

## **Captivating Nepal's Smartphone Users: The Path to Brand Loyalty**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Understanding brand loyalty drivers is crucial in Nepal's competitive smartphone market. This study investigates five key antecedents; brand image, perceived quality, brand engagement, social media marketing, and customer product involvement proposed to influence brand loyalty, addressing a gap in context-specific research.

**Methods:** A quantitative approach using descriptive and causal research designs was employed. Data from 200 smartphone users in Kathmandu were collected via structured questionnaires, applying convenience sampling.

**Results:** All five hypotheses were significantly supported ( $p < 0.05$ ). Customer product involvement emerged as the strongest predictor of brand loyalty, followed by perceived quality and brand image. Brand engagement and social media marketing also demonstrated significant, albeit comparatively weaker, positive effects.

**Conclusion:** The study confirms the multidimensional nature of brand loyalty in Nepal, highlighting customer product involvement as the dominant driver. Brands must prioritize

fostering deep consumer involvement with products while strengthening perceived quality, brand image, engagement, and social media outreach to cultivate loyalty.

**Novelty:** Its key novelty lies in revealing customer product involvement not traditional drivers like brand image as the paramount loyalty determinant, offering fresh strategic imperatives for market-specific brand management.

**Keywords:** Brand, Customer, Loyalty, Market, Satisfaction, Smartphone

## **Introduction**

Brand loyalty remains a central focus for marketing researchers. Studies in this area consistently show that consumers who are loyal to a brand tend to spend more than those who are not ([Tahir et al., 2024](#)). Thus, brand-loyal consumers are rifle shot considered as the most valuable target market for the organizations ([Ganesh et al., 2000](#)). According to Dick and Basu ([1994](#)), customer loyalty is a combination of attitude loyalty and behaviour loyalty. Brand loyalty is a type of link that consumers create through such value perception of brands ([Aaker, 1996](#)). Consumers will give their trust and loyalty to the brand once they stand behind it and their image of it ([Galuh Cahyaning Pramesti et al., 2024](#)).

Brand building is also important to marketers because it fosters customer retention and at times may require less of an investment of marketing resources relative to customer acquisition ([Riesen & Herndon, 2011](#); [Hossain & Kibria, 2024](#)). It also enhances the brand equity of the company ([Aaker, 1991](#); [Chaudhuri, 1995](#); [Uncles, Dowling & Hammond, 2003](#)). Consumers' buying decisions is largely influenced by intense competition among numerous brands within the packaged goods sector, along with an inherent preference for variety ([Choong, 1998](#); [Satyender Yadav & Nitin Negi, 2024](#)). Additionally, research highlights that consumers are not a homogeneous group ([Hallberg, 1995](#)); their connections with brands vary significantly in both intensity and nature ([Fournier & Yao, 1997](#); [Osorio et al., 2023](#)).

## **Review of the Literature and Conceptual Framework**

Brand loyalty continues to be a key area of interest for marketing scholars. It is defined as a strong and enduring commitment by consumers to repurchase or continue using a preferred product or service, even when faced with external factors or marketing efforts that might encourage them to switch to alternatives ([Son, 2010](#); [Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021](#)).

Brand image plays a crucial role in helping organizations position their products and services effectively in the marketplace ([Coulter & Zaltman, 1994](#)). It refers to the consumer's perception formed through brand associations stored in memory based on past experiences ([Lee et al., 2011](#)). Lazarevic ([2011](#)) identifies brand image as a key determinant in enhancing brand loyalty. A positive brand image allows companies to convey brand value to customers, which in turn reinforces and supports consumer loyalty to the brand ([Li & Lee, 2024](#)).

Aaker ([1991](#)) argues that perceived quality of the customers has a crucial effect in the brand loyalty and company success. It is a key factor in conducting warm customer relationship and belief. The perceived brand quality abilities the company to make more profits because it has an effect on brand loyal and on the number of the satisfied customers ([Aperia & Back, 2004](#)).

Consumers access prior information and experience to evaluate product quality, which is not an objective judgment but an individual and subjective one ([Holbrook & Corfman, 1985](#); [Garrido-Castro et al., 2024](#)).

