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BUILDING RESISTANCE TO BRAND SWITCHING DURING DISRUPTIONS IN A COMPETITIVE MARKET

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates brand switching behaviour among consumers in a competitive market. Emphasis historically places functional utility at the expense of social meanings. Given the paucity of literature, this study adopts a grounded theory methodology based on a series of in-depth interviews among Smartphone users in the UK to access consumers' insights and experiences of specific brands and provides consideration of market disruptions. Data from this study confirms that literature does not capture non-utilitarian factors such as socio-psychological benefits. Underlying factors explore how resistance can be built from an identity theory perspective that motivate consumers to continue buying specific brands.

KEY WORDS

Brand switching; Smartphones; Identity theory; Market disruption; Self-concept; Word-of-mouth; Consumer satisfaction; Brand loyalty.

1. Introduction and Background

There is a plethora of research on brand switching covering customers' intentions to assess possible substitutes of product categories to maximise the functional utility attributes in the marketing mix. (Guadagni and Little, 1983; Seiders and Tigerts, 1997; McFadden 1986; Sathish et al. 2011; Jung et al., 2017; Giovanisa & Athanasopouloub, 2018). Literature in the above stream of research fails to acknowledge the impact of socio-psychological attributes besides functional utility maximisation. This study presents an empirical investigation into the phenomenon of brand switching behaviour of consumers in a competitive market, with implications for how resistance could be built from an identity theory perspective. Emphasis has historically been placed on functional utility of products at the expense of social meanings. With exceptions of product function, insufficient attention has been paid to socio-psychological attributes and personal and social meanings of brands (Lam et al., 2013; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The basic assumption underlying this study is that people are constantly involved in social interactions and interpreting their constantly changing world. Hence, this study deviates from the traditional economic viewpoint of dealing with brand switching as functional utility maximisation (Appiah and Ozuem, 2018), to treating brand switching as a consequence of social mobility between brand identities amongst consumers (He et al, 2012; Lam et al., 2013).

The study explores existing literature on brand loyalty and identity theory to examine the effects of identity on brand switching. Despite extensive studies on brand switching (Ozuem and Lancaster, 2012) minimal research has been carried out to establish how market disruptions negatively impact customer-brand relationships and the strategies companies adopt to gain competitive advantage by repositioning themselves to minimise brand switching when disruptions occur in today's complex and globalised business environment.

Although loyalty literature offers valuable understanding of customer–brand relationships, two limitations trigger the need for critical investigation (Lam et al., 2013).

1. Predictors of brand switching resistance includes resisting both time and market disruptions. However, brand literature tends to concentrate on performance of brands within normal market conditions with less consideration for current complexities (Keller and Lehmann, 2006) when market disruptions become more prevalent.
2. Another limitation arises when we consider perceived value of brands when conceptualised and operationalised as functional utilitarian values. This is prevalent in brand loyalty literature, which does not capture other non-utilitarian factors such as socio-psychological benefits that might motivate customers to continue buying (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

This study builds upon loyalty literature by considering limitations identified, to further develop a substantive theory in relation to pre-existing frameworks e.g. Lam et al.'s (2013) consumer–brand identification (CBI) model and examine brand switching in a specific market disruption, namely the introduction of a radically new brand due to innovation in the technology industry and specifically the Smartphone industry. This sector was selected as the product category for this study because it represents a context in which brand switching is likely to occur because of the multiple alternatives and short inter-purchase frequencies that identify it (Jung et al, 2017). Notably, the market for Smartphones is dynamic, and the degree and rate of change in the technology and product innovation disrupting the market is staggering (Cecere et al, 2015).

No research has been carried out to study the phenomenon of brand switching from an identity theory perspective that utilises grounded theory methodology. Such an approach could provide useful insights and could help build a substantive theory to serve as a basis for

future research. The study could also benefit organisations from a managerial point of view, especially brand and customer relationship managers who must devise customer relationship strategies to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Da Silveira et al., 2013; Stokburger-Sauer et al, 2012; Lam et al., 2013).

2. The Market Structure for Smartphones

Smartphones represent the most recent step in the evolution of portable information and communication technology. The emergence of myriad apps via Smartphones, access to the Internet allow users an 'always-on connectivity' (Fuentes, Bäckström & Svingstedt, 2017; Park, 2019: Driediger & Bhatiasevi, 2019). The Smartphone market has experienced strong growth in recent years mainly due to technological advancement in the industry (Filieri, 2017; Tang et al., 2017; Yeh et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016). Smartphones are ubiquitous in modern society (Barnes, Pressey & Scornavacca, 2019), evidence suggests that there were 3.9 billion smartphones globally in 2016, which is estimated to rise to 6.8 billion by 2022 (Ericsson, 2017).

