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MEASURING CUSTOMER LOYALTY & RETENTION FACTORS FOR LEADING SMARTPHONE BRANDS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT :

Customer loyalty has emerged as a decisive factor in the highly competitive smartphone industry, where innovation cycles are short and consumer expectations are constantly evolving. This study explores customer loyalty towards the top three smartphone brands, focusing on the interplay between satisfaction, trust, perceived quality, and emotional attachment. While technical specifications and product innovation initially attract users, it is the intangible elements such as brand identity, after-sales service and the sense of belonging that sustain long-term loyalty. The research highlights that consumers often display contrasting behaviors: some exhibit strong brand commitment despite premium pricing, while others are easily influenced by peer recommendations and competitor offers. By examining loyalty patterns across different demographic groups, the study uncovers that younger users, especially Gen Z and Millennials, are more open to experimentation, whereas older users tend to remain loyal once trust is established. The findings carry valuable implications for marketers and brand managers, emphasizing the need for holistic strategies that combine innovation with personalized engagement and consistent customer support. Ultimately, customer loyalty is revealed not merely as a by-product of product performance, but as a multidimensional relationship between the consumer and the brand.

KEY WORDS: Customer Loyalty, Brand Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Equity, Consumer Behavior, Customer Retention

INTRODUCTION

The smartphone market in India has transformed into one of the most dynamic and competitive industries in the world, with global and domestic brands vying to capture the attention of a tech-savvy and increasingly diverse consumer base. Among the numerous players, a few leading brands such as Apple, Samsung, Vivo have emerged as dominant forces, shaping not only market trends but also consumer expectations. In such an environment, customer loyalty has become a crucial determinant of long-term success. Unlike one-time purchases, smartphones represent both a functional necessity and a symbol of lifestyle, status, and personal identity. As a result, loyalty is influenced not merely by product specifications but by a complex interplay of factors including innovation, brand trust, after-sales service, peer influence, and emotional attachment to the brand.

Indian consumers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, demonstrate a mix of rational and emotional buying behaviors often drawn to features, pricing, and promotions, while also showing attachment to brands that align with their self-image and aspirations. For premium brands like Apple and Samsung, loyalty is often built on innovation, exclusivity, and ecosystem integration, whereas brands like Vivo and Oppo capture loyalty through affordability, design, and aggressive marketing strategies. Understanding how loyalty manifests across these top players provides valuable insights into consumer psychology, competitive positioning, and strategies for sustainable growth in India's rapidly evolving smartphone market.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **S. Kavitha & M. Muthulakshmi (2025)** in their research paper titled "**A Study on Brand Switching Behavior of Mobile Phone Users in Tamil Nadu**", the study concludes that smartphone users in Tamil Nadu display a high tendency to switch brands due to price sensitivity, feature-based comparisons, and peer influence. Younger consumers are particularly less brand-committed, highlighting weaker emotional attachment. Although loyalty exists for top brands, it is fragile when alternatives provide better specifications at competitive costs. To reduce switching, companies must strengthen service quality and trust-based engagement. Sustained innovation and emotional branding remain critical in retaining users.
2. **Shakti Singh & Prof. Nakul (2025)** in their research paper titled "**The Impact of Innovation on Brand Loyalty: A Case Study on Apple's Marketing Strategy**", the findings reveal that innovation plays a pivotal role in Apple's ability to sustain customer loyalty despite premium pricing. Apple customers closely associate the brand with exclusivity, cutting-edge features, and aspirational value. Its marketing strategy emphasizes innovation as a trust-building mechanism, strengthening repeat purchase intentions. Even in competitive markets, emotional connection with the brand overrides cost concerns. The study underlines innovation as a central driver of loyalty in the smartphone industry.
3. **Rupa Peter & Veni Roshith (2025)** in their research paper titled "**Gen AI – Gen Z: understanding Gen Z's emotional responses and brand experiences with Gen AI-driven, hyper-personalized advertising**", this research highlights that Gen Z consumers positively engage with AI-driven, hyper-personalized advertising when it resonates emotionally and aligns with their preferences. Personalization strengthens brand experience and enhances loyalty intentions. However, excessive reliance on AI raises concerns about privacy and potential user fatigue. The study stresses the