Brand experience is a critical factor influencing consumers' decisions to repurchase a brand ([Brakus et al., 2009](#)). It is widely recognized as a key driver of brand loyalty because it evokes positive emotions and emotional connections between customers and the brand ([Brakus et al., 2009](#)). Consumers who have had a good experience with the brand pay recognition to the brand and supplier, these favorable conditions may help them to re-consume the same brand ([Goodson, 2011](#)). The brand experience is important as it enhances the intent to consume the brand in the future and affects the intent to try the brand line extension of a brand ([Kim & Sullivan, 1998](#)). Customers will be encouraged to look for a healthy and positive brand experience, with a view to their brand repurchase ([Hoch & Deighton, 1989](#)). The impact of brand experience on the customer's brand loyalty varies ([Brakus et al., 2009](#); [Saputra & Dewi, 2016](#); [Ong et al., 2018](#)).

Social media refers to interactive, computer-based technologies that enable individuals to create and share ideas, career interests, and various forms of content within virtual communities and networks. Social media marketing leverages these platforms to allow businesses and organizations to engage directly and personally with their customers, fostering communication and building stronger relationships. It is important to marketers since it is an inexpensive means of reaching consumers and offers multiple mediums for interacting and engaging customers in each stage of the purchasing life cycle ([Tuten & Sollomon, 2014](#); [Roy & Datta, 2022](#)). Social Media Marketing Social media marketing makes good use of resources and time, assisting a company build a platform for building customer loyalty (as opposed to usual convention) ([Pollock et al., 2011](#)). Unlike traditional marketing approaches, social media marketing represents a modern and unique strategy that emphasizes strengthening brand image and fostering customer loyalty through personalized engagement and relationship-building techniques ([Gordhamer, 2016](#)). Solem ([2016](#)), suggests that the consumer in that participates in social networks, through being an active member and posting positively in activities is brand satisfied and loyal. Brand and marketing activities have been the core of social media ([Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010](#)).

Customer product involvement refers to the level of personal commitment a consumer has toward a particular brand. This involvement often stems from the individual value or meaning a customer attaches to a specific product or brand. Importantly, product involvement is shaped by the consumer's perception rather than by the inherent characteristics of the product itself ([Pascale & Lim, 2003](#); [Wang et al., 2022](#)). A brand's significance can vary across different situations, influencing how engaged a consumer becomes with a product. Consumers tend to exhibit high involvement when they view a product as essential, enjoyable, or highly desirable ([Pascale & Lim, 2003](#)). Additionally, the personal relevance of a brand can significantly impact how consumers search for information, process it, and ultimately make purchasing decisions ([Riesen & Herndon, 2011](#)). Tabish et al. ([2017](#)) studied the drivers of brand loyalty in mobile

phone industry. The principal purposes were to discover the key factors and measure the effects that lead to customer's loyalty to the brand and subsequently to investigate these effects on customers' decisions in selecting the brand. The methodology adopted is a Quantitative research, data has been collected from the questionnaire. Key results showed that trust is the most important factor influencing brand loyalty. The trust in smartphones meant that customer satisfaction was high. In a business to business context brand loyalty is influenced by product involvement ([Ahmed et al., 2014](#); [Shrestha et al., 2024](#)).

Singh ([2016](#)) explored determinants of brand loyalty among Samsung mobile users in Nepal. The prime purpose of analyzing this qualitative analysis is to identify the factors affecting brand loyalty of Samsung mobile users among Nepali people. This research has the purpose to use the quantitative method. Causal relationship of independent and dependent variable is being explored using multiple regression through mathematical models on SPSS. The sample amounted to 120 participants in the study. The determining factor was the quality of Samsung smartphones as quality, fashionable and stylish products. Samsung is a well-known and respected brand in the world of smartphones. If you are Samsung smartphone users and feel like you are 1 part of smart community, then you will feel good and somehow great with this application! The contents in the page group of the Samsung smartphone are new and cool and satisfy end users demand in general, and they are satisfied in the use or possession of the same. Although several studies on brand loyalty of smartphone have been carried out in developed as well as in some undeveloped countries, a knowledge gap exists with respect to the brand loyalty of smartphone in Nepal. The research aims of the study include:

- To study the determinants of brand loyal in Nepalese smartphone market.

