

FACTORS AFFECTING SERVICE PROVIDER SWITCHING INTENTIONS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: *The growing number of mobile phone service providers has intensified competition among companies, resulting in a variety of attractive packages and plans aimed at attracting customers. This competitive environment has encouraged subscribers to switch to different service providers. Since Prepaid subscribers are not bound by contractual obligations, they have greater flexibility to switch providers. Factors affecting service provider switching intentions among university students are examined, focusing on the effects of price, satisfaction, alternative attractiveness and MNP-induced self-efficacy on intention to switch. The paper also explores potential methodologies that could be valuable for analyzing these factors. The findings of this study are expected to deepen the understanding of what factors influence university students to switch service providers.*

Keywords: *Intention to Switch, Mobile Phone Services, Prepaid Subscribers, University Students*

Introduction

The telecommunications industry has been evolving rapidly, with an increasing number of mobile service providers competing to attract customers. To maintain a competitive edge, these companies offer a range of attractive packages and plans, especially targeting university students who rely heavily on mobile phones for communication, studies, and entertainment. Prepaid services, particularly, give students the flexibility to switch providers without the hassle of being locked into contracts (Tang *et al.*, 2022). As students explore various service options, understanding what drives them to switch providers has become essential.

One significant development that has simplified the process of switching providers is mobile number portability (MNP). This feature allows users to keep their phone numbers when switching to a new provider, removing a major barrier that once discouraged customers from making a change. Consequently, the competitive landscape has intensified, with companies striving to maintain customer loyalty (Boateng & Owusu, 2014). Prepaid users, including students, are even more likely to switch because they are not bound by long-term commitments, making it easier to explore better deals.

Previous studies show that several factors influence a customer's decision to switch service providers, and students are no exception. According to Urooj Aijaz *et al.*, (2023), these factors include price, customer satisfaction, and the appeal of alternative services. Price is often a major consideration for students, who typically look for affordable plans that fit their budget. However, previous studies (e.g., Rahim *et al.*, 2022) have focused primarily on price and satisfaction, with insufficient attention to the specific combination of factors such as the influence of MNP on switching behavior in a demographic that is highly flexible and price sensitive. Dissatisfaction with current services, such as poor network coverage or slow customer support, can also motivate them to switch. Meanwhile, appealing offers from competitors, such as more data or better incentives, often tempt them to move (Rahim *et al.*, 2022).

MNP also plays a key role in boosting students' confidence to switch providers. The ability to keep their phone number reduces the hassle of notifying contacts, making the process of switching smoother. This self-efficacy, or belief in their ability to successfully change providers, is particularly important for students who manage their own phone plans. Understanding how this sense of empowerment, alongside price, satisfaction, and alternative attractiveness, affects their decision-making can offer deeper insights into why they switch (Chuah *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, most existing studies have examined the factors influencing switching behavior in general terms, they have not adequately explored the impact of MNP-induced self-efficacy on university students' decision-making. Although research by Boateng & Owusu (2014) and Urooj Aijaz *et al.* (2023) highlights factors like price, customer satisfaction, and alternative attractiveness, there has been limited focus on how the empowerment provided by MNP boosts students' confidence in switching providers. Additionally, prior studies have not thoroughly investigated how this self-efficacy interacts with factors like price sensitivity and satisfaction to influence the decision to switch, especially in the Malaysian context, where MNP is relatively new.

This concept paper aims to address this gap by exploring how price, satisfaction, alternative attractiveness, and MNP-induced self-efficacy influence university students' intentions to switch mobile service providers. By examining these factors, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of what drives provider-switching behavior among university students, with important implications for marketing strategies and customer retention efforts. The findings could

provide valuable insight into service providers, helping them develop more effective strategies to attract and retain this tech-savvy and highly competitive group of consumers.