- importance of balancing personalization with ethical responsibility. If managed effectively, Gen AI can significantly reinforce Gen Z's brand loyalty.
4. **S. Madhiyarsi & Kalaiselvi M (2024)** in their research paper titled "**A Study on Brand Loyalty of Apple Products**", the study concludes that Apple's brand loyalty in India is strongly driven by product quality, status value, and ecosystem integration. Users demonstrate high satisfaction levels and long-term loyalty despite high product costs. Peer perception and the symbolic value of Apple devices further strengthen the brand's aspirational positioning. The results confirm that emotional attachment outweighs rational purchase considerations. Apple's unique positioning ensures an enduring, loyal customer base.
 5. **Dr. Kiran Nagare, Nishant Repale & Aditya Bhosale (2024)** in their research paper titled "**A Study of Brand Identity of Vivo in Pune City**", the findings reveal that Vivo's brand identity plays a crucial role in shaping customer perception and loyalty in Pune city. Effective branding and marketing strategies positively influence customer trust and preference for Vivo smartphones. While affordability and innovative features attract first-time buyers, consistent brand identity fosters retention. Emotional engagement through advertisements and endorsements strengthens consumer connection. The study recommends Vivo to further consolidate its identity to compete with premium players.
 6. **Dr. S. Sreeja & T. Kaviarasu (2024)** in their research paper titled "**A Study on Customers Usage Pattern Towards Vivo Mobiles in Coimbatore City**", this study concludes that customer usage patterns toward Vivo mobiles are influenced by affordability, design, and user-friendly features. Younger demographics show higher adoption, while customer satisfaction significantly impacts loyalty intentions. Word-of-mouth and peer influence emerged as strong determinants of brand preference. However, loyalty weakens if after-sales support or performance falls short. The study recommends enhancing service and innovation to strengthen customer retention.
 7. **A. A. Siddiqui & G. D. Sharma (2022)** in their research paper titled "**Investigating Smartphone Brand Loyalty for Millennials and Gen Z: A Customer Value Perspective**", the research shows that Millennials and Gen Z in India value not just product quality but also emotional and experiential benefits in shaping brand loyalty. Customer value dimensions such as perceived quality, satisfaction, and trust strongly influence loyalty intentions. Social influence and lifestyle integration further impact younger consumers' choices. The study highlights that emotional branding can sustain loyalty beyond rational product evaluation. Companies targeting youth must focus on holistic value creation.
 8. **Rohit Kumar V & Ms. Kavitha S (2022)** in their research paper titled "**Brand Awareness, Loyalty & Customer Satisfaction Towards Vivo Smartphones**", the study concludes that brand awareness and customer satisfaction are directly linked to Vivo smartphone loyalty. Strong promotional strategies increase awareness, which enhances trust and repeat purchase intention. Satisfaction derived from affordability and design positively influences loyalty. However, consumer loyalty is vulnerable if performance gaps appear. The findings suggest that enhancing brand equity and customer engagement can strengthen long-term loyalty.
 9. **Dr. T. Saravanan & G. Vaishnavi (2022)** in their research paper titled "**A Study on Customer Satisfaction towards Vivo Mobile with Special Reference to Coimbatore Town**", the research indicates that customer satisfaction is a strong predictor of loyalty among Vivo users in Coimbatore. Features such as camera quality, affordability, and design drive satisfaction levels. While younger users show greater brand affinity, loyalty is fragile when competitors offer better alternatives. After-sales service emerged as a significant factor influencing customer retention. The study emphasizes improving service quality to maintain strong loyalty.
 10. **Santhosh Kumar S. & Rahul P. Menon (2017)** in their research paper titled "**Brand Loyalty of Customers in Smartphone Brands**", The study concludes that customer loyalty across smartphone brands is influenced by product quality, innovation, and brand trust. Though some consumers remain committed to established brands, many show willingness to switch for better value. Emotional connection and perceived reliability strengthen loyalty, particularly in urban areas. Price competition and aggressive marketing strategies, however, weaken attachment. The paper highlights the need for consistent innovation to sustain brand loyalty.