The current global Smartphone market continues to be dominated by a small number of large technology firms such as, Samsung, Huawei and Apple. In a report by the International Data Corporation (IDC), andriod Smartphones market share continues to grow across the globe, with a total of 355.2 million units sold in the third quarter of 2018Samsung, leads the smartphone market in terms of market share, accounting for 20.3% in the third quarter of 2018, while Huawei overtook Apple ~~it~~ leaping closely behind Sumsung, with 52 million handsets sold, totaling 14.6% of the overall smartphone market share, driven by sales of its high-end P20 series (Su, 2018).~~—~~A report by Statistica (2019) shows that global Smartphones market share, in terms of sales, in the second quarter of 2018 indicates that

88%. This percentage of all smartphones sold were Smartphones with Android operating system.

Despite significant growth in the industry, the Smartphone market is changing with severe threats (Felix, 2015; Tang et al., 2017; Cousins and Robey, 2015). Manufacturers leverage their competitive advantage to enable them to maintain their position in the market with a positive brand image, exploring new revenue streams and achieving a sustainable product differentiation to drive sales (Yeh et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016). The UK economy continues to be a huge market for Smartphone manufacturers.

3. Theoretical Underpinnings and Contextualisation

Personal identity points to the direction of an individual's biography. It encapsulates an individual's uniqueness, which is what makes that individual different from others in the social field. Goffman (1968) holds the view that individuals are identified by peculiar signs displayed at a certain time either at a point in the past or now, which he believes will not stop. This means that the symbols and signs that distinguish us from others become our personal identity. This could be our biography, our personal data, our fingerprints, etc.

'By personal identity, I have in mind . . . positive marks or identity pegs, and the unique combination of life history items that comes to be attached to the individual with the help of these pegs for his identity' (Goffman, 1968, p.74).

This represents a complex and uninterrupted profiling of who we are as individuals, instead of our inner essence, our feelings, and how we exist in society.

Marketing research based on identity theory focuses on how individual consumers behave in agreement with the most salient identity (i.e. highest in the hierarchy), because it provides the most meaning for the self (Swimberghe, et al., 2018; Prentice, Han, Hua & Hu,

2019). This study posits that customers who identify with a brand are likely to be loyal to the brand, but all brand-loyal customers need not identify with the brand.

Although identity and social identity theory have evolved across the fields of social psychology and sociology, both have several concepts in common and have been incorporated into self-concept marketing literature. Both examine the association between the self and society (Belk, 1988; Swimberghe et al., 2018). Most relevant to this research are identification and identity-congruent behaviour. Identity represents the subjective component of a role and identities are organised hierarchically.

Analysis of brand identification has developed from its underpinning in social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT). These theories indicate that consumers try to attain a social identity that communicates their own identity, which assimilates to that of members within a group to which they belong (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). As conceptualised in SIT, identification is defined as the psychological state that has multidimensional perspectives, namely affective, cognitive and evaluative (Lam et al., 2013). However, it has also been defined in literature as congruence of self-image among consumers and brands (Hughes and Ahearne, 2010) or the involvement of a consumer in a brand. Consumers identify with brands with which they share similar personality traits and values, given the importance of the symbolic nature of brands. Consumers create their social identity based on their brand choice (Dey et al., 2018).

Identifying with a preferred brand has psychological benefits, including strengthening consumers' self-esteem (Elbedweihy et al., 2016), involving behaviours like loyalty, cross-buying, up-buying and word-of-mouth. It also implies a willingness to pay a higher price and resistance to negative information about the company.

Among the most important antecedents of brand identification literature is congruence between the consumer's and the brand's values (Augusto and Torres, 2018) and satisfaction

with the brand. Lam et al. (2013) summarise the antecedents of the consumer's identification with the manufacturer's brand using three variables: instrumental, symbolic and consumer trait variables. Specifically, for the Smartphones industry, and for a leading brand manufacturer, this study considers product innovation, perceived quality and brand distinctiveness as instrumental drivers. The characteristics of these instrumental drivers, are generally under the control of manufacturers. Associations with Smartphones are conceived as symbolic variables.

It accepts congruence between the consumer's image and that of the brand (self-brand congruity) and perceived brand-image to be symbolic drivers, whereas resilience, brand advocacy and loyalty are measured as satisfaction variables. The model assumes that satisfaction with the brand is key to constructing long-term relationships between the brand and the consumer (Oliver, 1980; Shanahan, Tran & Taylor, 2019).

The focal drivers of consumer identification with the Smartphone sector are categorised and explained further. Product innovation, Perceived quality and brand distinctiveness ~~is~~ are considered ~~an~~ as instrumental drivers of Smartphones because generally under the control of manufacturers. Instrumental drivers are the consumer's judgment about the superiority or excellence of a product (Zeithaml, 1988; Rahman and Soesilo, 2018), hence it represents an instrumental driver of CBI (Mittal, 2006 'functional'.

Associations with Smartphones (which provide self-brand congruity) are conceived as symbolic drivers since they are controlled by managers through marketing communications and brand positioning. The self-brand congruity is a fundamental antecedent of identification (Dimitriadis and Papista, 2011; Lam et al., 2013). Buyers with a more positive attitude to Smartphones will see themselves as 'smart shoppers' (Martínez and Montaner, 2008) congruent with the self-image of consumers.