Problem Statement

In recent years, the telecommunications industry in Malaysia has become a bustling marketplace, characterized by intense competition among various service providers eager to capture the attention of consumers. Among these potential customers, university students stand out as a crucial demographic. Their heavy reliance on mobile phones for communication, education, and entertainment makes them prime targets for prepaid services, which offer the flexibility to switch providers without the constraints of long-term contracts. Despite this growing interest, the specific factors driving students' decisions to switch providers remain largely unclear, leaving service providers uncertain about how to effectively meet their needs (Lin *et al.*, 2021).

A significant innovation in this arena is Mobile Number Portability (MNP), a feature that allows users to keep their phone numbers when they switch providers. This convenience has greatly reduced a major barrier to changing service providers, particularly for prepaid users who appreciate the freedom from contracts. However, research on how MNP interacts with other important factors, such as price sensitivity and customer satisfaction, to influence students' switching behavior is still limited (Shin & Kim, 2007). For service providers eager to enhance customer retention, understanding this interplay is essential.

Price sensitivity and customer satisfaction are two critical elements that significantly impact students' decisions to switch. University students are often budget-conscious and can be swayed by even minor price changes, while dissatisfaction with aspects like service quality or customer support can prompt them to seek alternatives (Lin *et al.*, 2022). Although these issues have been discussed in broader studies, the specific dynamics affecting prepaid university students in Malaysia are not well-explored (Badeggi & Muda, 2021). This gap in understanding complicates efforts for service providers to create tailored strategies aimed at retaining this valuable customer base.

Finally, the allure of alternative service providers adds another layer of complexity to students' switching behavior. Offers that feature more competitive pricing, larger data allowances, or enticing promotional incentives can easily attract students to switch services (Russell-Bennett & Bove, 2002). Despite the significance of these alternatives, comprehensive research on their impact on university students' decisions is lacking. Gaining a deeper understanding of these factors is crucial for mobile service providers to stay competitive and devise effective strategies to attract and keep this essential segment of consumers.

Literature Review

The Influence of Price on Intention to Switch

Price perception is a key element in determining consumer intentions to transfer mobile service providers, particularly among price-sensitive demographics like university students. Recent studies by Lisana (2023) highlight that students often prioritize affordable plans, making prices a critical factor in their decision to switch providers. When confronted with competitive pricing, students are more willing to explore alternatives, according to research shows a direct relationship between perceived price fairness and switching intentions. There are also studies that indicate that students evaluate the fairness of prices and their acceptance, which directly impacts their

switching behavior. When they perceive prices as unfair or excessively high, they are more likely to consider alternatives that offer better value for money. This phenomenon has been supported by findings from various studies indicating that perceived price fairness significantly correlates with switching intentions. For example, Anisa and Tjhin (2023) observed that unfair pricing practices could lead to customers searching out competitors with more appealing pricing structures, emphasizing the relevance of price perception in retention efforts. This has been supported by Anis and Noor (2021), the study verified positive relationship between price and intention to switch.

Moreover, the relationship between price and switching intention can be understood through the lens of price consciousness. They exhibit varying degrees of sensitivity to price changes; when prices are revealed, students may shift their preferences towards lower-cost options, even if they initially favored higher-priced services due to perceived quality. This dynamic implies that successful pricing approaches can greatly increase a provider's desirability in a competitive environment. Additionally, switching costs play a moderating role in this dynamic. Zhang et al. (2023) discovered that higher perceived switching costs might reduce the impact of price on switching intentions, implying that even if a competitor provides a cheaper price, customers may be hesitant to switch if they believe the transition will be difficult or costly. This interplay between price sensitivity and switching costs underscores the complexity of consumer decision-making in the telecommunications market.

H1: There is a positive relationship between price and intention to switch.