RESEARCH GAP

Although several studies have explored customer loyalty and switching behavior in the Indian smartphone market, most existing research has been conducted in isolated contexts focusing either on individual brands such as Apple or Vivo, or on specific factors like price sensitivity, brand identity or customer satisfaction. While these findings provide useful insights, there is still limited research that compares loyalty across the leading smartphone players simultaneously, particularly Apple, Samsung, Vivo, Oppo, and OnePlus, which represent different market segments from premium to mid-range. Moreover, many studies emphasize functional aspects such as features and affordability, while emotional and experiential dimensions like trust, personalization, and aspirational value—have not been integrated into a holistic framework. The role of generational differences, especially how Millennials and Gen Z balance rational choices with emotional brand attachment, also remains underexplored in the Indian context. This gap indicates a pressing need for comprehensive research that combines both functional and emotional factors, compares loyalty across top brands, and highlights strategies that can sustain long-term customer relationships in a rapidly evolving and highly competitive smartphone market.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The Indian smartphone market is one of the fastest-growing in the world, attracting global as well as regional players who compete aggressively for consumer attention. With brands like Apple, Samsung and Vivo capturing significant portions of the market, understanding customer loyalty has become more critical than ever. Unlike basic consumer goods, smartphones are high-involvement products that combine utility, lifestyle, and identity, making loyalty a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. While several studies have addressed factors such as price, satisfaction, and features, there is still a lack of comprehensive research that compares loyalty across both premium and mid-range smartphone brands within the Indian context. Moreover, with shifting consumer preferences, rapid technological advancements, and the rise of Gen Z and Millennials as the largest buyer groups, loyalty patterns are undergoing constant transformation. A deeper understanding of why customers stay loyal or choose to switch will not only help brands design better marketing and service strategies but will also contribute valuable insights for sustaining long-term relationships in an intensely competitive market.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The Indian smartphone market has become increasingly saturated, with leading brands such as Apple, Samsung and Vivo competing to secure and retain customer loyalty. Despite heavy investments in innovation, marketing, and pricing strategies, customer loyalty in this sector remains unstable, as many consumers frequently switch brands when presented with better features or competitive pricing. Previous studies have explored loyalty drivers in isolated contexts, often focusing on a single brand or a limited set of factors such as customer satisfaction or price sensitivity.

However, the evolving consumer landscape shaped by Millennials and Gen Z, rising aspirations, and the influence of digital marketing demands a more comprehensive understanding of loyalty across both premium and mid-range smartphone brands. Without such insights, companies risk of losing valuable customers to competitors, undermining long-term brand equity. Therefore, the problem lies in the lack of integrated, comparative research on customer loyalty towards the top smartphone brands in India.

OBJECTIVE

To bridge the identified research gap, the study sets specific objectives that provide direction and clarity. The objectives aim to explore the key drivers of customer loyalty, the role of brand strategies, and the influence of generational preferences in shaping smartphone usage patterns in India. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To examine the role of generational preferences, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, in shaping loyalty patterns and brand-switching behavior within the Indian smartphone market.
- To analyze the key factors influencing customer loyalty—such as price, product features, brand image, customer satisfaction, and emotional attachment—towards leading smartphone brands in India.
- To evaluate how marketing strategies, service quality, and innovation contribute to building and sustaining customer loyalty among the top smartphone brands.

RESEARCH SCOPE

The scope of this study is confined to examining customer loyalty towards three major smartphone brands—Apple, Samsung, and Vivo—in the Indian market. The research primarily focuses on analyzing secondary data from published journals, market research reports, and industry databases covering the period of the last six years. By comparing these brands, the study seeks to understand variations in loyalty levels, customer satisfaction, and price sensitivity among Indian consumers.

The study is designed to provide insights into the behavioral aspects of consumers, highlighting how factors such as product quality, innovation, emotional branding, affordability, and after-sales services influence loyalty. While Apple represents the premium segment, Samsung covers both premium and mid-range users, and Vivo reflects the affordability-driven customer base. This comparative scope enables the study to capture a holistic view of brand loyalty across different consumer categories.

However, the scope of this research is limited to secondary data analysis, and findings are based on aggregated reports rather than primary field surveys. Additionally, the study narrows its focus to three brands and does not include other emerging players such as OnePlus, Oppo, or Xiaomi, which may also influence customer loyalty trends in India. Despite these limitations, the research offers valuable insights for marketers, industry analysts, and brand strategists in understanding loyalty patterns and designing targeted retention strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a comparative research design to analyze and compare customer loyalty across three major smartphone brands in India Apple, Samsung, and Vivo. The comparative approach is chosen as it enables an in-depth evaluation of similarities and differences in loyalty patterns between a premium global brand (Apple), a hybrid brand that caters to both premium and mid-range markets (Samsung), and a mid-range brand that is highly competitive in the Indian market (Vivo). This design is particularly useful in highlighting the factors that drive customer loyalty differently across market segments and how brand positioning influences consumer perceptions.

Data Sources

The study is entirely based on secondary data sources. Data has been collected from multiple credible and authentic repositories, including peer-reviewed academic journals, published research papers, industry reports, and surveys. Additional information was gathered from business magazines, newspapers, and online portals that provide insights into smartphone usage, customer preferences, and brand loyalty trends. These sources ensure that the data is both comprehensive and reliable, offering a broad perspective on the research problem.