Satisfaction with the brand over time arises from the results of subjective evaluation of preferred brand experience or consumption, especially where the brand exceeds expectations. A common aspect existent in most definitions of satisfaction is the perception of comparison between expectations and results (Gómez et al., 2011). Satisfaction with the brand is key to constructing relationships between the brand and the consumer (Hsiao et al., 2015). This is a vital strategic concept in marketing, as it seeks to generate a connection between the processes of purchasing and consumption and the post-purchase phenomenon.

4 Methodology: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is primarily an inductive, qualitative methodology, capable of exploring facts and meanings attributed to social situations (Flit et al., 2018). The philosophical underpinning of grounded theory is traced to the notion of 'symbolic interactionism' (Blumer, 1969). Advocates of symbolic interactionism believe that meaning is socially constructed and negotiated, and meaningful reality is contingent upon human construction, and can be elicited and refined only through interactions between and among the investigator and participants. Grounded theory focuses on behavioural patterns that shape social processes as people interact together in groups (Krush et al., 2015).

This study employs theoretical coding which encompasses the very basis of grounded theory. The essential relationship between data and theory is a conceptual code which conceptualises the underlying patterns of the data (Glaser, 1978; Howell, 2000). There are three types of theoretical coding; "open, axial and selective" which is appropriate for this study because the intention is to develop a substantive theory regarding brand switching behaviour in relation to pre-existing identity theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p 9). Open coding is the foundation of the grounded theory process. "The goal of the analyst is to generate an emergent set of categories and their properties which fit, work and are relevant for integrating theory. To achieve this goal the analyst begins with open coding" (Glaser, 1978; p 56). "Axial coding involves bringing the analysis together, creating a whole. It indicates the overall system of which the categories created through open coding are part. Axial coding allows a more focused means of discovering and relating categories" (Howell, 2000; p 33). "Selective coding is the process by which all categories are unified around a core category" (Corbin and

Strauss, 1998; p 15). "The core category represents the central phenomenon of the study. It is identified by asking questions like; what is the main analytical idea presented in this research? What does all the action/interaction seem to be about?" (ibid).

"Grounded theorist code, define and categorise data as it is collected. The data and researcher should continually interact and questions evolve as the analysis develops. Through theoretical sampling the study should not fit into pre-conceived processes but emergent codes and categories through the researcher's interpretation of the data. Coding is iterative and interactive and line by line coding ensures that the researcher's beliefs are not imposed on the data and interpretation" (Howell, 2013; p 138). The aim is to develop substantive theory which emerges from data. Substantive theory involves the process of conceptualizing empirical data through theoretical sampling and coding. Charmaz (2006) argued that theoretical sampling identified a different logic to traditional research design. The purpose of theoretical sampling is to obtain data to help ... explicate ... categories. When categories are full they reflect quality of respondent experiences and provide a useful analytic handle for understanding them' (p 100). Theoretical sampling is purposeful on the basis of the categories developed as the research programme progresses; it is based on theoretical concerns in relation to previous data collection. Incidents incorporate empirical data or indicators of a category or concept from which the grounded theory is generated. Through open coding procedures core categories emerge followed by further data collection and analysis for selective coding to theoretically saturate the core category and related categories. Data was collected to investigate phenomena, behaviours and developments in the UK. The unique role of these situational opposites in building resistance to brand switching during market disruptions in a competitive market was examined.

For grounded theorists the objective is to gain rich and detailed insights into the complexity of social phenomena. The suitability as participants in the research was based on their willingness to participate in the interview process. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted via Skype, through video chat and voice call services. Interview scheduling depended on the location of participants. Forty participants took part in interviews conducted across the UK. See table 1 for demographic profile of Interviewees

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Interviewees

	Age	Gender	Brand	Profession	Position
1	18-24	F	iPhone	Student	N/A
2	75+	M	Samsung	Web designer	Director
3	65-74	F	HTC	Courier owner	Manager
4	45-54	M	Samsung	Healthcare asst.	Supervisor
5	18-24	F	iPhone	Teacher	Other
6	55-64	M	HTC	Book keeper	N/A
7	75+	M	iPhone	Lecturer	Other
8	65-74	F	Samsung	Student	Other
9	35-44	M	iPhone	Marketing Exec.	other
10	45-54	M	iPhone	Security officer	Other
11	35-44	F	Nokia	Pharmacist	Senior Manager
12	18-24	M	iPhone	Engineer	Junior staff
13	35-44	F	iPhone	Nursery Nurse	Junior Staff
14	25-34	M	iPhone	Student	Other
15	25-34	M	iPhone	Student	Other
16	18-24	F	Samsung	Carer	Other
17	18-24	F	Samsung	Student	Other
18	45-54	M	iPhone	National Rail Staff	Other
19	55-64	F	Samsung	Nursery Nurse	Manager
20	55-64	F	Samsung	Health Worker	Other
21	75+	M	iPhone	IT Consultant	Executive
22	18-24	F	iPhone	Accountant	Manager
23	18-24	F	iPhone	Teacher	Other
24	55-64	M	Samsung	Health Worker	Assist. Manager
25	25-34	F	Samsung	Sales executive	Other
26	45-54	M	Nokia	Police	Other
27	45-54	F	iPhone	Entrepreneur	Director
28	25-34	F	Samsung	Nurse	Other
29	45-54	M	iPhone	Lecturer	Other
30	55-64	F	HTC	Banker	Executive