### **Theoretical Framework**

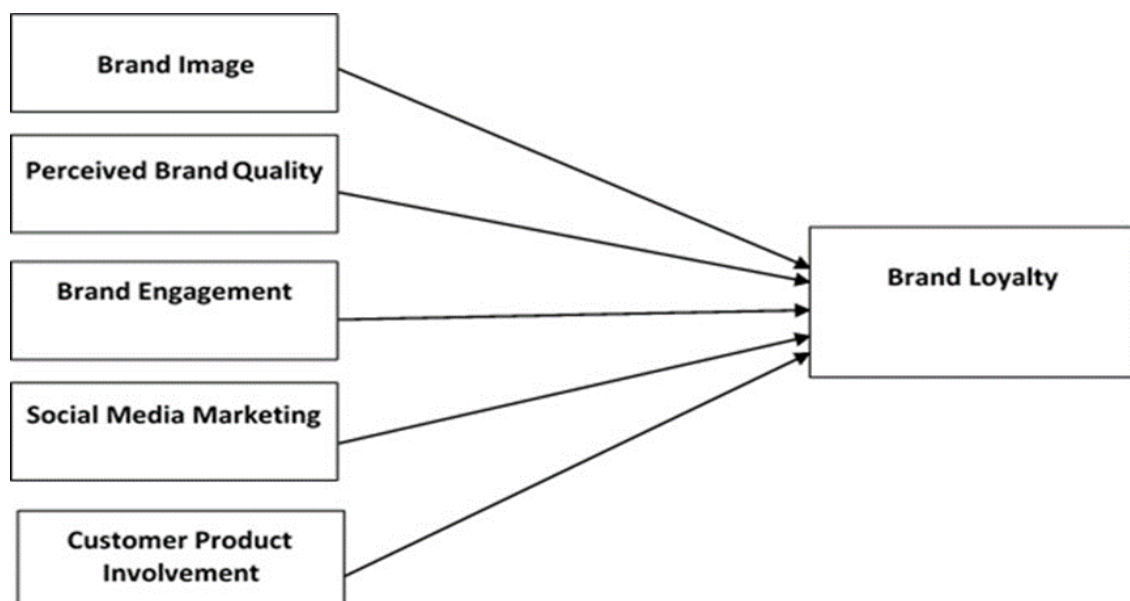


Fig.1 The framework of the study

As illustrated in Figure 1, the variables brand image, perceived brand quality, brand engagement, social media marketing, and customer product involvement are identified as exogenous constructs meaning they influence other variables in the model. In contrast, brand loyalty is positioned as the endogenous construct, which is affected by these external factors. Based on this framework, the proposed causal hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Brand image has an impact on brand loyalty.

H2: The perceived quality of a brand affects brand loyalty.

H3: Brand engagement has an effect on brand loyalty.

H4: Social media marketing influences brand loyalty.

H5: Consumer involvement with the product has an impact on brand loyalty.

## **Methods**

The research was done in a quantitative way to achieve the purpose. The quantitative method that was selected for this research has three rationales. The first reason is that quantitative methods are more suitable in situations where hypotheses are established (Creswell, 2009). Second, achieving the objective necessitated a relatively large representative sample. It is infeasible to conduct qualitative research on a large scale. Third, this study employed a well-established and widely validated approach to quantitative data collection and analysis. To align with the principles of the positivist research paradigm such as causal reasoning, variable reduction, hypothesis testing, structured questioning, use of measurement tools, and theory application; a survey method using self-administered questionnaires was selected.

For this study, the descriptive and causal research design is used to respond to the challenges of the brand loyalty relationship to its factors. It was done descriptive research design for fact-finding and for seeking reasonable information regarding its influence on an individual's smartphone brand loyalty. Descriptive research designs are the formal structures that meaningfully connect variables and the phenomena, it describe the phenomena, show relationships among them, such are better than the quasi-experimental study. It assists with seeking the fact (Cooper & Schindler, 2009). Additionally, a causal research design was utilized to identify the causes of brand loyalty and its influencing factors. This approach aids in understanding the direction, strength, and nature of the relationships among variables. Key elements affecting brand loyalty such as brand experience, perceived brand quality, brand image, social media marketing, and customer product involvement were thoroughly examined and described.

People using smartphones in Kathmandu City at the time of the study are considered the study population. Therefore, 200 individuals were sampled from the whole population. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was employed in selecting the sample respondents. Respondents were chosen using a non-random sampling method, approached at local markets, shops, smartphone retail outlets, and private residences. This convenience sampling technique was deemed the most practical and suitable for the study.