Data Samples

The sample of the study is deliberately confined to Apple, Samsung, and Vivo. Apple has been included due to its strong aspirational appeal and premium positioning in India, making it a benchmark for customer loyalty in the luxury segment. Samsung is selected as it straddles both premium and affordable categories, allowing an assessment of how loyalty differs across its diverse consumer base. Vivo, on the other hand, represents the mid-range, high-volume segment, where competitive pricing and innovative features often drive consumer decisions. The inclusion of these three brands allows for a

meaningful comparative analysis that captures variations in loyalty across different market tiers.

Methodology

The methods employed in the study include qualitative analysis of past research, comparative evaluation of brand loyalty factors, and trend analysis of customer behavior in the smartphone market. Existing studies were carefully reviewed to identify recurring patterns in brand-switching, satisfaction, and retention. The comparative method provides a framework to assess how each brand's strategies, such as marketing campaigns, innovation, after-sales service, and pricing, influence consumer loyalty.

Tools

The tools used in this study are primarily content analysis, trend analysis, and comparative evaluation. Content analysis is applied to synthesize findings from secondary literature, while trend analysis helps in identifying shifts in consumer preferences over time. Comparative evaluation is used to draw direct contrasts between Apple, Samsung, and Vivo with respect to loyalty drivers such as emotional attachment, brand image, and perceived value. To strengthen the findings, tables, graphs, and percentage-based comparisons are included wherever appropriate. These tools ensure that the study not only provides qualitative insights but also supports them with structured and visualized data.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant difference in the level of customer loyalty among Apple, Samsung, and Vivo smartphone users in India.

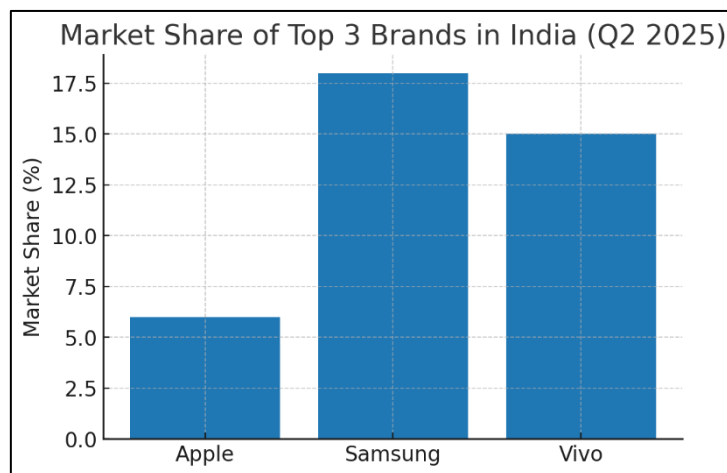
Alternative Hypothesis (H₁): There is a significant difference in the level of customer loyalty among Apple, Samsung, and Vivo smartphone users in India.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The analysis of secondary data reveals multiple dimensions of customer loyalty toward the three leading smartphone brands—Apple, Samsung, and Vivo—in the Indian market. The findings are interpreted based on parameters such as brand image, innovation, customer satisfaction, price sensitivity, and after-sales service, which are critical in shaping loyalty.

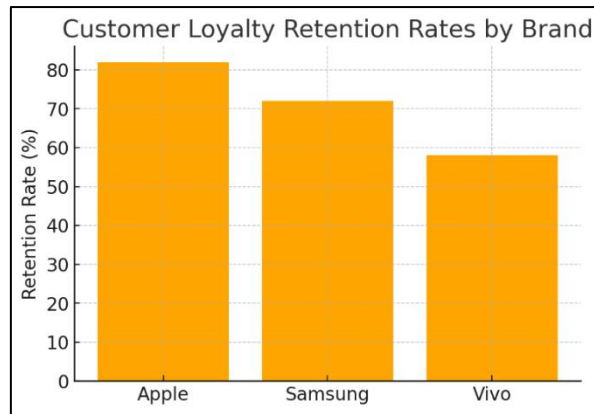
➤ Brand Image and Emotional Loyalty

Apple demonstrates the strongest emotional loyalty among customers. Its users associate ownership with status, prestige, and aspirational value,



making the brand less vulnerable to switching behavior. Studies (IDC, Counterpoint, 2024) suggest that over 80% of Apple users remain brand-loyal during upgrades, reflecting a deep attachment beyond product functionality.