31	55-64	M	iPhone	Teacher	Manager
32	65-74	F	Nokia	Health Care Asst.	Other
33	18-24	M	HTC	Fire fighter	Other
34	65-74	M	HTC	Solicitor	Manager
35	45-54	F	Samsung	Insurance underwriter	Executive
36	55-64	M	iPhone	Accountant	Manager
37	65-74	F	iPhone	Lawyer	Manager
38	55-64	F	Samsung	Health Care Assistant	Other
39	35-44	M	iPhone	Teacher	Other
40	65-74	F	iPhone	Nutritionist	Manager

This paper investigates meanings within social phenomena (identity and brand switching). Following the long tradition of viewing possessions as the extended self (Belk, 1988), the study draws on identity theory to propose that customers may develop customer/brand identities, or a belief that they share the same self-definitional attributes with a brand or organisation; this study extends this logic to investigate brand switching behaviours.

5 Analysis and Findings

During open coding, data is broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.102). This process exposes data and uncovers thoughts, ideas and meanings expressed by respondents. Concepts emerged as interviews were completed and these were recorded using theoretical memos which provided a snapshot of ideas at hand, with implications for noting relationships between codes. Emerging codes were examined for theoretical relevance, and only concepts that showed persistent occurrence in the collected data formed open categories. These were identified through analysis of interview questions and simultaneously compared until no new concepts

emerged. The analysis resulted in the emergence of seven open categories expressed in terms of their properties and dimensions:

- Self-congruence
- Functional utility
- Brand distinctiveness
- Brand loyalty
- Resilience (new innovative product)
- Resilience (competitive pricing)
- Brand advocacy

Each of the open categories was discussed in terms of its properties and dimensions as these related to data on brand loyalty and switching behaviour from an identity theory perspective. Table 1 summarises properties and dimensions of the open categories:

No.	Open Category	Properties	Dimensions
1	Self-congruence	Self-concept Self-esteem Belongingness Prestige	Positive Negative
2	Functional utility (Quality)	Perceived value Customer satisfaction	High Low
3	Brand distinctiveness	Uniqueness	High Low
4	Brand loyalty	Brand switching Attitudinal loyalty Behavioural loyalty	High Low
5	Resilience (new innovative product)	Brand switching	High Low
6	Resilience (competitive pricing)	Commitment	High Low
7	Brand advocacy	Brand mage Word-of-mouth	Positive Negative

Table 1: Summary of properties and dimensions of open categories

Axial coding was used to order and arrange categories in terms of their relationship with each other. Its purpose is to begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.124). Through the application of the paradigm model to categories that emerged during open coding, seven main categories were

identified. Each main category subsumes a combination of open categories. Axial coding was followed by selective coding, which integrated, interpreted and refined major categories and sub-categories to form a story-line that described what happened in the phenomenon. Using axial coding, four primary tasks were completed: laying out categories in terms of their properties and dimensions; identifying conditions, actions and interactions, and consequences associated with the phenomenon; relating categories to their sub-categories by analysing statements of relationship; identifying how the major categories relate to one another.

Axial coding established relationships between open categories during the coding process, as shown in Table 2.

Main categories (Open coding)	**Renamed categories (Axial coding)**
1. Self-congruence	**Identity**
2. Functional utility + Brand distinctiveness	**Customer satisfaction**
3. Brand loyalty	**Brand loyalty**
4. Resilience (new innovative product)	**Disruptions**
5. Resilience (competitive pricing)	**Brand switching**
6. Brand advocacy	**Brand advocacy**

Table 2: Relationship between open codes and axial codes

Following axial coding, conditions, actions and interactions, and consequences associated with the phenomenon were identified through the application of the paradigm model (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This provides a coherent explanation of what is taking place. The process further examines relationships among the data and explores conditions (contextual, causal and intervening), actions/interactions, and consequences in Table 3.

No.	Sub Category	Paradigm Component
1	Brand switching	Phenomenon
2	Market disruptions	Causal condition
3	Brand loyalty	Context
4	Customer satisfaction	Intervening condition
5	Identity	Action/interaction
6	Brand advocacy	Consequences

Table 3: Sub-categories and their paradigm components

Sub-categories address issues like where, how, why and with what consequences the phenomenon occurs. Interactions between these categories are presented in the coding diagram in Figure 2.