This study comprises primary data. It comes from the survey questionnaires. Primary data are gathered as a result of administering questionnaires (Hair et al., 2003). The research directly obtains data from respondents with only smartphone usage.

Data were gathered using self-administered questionnaires that included structured items, ranking questions, single-response formats, and 5-point Likert scale statements. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided with clear, concise instructions on how to complete the paper-based questionnaires.

Primary data were obtained through questionnaires. An interaction with smartphone user was done with the questionnaire was conducted on 386 men. The survey has been handed to all the respondents. The questionnaire's survey items are sub-ordered into the following sections. The first section of the questionnaire focused on collecting demographic information from respondents, including gender, age, occupation, and monthly income. The subsequent questions addressed the main topic of the survey smartphone brand loyalty. These included inquiries about brand preference, length of usage, and brand rankings. A carefully designed questionnaire was employed to gather all the necessary data effectively.

The output of the analyzed demographic data is generated using SPSS. Partial least squares structural equation modelling and psychometric and econometric aspects of the research model were used and tested using Smart PLS 3.0.

Of the respondents, 43 percent are male and 58 percent are female. A large number of them, or 56%, are aged 20-30 years. The second majority falls under age of 20, at 19%. Most of the respondents, 47 percent, are employees. Students (32 percent) and businesspeople (15 percent) follow. 29 percent respondents fall within a monthly income of NRs. 10000 and 20000. Those respondents who have monthly incomes > NRs. 20000-30000 and between NRs. 10000-40 trail behind, with 21 percent and 11 percent.

## **Results and Discussion**

This study investigates the factors influencing loyalty to smartphone brands in the Nepalese market. For data analysis, the research employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using the SmartPLS 3.0 application. The analysis was carried out in two distinct phases: first, the measurement (outer) model was assessed to validate the reliability and validity of the reflective indicators; second, the structural (inner) model was examined to explore the relationships among the proposed constructs.

### **Measurement Model**

Table1: Evaluation of Outer or Measurement Model

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Loadings</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
<b>Brand Experience</b>	BEX1	0.876	0.765	0.585
	BEX2	0.711		
	BEX3	0.855		
	BEX4	0.755		
<b>Brand Image</b>	BRI1	0.775	0.857	0.562
	BRI3	0.745		

<b>Brand Loyalty</b>		BRI4	0.769		
		BRI5	0.877		
		BRI6	0.764		
		BRL2	0.834	0.887	0.767
		BRL3	0.846		
		BRL4	0.863		
		BRL5	0.765		
<b>Customer Involvement</b>	<b>Product</b>	BRL6	0.864		
		CUPI1	0.844	0.768	0.654
		CUPI5	0.852		
<b>Perceived Brand Quality</b>		CUPI6	0.846		
		PEBQ1	0.784	0.863	0.863
		PEBQ2	0.845		
<b>Social Media Marketing</b>		PEBQ4	0.766		
		SOMM4	0.786	0.892	0.562
		SOMM5	0.745		
		SOMM7	0.852		

As seen in Table 1, all the construct loadings are higher than 0.7. Composite reliability and AVE are both higher than 0.7. In addition, CR is higher than AVE. So, the criterium is valid.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	<b>BEX</b>	<b>BRI</b>	<b>BRL</b>	<b>CUPI</b>	<b>PEBQ</b>	<b>SOMM</b>
<b>BEX</b>	<b>0.780</b>					
<b>BRI</b>	0.521	<b>0.767</b>				
<b>BRL</b>	0.582	0.492	<b>0.862</b>			
<b>CUPI</b>	0.623	0.491	0.810	<b>0.841</b>		
<b>PEBQ</b>	0.636	0.606	0.555	0.524	<b>0.790</b>	
<b>SOMM</b>	0.556	0.367	0.498	0.558	0.442	<b>0.735</b>

As shown in Table 2, the diagonal elements indicate the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which exceed the corresponding correlation values in both their rows and columns. This result verifies that discriminant validity has been achieved.