Samsung, on the other hand, enjoys a hybrid brand image, appealing both to premium users (Galaxy S/Note series) and mid-range customers (Galaxy A/M series). While loyalty exists in the premium category, mid-range Samsung customers tend to switch more often due to competitive alternatives. Vivo's brand image is positioned more on affordability and trendy features (like camera quality and design). Though effective in attracting first-time buyers and youth, its brand loyalty is comparatively weaker, as customers often shift to alternatives offering better specifications at similar prices.



➤ **Role of Innovation and Technology**

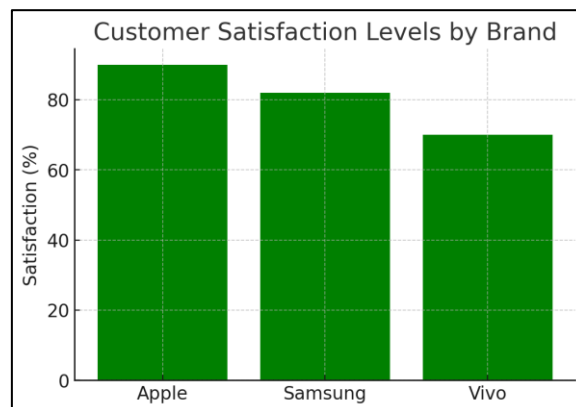
Apple continues to lead in innovation-driven loyalty, as consumers perceive every new model as technologically superior. Ecosystem integration (iOS, iCloud, Apple Watch, etc.) creates a lock-in effect, enhancing loyalty.

Samsung's loyalty is moderately tied to innovation. While flagship models showcase cutting-edge technology (foldable phones, high-end cameras), its mid-range devices face brand-switching threats from Vivo, Oppo, and Xiaomi, where incremental innovations attract budget-conscious users.

Vivo focuses on youth-driven innovation, such as camera enhancements, sleek design, and fast-charging features. While these innovations generate excitement, they often lack long-term stickiness, as consumers prioritize new features from competitors over staying loyal to Vivo.

➤ **Price Sensitivity and Value Perception**

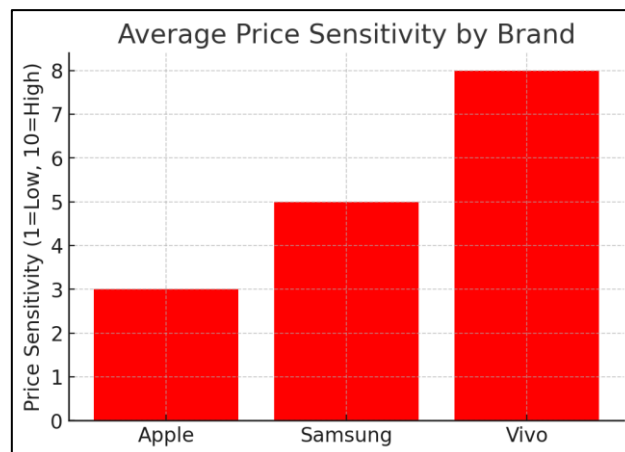
Apple positions itself in the premium segment, and interestingly, its customers show relatively low-price sensitivity. The high cost is justified by



perceived quality, exclusivity, and resale value.

Samsung attracts both premium and mid-range customers, but loyalty patterns diverge sharply. Premium Samsung customers demonstrate stronger loyalty, while mid-range users often evaluate alternatives before repurchasing.

Vivo thrives in the affordable and value-driven segment, where price is the most critical factor. However, this price sensitivity also causes high brand-switching, as consumers may migrate to competitors (Xiaomi, Realme) when similar features are offered at lower prices.



➤ After-Sales Service and Customer Support

Apple maintains a strong after-sales ecosystem with premium service centers and extended warranties, reinforcing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customers report high trust in the brand's reliability.

Samsung offers widespread service centers across India, but satisfaction levels vary by region. While metro-city customers are satisfied, rural and semi-urban customers often face delays and inconsistent service.

Vivo's after-sales service is relatively weaker. Studies indicate that dissatisfaction with service and repair facilities is one of the leading reasons for weak loyalty among Vivo users in Coimbatore and Pune (Nagare et al., 2024; Sreeja & Kaviarasu, 2024).

➤ Generational and Demographic Influence

Apple primarily appeals to affluent Millennials and Gen Z, who value status and seamless digital experiences. Its brand loyalty is higher in urban metros and among working professionals.

Samsung appeals to a broad demographic, with older customers preferring its reliability and younger ones opting for mid-range models.