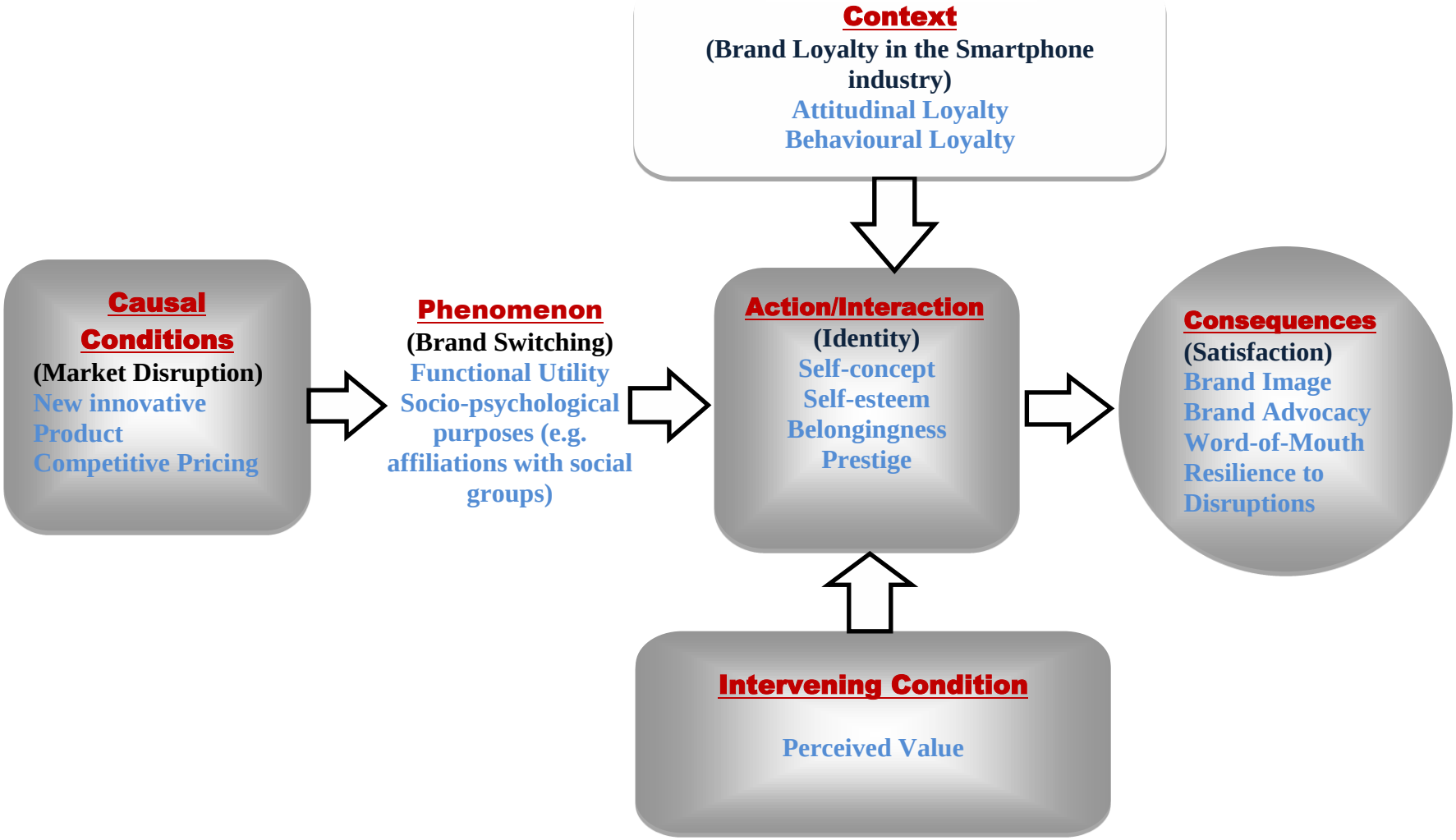

Figure 2: Axial Coding Paradigm Model of Resistance to Brand Switching

The paradigm model addresses two critical components of the theory: the structure and the processes. A process is 'a series of evolving sequences of action/interaction that occur over time and space, changing or sometimes remaining the same in response to the situation or context'. The phenomenon answers the question: 'What is going on here?' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp.130 and 165).

Sathish et al. (2011) indicated that it is consumer behaviour where the behaviour of consumers differs, based on the satisfaction level of consumers with providers. Hence, brand switching can be described as the process of being loyal to one product or service, and switching due to dissatisfaction or other problems.

Through the application of the paradigm model, the causal condition of market disruptions led to the phenomenon that represents the issue of the possibility of brand switching, which was the basis of the emerging theory. Indeed, the phenomenon of brand switching included properties of commitment, behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty and these properties reflected views of users of Smartphones.