### Structural Model

The structural model is designed to evaluate the direct relationships between constructs, allowing for the testing of hypotheses by analyzing the effect of independent (exogenous) variables on the dependent (endogenous) variable. Table 3 presents the results of the structural model assessment, indicating the strength and significance of each hypothesized relationship:

Table 3: Evaluation of the Inner or Structural Model

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Path Coefficients</b>	<b>T Statistics</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>H1: BRI -&gt; BRL</b>	0.165	2.006	Supported
<b>H2: PEBQ -&gt; BRL</b>	0.187	3.907	Supported
<b>H3: BEX -&gt; BRL</b>	0.036	5.574	Supported

<b>H4: SOMM -&gt; BRL</b>	0.032	6.467	Supported
<b>H5: CUPI -&gt; BRL</b>	0.624	12.472	Supported

The outcomes in Table 3 confirm that all five predictors; BRI, PEBQ, BEX, SOMM, and CUPI have a statistically significant impact on BRL. Hence, each of the proposed hypotheses is validated by the analysis. These results echo the earlier research conducted by Ahmed et al. (2014) and Saputra and Dewi (2016), affirming that these variables play a key role in fostering loyalty. Specifically, the positive connections identified between brand experience and brand image with brand loyalty are in line with the findings of Brakus et al. (2009) and Ong et al. (2018), who highlighted the importance of customer experiences in strengthening brand attachment. Moreover, in the context of Nepal's smartphone market, social media marketing appears to be a particularly influential driver of brand loyalty. This finding supports the views of Solem (2016) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who emphasized the strategic importance of social media in cultivating customer commitment to brands.

## Discussion

This study empirically validates a comprehensive framework for smartphone brand loyalty in Nepal, confirming all five hypothesized drivers (H1-H5). The findings align with global literature on the importance of brand image (Lazarevic, 2011), perceived quality (Aaker, 1991), brand experience (Brakus et al., 2009), and social media marketing (Solem, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However, the overwhelming dominance of customer product involvement (CUPI) ( $\beta = 0.624$ ) emerges as the critical insight, surpassing traditional drivers like brand image ( $\beta = 0.165$ ) and perceived quality ( $\beta = 0.187$ ).

This challenges conventional brand strategy paradigms in two key ways:

**Contextual Primacy of Involvement:** Pascale & Lim's (2003) conceptualization of involvement as personal commitment resonates powerfully in Nepal's market. Smartphones likely transcend functional utility, representing aspirational tools for socioeconomic mobility, connectivity, and identity. This deep personal relevance drives loyalty more than abstract brand perceptions.

**Reinterpreted Hierarchy of Drivers:** While Singh's (2016) Nepal study emphasized quality, this research reveals CUPI as the foundational driver. This suggests quality and image may be gatekeepers for initial purchase, but sustained loyalty requires embedding the brand within the user's value system and daily life narrative.

Social media marketing's significance (H4 supported,  $\beta = 0.032$ ) aligns with its role in fostering personalized engagement (Gordhamer, 2016), but its relatively smaller impact underscores that platforms are enablers rather than primary loyalty creators in Nepal. Brand experience's modest effect ( $\beta = 0.036$ ) suggests sensory/affective interactions (Brakus et al., 2009) may be secondary to the product's perceived instrumental value.

**Limitations and Future Research:** The Kathmandu-centric sample limits national generalizability. Future work should explore regional variations and incorporate qualitative methods to unpack the cultural and socioeconomic nuances shaping product involvement.

**Theoretical Implication:** This study extends Ahmed et al.'s (2014) B2B findings on involvement to the B2C smartphone domain, establishing CUPi as a pivotal, context-sensitive loyalty driver requiring greater emphasis in emerging market models.

**Practical Implication:** Brands must pivot from purely image-centric campaigns. Strategies should:

Deepen Product Relevance: Frame smartphones as essential tools for education, entrepreneurship, and social connection.

Leverage Community: Foster user communities that reinforce the product's role in achieving personal goals.

Integrate Drivers: Use social media to demonstrate quality and facilitate experiences that reinforce involvement, creating a synergistic loyalty ecosystem.

## **Conclusion**

This study conclusively identifies the determinants of smartphone brand loyalty in urban Nepal. All five hypothesized factors brand image, perceived quality, brand engagement, social media marketing, and customer product involvement significantly drive loyalty. Crucially, customer product involvement (CUPi) emerges as the overwhelmingly dominant predictor, surpassing traditional drivers like brand image and perceived quality. This challenges conventional prioritization in brand strategy, highlighting that deep consumer interest in the product category itself is paramount in this market. For smartphone brands, cultivating meaningful product involvement, coupled with reinforcing quality perceptions, brand image, engagement, and targeted social media, is essential to secure enduring loyalty in Nepal's competitive landscape.

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