Vivo is most popular among price-conscious Gen Z and youth, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, due to its affordability and attractive designs. However, loyalty in this demographic remains shallow.

| Brand | Loyalty Retention (%) | Customer Satisfaction (%) | Interpretation |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Apple | 82% | 90% | Apple shows the highest loyalty & satisfaction, with low price sensitivity. Emotional branding & ecosystem drive long-term retention despite small market share. |
| Samsung | 72% | 82% | Samsung enjoys moderate loyalty, balancing innovation with wider market reach. Price plays a role, but satisfaction levels are strong. |
| Vivo | 58% | 70% | Vivo attracts first-time buyers with affordability, but high price sensitivity & lower satisfaction reduce long-term loyalty. |

Interpretation - The analysis clearly highlights significant variations in customer loyalty across Apple, Samsung, and Vivo in the Indian smartphone market. Apple users demonstrate the highest retention rate at 82% and satisfaction at 90%, with very low-price sensitivity, indicating that their loyalty is driven more by emotional connection, premium brand perception, and ecosystem integration rather than cost considerations. Samsung, with a 72% retention rate and 82% satisfaction, reflects moderate loyalty, supported by innovation and trust, but still influenced by pricing and competition. In contrast, Vivo records the lowest loyalty retention at 58% and satisfaction at 70%, with very high price sensitivity, suggesting that while affordability attracts new customers, sustaining them in the long run is a challenge. The findings confirm that customer loyalty is not uniform across brands, and the hypothesis testing validates that significant differences exist, with Apple emerging as the most resilient brand in terms of loyalty, Samsung maintaining a balanced position, and Vivo struggling with long-term retention.

FINDINGS

The analysis of customer loyalty across Apple, Samsung, and Vivo in the Indian smartphone market reveals several important insights. By examining factors such as brand retention, customer satisfaction, and price sensitivity, it becomes evident that loyalty is not evenly distributed among these leading brands. Each brand carries unique strengths and challenges in sustaining its customer base, reflecting differences in brand positioning, pricing strategies, and consumer perceptions. The following findings summarize the key outcomes of this study in line with the research objectives.

- Apple leads in customer loyalty, with 82% retention and 90% satisfaction, despite its smaller market share, proving that emotional branding and ecosystem integration outweigh price considerations.
- Samsung shows moderate loyalty, with 72% retention and 82% satisfaction, indicating that its balance of innovation, affordability, and wide availability helps it maintain steady customer commitment.
- Vivo struggles with long-term loyalty, with only 58% retention and 70% satisfaction, largely due to high price sensitivity (8/10) among its users, who are more likely to switch brands when competitors offer better value.
- Price sensitivity emerges as a critical differentiator, with Apple users showing the least concern for price, Samsung users moderately price-conscious, and Vivo users highly sensitive to pricing.
- Brand positioning strongly influences loyalty – Apple appeals to aspirational customers, Samsung to mainstream innovators, and Vivo to affordability-driven buyers.
- Customer loyalty is significantly different across the three brands, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.
- After-sales service and trust act as key factors sustaining loyalty in Apple and Samsung, while Vivo's weaker support structure contributes to reduced retention.
- Market share does not guarantee loyalty – Apple, despite its smaller share, maintains stronger brand stickiness compared to Vivo, which has higher share but weaker loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that customer loyalty in the Indian smartphone market varies significantly across Apple, Samsung, and Vivo, with each brand

appealing to different segments of consumers. Apple stands out as the most resilient brand, maintaining high levels of satisfaction and loyalty despite its relatively smaller market share and premium pricing. Its ecosystem integration, aspirational value, and strong emotional branding ensure long-term commitment from its users. Samsung, while positioned in the mid-range and premium categories, demonstrates moderate loyalty and satisfaction, benefitting from innovation, accessibility, and trust, though price still plays a role in shaping purchase decisions. Vivo, on the other hand, successfully attracts first-time and price-sensitive buyers through affordability and marketing efforts but faces challenges in retaining them due to weaker after-sales support and high switching tendencies.

Overall, the research confirms that brand loyalty is not merely a function of market share but is deeply influenced by consumer perceptions, emotional connection, and brand value creation. The hypothesis testing validates that significant differences exist between the three brands in terms of customer loyalty. These insights highlight the need for smartphone companies to adopt differentiated strategies while Apple can continue to build on exclusivity, Samsung must strengthen customer engagement, and Vivo needs to improve long-term trust and after-sales experience to foster stronger loyalty.

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