In line with recent developments in choice modelling, identity theory suggests that brand switching also serves socio-psychological purposes besides functional utility maximisation. When asked if they would try other brands of Smartphones, even though they are satisfied with what they had, most participants answered that their circle of friends were users of particular brands which made it somewhat difficult to switch. Some responses from participants are noted:

> *"No, I won't switch; I will not use any other phone as my circle of friends are users of iPhone" (IT consultant).*
>
> *"In terms of recognition, I would say yes. It gives me a sense of pride as I feel part of an elite group. Also, Apple phones are of high quality and that*

represents my personality as I pay much attention to detail" (Security officer).

"I'm a socially oriented person; I'm close to my friends and that's what the FaceTime app seeks to promote. I grew up in a very tight-knitted community; we're very close." (Emmanuel, Student).

"Yes, all my friends in my social network are on FaceTime and I feel that sense of belongingness when I connect with friends on FaceTime." (International Courier owner).

Drawing from these responses, there is an indication that users of a specific brand derive their identity from affiliations with social groups. Most participants said they would stick with their current Smartphone because they have used other brands of Smartphones before, and they believe theirs is unique. They are not motivated to switch, which is evidence that they value such membership and distinguish themselves from those who do not share such affiliations, forming the in-group and the out-group.

Causal conditions are events and occurrences that influence development of the phenomena, such as being at a certain kind of place or experiencing a type of influence. They can be thought of as the background necessary, but not sufficient, for the development of the phenomena. This may explain why and how persons or groups respond in certain ways (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.130). In attempting to identify the causal condition, the study focused on the phenomenon while systematically going back to data to consult the set of events, happenings or incidents that led to the occurrence of the phenomenon.

Market disruptions are the major cause of brand switching and are major events occurring in a market that threaten customer-brand relationships (Stern et al., 1998). As noted by McGrath (2011), the concept of market disruption that occurs in a product market

immediately harkens to research into technology and innovation. Disruptions literally uproot and change how we think, behave, do business, learn and go about our day-to-day activities.

Disruptive innovation theory helps create a new market and eventually goes on to disrupt an existing market. The term is used in business and technology literature to describe innovations that improve a product or service in ways that markets do not expect, first by designing for a different set of consumers in the new market and later by lowering prices in the existing market.

The causal condition was technology and innovation. Data from consumers interviewed pointed out that consumers acknowledged their awareness of disruptions in the Smartphone market due to new and sophisticated brands that are introduced regularly. Most participants indicated that they would rather choose an innovation from their incumbent brand than that of a different brand, mainly because they were used to the incumbent brand, or they thought the difference might not be significant. Some responses follow:

> *"Yes, I will repurchase because I have got used to this brand and I will not switch, and learning how to use a new innovative phone from a different company" (Student).*
>
> *"No, I will not purchase any other, because the IOS (software) is unique to Apple unlike Android and others" (Unknown).*

The introduction of new brands of Smartphones causes the phenomenon of brand switching to happen. Respondents insisted that they would prefer a new innovative version of their current brand, rather than that of a different brand. However, their reasons were mainly because they were used to the current brand. Responses from Smartphone users show that consumers are aware of disruptions due to innovation.

Context denotes the specific set of patterns of conditions at a time and place that interact dimensionally to create circumstances or problems to which individuals respond

through a blend of action/interaction (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.132). The contextual conditions further answer the 'why' of the phenomenon. To provide the contextual framework for the actions and interactions, questions were:

"Would you buy this brand even if new Smartphones were launched by competitors?"

"Would you continue to buy this brand of Smartphone irrespective of price?"

The contextual conditions are attitudinal loyalty, behavioural loyalty and commitment. These contextual conditions affect the developed strategies through properties of the open category of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronise a preferred product or service consistently in the future, causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour (Oliver 1999, p.34). Indeed, participants interviewed agreed that they did not intend to switch and would prefer to stick with their current Smartphone because they were used to it in terms of manoeuvrability and accessibility. One response was:

"I will stick to iPhone, because I used an Android phone before iPhone, and I realised that in terms of manoeuvrability and accessibility of the functions of the phone, iPhone is unique" (Healthcare assistant).

Customer loyalty, in a behavioural way, measures the concept as behaviour involving repeat purchase of a product or service, evaluated by the sequence in which it is purchased, as a proportion of purchases, and an act of recommendation. Most participants admitted they were loyal to their incumbent brand provider.

Attitudinal loyalty captures the emotional and cognitive components of brand loyalty. Oliver (1999) aligns his description with this belief by defining loyalty as a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronise preferred products or services consistently in future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching

behaviour. This is why attitudinal loyalty is referred to as 'emotional loyalty' and is regarded as being much stronger and longer lasting and has been compared with marriage (Albert and Merunka, 2013). A respondent commented:

"I am loyal but not more than that. I am, though, engaged. I would say I'm in love with the Samsung brand" (Social worker).

This response represents attitudinal loyalty, which indicates not only higher repurchase intention, but also resistance to counter-persuasion to switch to a new offering. It indicates resistance to adverse expert opinion, a willingness to pay a price premium, and a willingness to recommend the service provider or brand to others. Participants clearly displayed this attribute by insisting they would not switch to any other phone.

