Nguyen, 2012).

By addressing these issues and concerns, Malaysian telecommunications firms may traverse the intricacies of e-CRM deployment and maximise its potential to boost brand image, increase student satisfaction, and promote long-term commitment.

Conclusion

The findings reveal a significant relationship between the effective use of e-CRM features and increased student loyalty which met the objective of this study. Based on the present case study's findings, the e-CRM features are classified into three (3): pre-purchase, at-purchase and post-purchase. All these features contributed high values and influence student loyalty towards telecommunication companies. As e-CRM proven and lasting strategy to ensure e-loyalty of customers towards e-business (Kumar, Mokha & Pattnaik, 2021), this study proved also the positive result in which indicated that there was influence of e-CRM features to loyalty. In summary, effective e-CRM can enhance loyalty among students by fostering personalization, engagement, and satisfaction. However, these telecommunication companies must also navigate certain challenges to maximize these benefits.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does e-CRM enhance students' engagement and loyalty in the telecommunications sector?
2. What role does data analytics play in e-CRM systems for telecommunication companies?
3. In what ways can e-CRM contribute to personalized customer experiences in telecommunications?
4. What challenges do telecommunications companies face in implementing and maintaining effective e-CRM strategies?
5. How does e-CRM impact operational efficiency and cost reduction for telecommunication companies?

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