Intervening conditions that mitigate or otherwise alter the impact of causal conditions on the phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.131). These contextual conditions influence strategies. In this study, intervening conditions were present and manifested in different situations for the phenomenon. Some intervening conditions occurred because of unexpected events, which caused the individual to respond in a new way to the situation through forms of actions and interactions.

Customer satisfaction concerns were key intervening conditions, and included properties such as functional utility, brand uniqueness, perceived value and quality. The identification of the intervening conditions led to posing questions:

"How distinct is your Smartphone from other Smartphones?"

"How satisfied were you with iPhone in terms of quality and functions?"

Interviews conducted with users revealed they were satisfied with quality and durability as well as the functionalities of their products. Functional benefits of brands are often product-oriented and satisfy immediate and practical needs. Such benefits are often associated with problem solution or avoidance. Interview responses suggested that

participants believe their current Smartphone gives them satisfaction in terms of quality and functions. Responses included:

> *"Yes, I will buy. I feel some commitment to the brand. It's very durable" (Healthcare assistant).*
>
> *"Very satisfied. Built to handle my needs" (Lecturer).*
>
> *"Satisfied with quality of iPhone. Functions are easy to use, and it has many features which other brands don't have" (Healthcare assistant).*

These responses explain why organisations that focus on quality through innovation and technology are likely to disrupt the product market with new and sophisticated products. Functional benefits, particularly those based on attributes, link directly to consumer decisions, but are not without their limitations, since they fail to differentiate, and moreover are easily replicated (Aaker, 1996).

An action connotes the stream of actual causal interventions that people use to resolve situations or issues they encounter. Interactions are mutual and comprise reciprocal action or influence. Strategic actions/interactions are purposeful, intended to resolve a problem or respond to the unexpected. Routines are actions/interactions taken in response to everyday life, which include rules, protocols, and ways of acting that maintain the social order. Indeed, actions which occur in response to changes in the context may be strategic when they are taken in response to problematic situations, or routine when they are carried out without much thought (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.165). Actions/interactions play a significant role in establishing the dynamics between individuals, groups and organisations. The extent to which a study focuses on individuals or groups depends on the extent to which there is action/interaction directed at managing, handling, carrying out or responding to a phenomenon as it exists in context or under a specific set of perceived conditions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.104).

This study discusses switching behaviours and organisational responses to contexts affecting strategic actions and interactions. These comprise the input of the concept of self-congruence. This refers to how much a consumer's self-concept is congruent with the personality of a typical user of the brand. Brand personality is the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. Consumers tend towards those brands with similar personality traits to themselves. Individuals are driven by a need to feel good about themselves. They try to maintain and enhance their own self-esteem (Malär et al., 2011). One way towards achieving this is to consume brands that are congruent with one's own view of self, or ideal self. Indeed, brands may be viewed as a system of signs in the construction of the self (Schembri et al., 2010). Consumers evaluate the symbolism of the brand and determine whether it is appropriate for their 'selves' (Belk, 1988).

Participants were asked 'if the brand symbol gives them recognition and reflects their personality, respectively'. This notion was evident from feedback from respondents as data from most users suggested that the brand is not just about making money but is about making a difference. This drives their connection with the brand, and it makes it vital to them. Some responses were:

> *"Being an iPhone user, I derive recognition and self-esteem from it. My company is an IT firm and we understand the need to have a top of the range Smartphone which has the ability and functions to support our work" (IT consultant).*
>
> *"Apple is not just about making money; they are about making a difference, so I think that's what drives my connection with the brand and it is vital" (Dentist).*

Identity is considered an action/interaction strategy, including its properties of self-concept, self-esteem, belongingness and prestige. Identity, as an action/interaction strategy in

response to the phenomenon of brand switching, provides a strong basis for organisations to capture the repurchase intentions of consumers. Identity theory is closely related to the self-concept, and both examine the connection between the self and social entities (Belk, 1988). These participants' views suggest that identities provide them with a sense of purpose and meaning, defining who they are, as well as why they behave in specified ways in society; hence, identities thus increase their self-esteem.

Consequences refer to the outcome or results of actions/interactions. These may be intended or unintended; primary or secondary. An unintended consequence arises when an action that is performed with the intention of producing one consequence produces a different one, which can be conflicting, negative or positive. This was identified through the question: 'Would you recommend to a friend?' Brand advocacy was identified as the consequences that occur resulting from strategies adopted, and outline the effect of brand image and positive word-of-mouth. Brand advocacy describes results from the implementation of strategies related to the effects of identity on brand switching behaviours among Smartphone users. Brand advocates are active when they have emotional bonds with a brand, and 'live' this brand through high involvement and word-of-mouth (Wragg, 2004).

Participants confirmed they would recommend their current brand of Smartphone to family and friends, and confirmed that this was purely based on the fact that the brand offers good quality and has a positive image:

> *"Honestly, I will always recommend the Samsung to family and friends. This is not because I work for Samsung, but my recommendation is purely because the brand offers good quality and value for money" (Samsung Customer service assistant).*

> *"I will recommend it to my pals, no doubt, especially those who expect more from a Smartphone, since the functions the iPhone provides are amazing" (News editor).*
>
> *"Yes, I will recommend, because I have never sent this iPhone for repairs for the past four years and never had a challenge with it" (Banking professional).*
>
> *"Yes, I will recommend, because it's the best Smartphone with distinct features" (Healthcare assistant).*

Participants' responses show belief that a positive brand image results in brand advocacy through positive word-of-mouth. As evidenced, satisfied customers are more likely to tell others of their favourable experience, and thus engage in positive word-of-mouth promotion (Wragg, 2004).

6. Substantive Theory

Based on brand loyalty literature and identity theory perspective, this study has empirically investigated brand switching in the competitive Smartphone market during disruptions caused by the introduction of new brands due to innovation. The nature of factors that influence brand switching behaviour based on the empirical data gathered for this study have been identified.

The study applied grounded theory and developed a substantive theory to enhance understanding of brand switching in competitive markets like the Smartphone industry. A substantive theory of resistance to brand switching behaviour within a competitive market emerged by establishing the causal conditions that led to the existence of the phenomenon, the context, intervening conditions, action/interactional strategies and consequences. Substantive theory has provided a thorough understanding of brand loyalty in competitive markets. This will enable technology firms in the Smartphone industry to develop stretegies

aimed at mitigating or building resistance to brand switching during disruptions in competitve markets.

The technique of simultaneous data collection and analysis was utilised to develop the theory of brand switching related to identifying the nature of competitive markets and the phenomena that were present. It also identified how these were brought about, and what effect they had on brand loyalty. Consequently, brand switching in competitive markets represents the core category, with disruptions (the introduction of new innovative products and competitive pricing) as causal conditions. Brand loyalty was the context, and customer satisfaction was the intervening condition. Identity was the action/interactional strategy and brand advocacy was the ultimate consequence. Substantive grounded theory is summarised:

- Brand switching affects brand loyalty in competitive markets like the Smartphone industry. The search for funtional utility maximisation and social mobility influences switching behaviour and the actions of Smartphone users across the UK. The context of brand loyalty, however, determines the impact of brand switching behaviour in competitive markets like the Smartphone industry.
- Market disruptions affect levels of brand switching in competitive markets such as the Smartphone industry. The introduction of new innovative products and competitive pricing disrupts these competive markets, causing consumers to switch brands in search of utility maximisation. Market disruptions encourage brand switching and this impacts loyalty in competitive markets.
- Behaviourally loyal customers exhibit motivations to remain loyal:

  (i) They are forced to be loyal (e.g. by monopoly or high exit costs);

  (ii) They remain loyal due to inertia:

  (iii) They are functionally loyal.

  From a marketing perspective, this suggests that as long as there are no specific

'triggers' to compel behaviourally loyal customers to change providers, they will remain passively loyal.

- Attitudinal loyalty can be defined as capturing emotional and cognitive components of brand loyalty. This represents a more long-term and emotional commitment to a brand, and is why attitudinal loyalty is referred to as 'emotional loyalty' that is regarded as being 'much stronger and longer lasting'.
- Behaviourally loyal users are more likely to switch brands than attitudinally loyal users, since the latter group of consumers are psychologically committed to a particular brand, and intend to purchase and recommend this particular brand without necessarily taking repeat purchase behaviour into account.
- There seems to be a relationship between brand switching and perceived value, as the presence of funtional utility tends to influence customers' perceived value and quality. This may raise concerns about customer satisfaction, which mitigate the impact of market disruptions.
- Self-concept, self-esteem and brand prestige tend to have a direct impact on customer satisfaction in a competitve market. Identity strategies consolidate attitudinal loyalty in response to brand switching in a competitive market like the Smartphone industry. This is done through embedding into customers the ideas of self-concept and self-esteem, which create brand prestige and a sense of belonging. These strategies aim to enhance attitudinal loyalty and minimise behavioural loyalty traits.

The substantive theory suggests that the consequences of implementing these identity strategies would be to enable brands or organisations to withstand disruptions in competitive markets, and lead to high brand advocacy among consumers through positive brand image and word-of-mouth. This further mitigates brand switching during market disruptions in competitive markets.

7. Directions for Further Research

This study provides a framework for research in the Smartphone industry in the UK; future research could be extended to include more diverse populations and include other product categories that are disrupted by technological innovation, to be able to examine whether there exist any dissimilarities in terms of CBI formation over time. This will serve as a more rigorous and robust examination of the phenomenon with the CBI framework.

Substantive theory based on the CBI model as adapted and advanced for this study could be applied in other disciplines. Evidence from this study shows the importance of branding and brand loyalty to non-commercial organisations such as political parties (Pich and Dean, 2015), hence the CBI model applied in this study may be applicable in the examination of voters' loyalty to specific political parties.

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