The Influence of Satisfaction on Intention to Switch

Numerous research has looked at the relationship between customers' satisfaction levels and their tendency to switch service providers. It has been a focal point in marketing research. Customer satisfaction is an experience-based assessment of the degree to which service meets their expectations, and it is related to customer loyalty and retention (Althonayan *et al.*, 2015). It is a significant predictor of customer loyalty since satisfied customers are more likely to keep using their current service provider. Studies show that satisfied customers have less tendency to switch to competitors because they feel more worthy of their existing service provider (Chuah *et al.*, 2017). This fundamental notion emphasizes the need to preserve high satisfaction levels as a way to foster customer loyalty. For instance, García and Curras-Perez (2019) found that customers who reported high satisfaction levels were significantly less inclined to consider alternative service providers. This relationship is most pronounced in industries with a high level of competition, where customers have several options. The argument is clear that the service providers must prioritize customer satisfaction in order to reduce their risk of losing customers to others. Calvo-Porrà and Lévy-Mangin (2015) concluded that dissatisfied customers are more likely to switch and actively seek alternatives than satisfied customers. This shows that dissatisfaction is a major cause of switching behavior. Higher levels of satisfaction are associated with fewer switching intentions. Satisfied customers are more reluctant to switch than dissatisfied ones, illustrating the necessity of keeping high levels of satisfaction. To effectively retain customers, service providers must focus on providing high-quality service, improving customer experience, and identifying the factors that might contribute to switching behavior. This allows them to reduce churns and create long-term loyalty in a competitive environment. Thus, ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction is vital for service providers to retain customers.

Several factors contribute to customer satisfaction, including service quality, value for money, and the overall customer experience (Majeed *et al.*, 2022). Customers are more inclined to remain

loyal and switch when they perceive that a service provider regularly provides high-quality service at a reasonable price. This emphasizes the importance for companies to invest in upgrading service quality and customer experience in order to boost satisfaction. Apart from that, the relationship between satisfaction and the inclination to switch is not usually straightforward. High satisfaction typically correlates with low switching intentions. The study by Anis and Noor (2021) shown negative relationship between satisfaction and intention to switch. However, external factors can disrupt this relationship. For example, Willys (2018) noted that satisfied customers might switch if they feel a competitor provides a significantly better offer or more attractive service. Furthermore, external factors such as switching costs and the availability of alternatives might impact a customer's decision to switch, no matter their satisfaction level. In addition, switching costs have both monetary and psychological implications, which may change this dynamic. Customers may feel tied with a service provider regardless of their dissatisfaction if the perceived costs of switching outweigh the benefits (Szymanski & Henard, 2001).

H2: There is a negative relationship between satisfaction and intention to switch.

The Influence of Alternative Attractiveness on Intention to Switch

The concept of alternative attractiveness is related to the perceived advantages and qualities of competitor service providers that might convince a customer to switch. For instance, Chuang and Tai (2018) highlighted that when customers feel great opportunities in alternative options, they are more inclined to look into switching to others. This relationship has been supported by numerous studies, which show that attractive alternatives can considerably drive customers to seek out new providers, particularly in competitive areas like telecommunication. Research by Lai and Chen (2020) supports the notion that alternative attractiveness is a key determinant of switching intention. This study investigates how alternative attractiveness contributes to switching behaviors in the telecommunications sector, with a focus on the mediating effect of customer satisfaction. This finding is crucial in industries where competition is intense, and customers have available access to information about alternatives. Kumar and Gupta (2019) concluded that users are likely to switch if they discover that another offers attractive features compared to their existing provider. This implies that even satisfied customers may be driven to switch if they believe they can get more affordable values or features elsewhere. Moreover, Kim and Kim (2019) emphasized that alternative attractiveness is not a supplementary but rather a primary, significant switching behavior. In their study, they examine how users' consideration of alternative attractiveness affects their decision to switch, providing insights into retention strategies. This perspective aligns with a more comprehensive understanding of customer behavior, in which the availability of attractive alternatives may result in competitive pressure, requiring service providers to enhance their services in order to keep customer loyalty continuously. Recent studies, such as those by Zhang and Chen (2020), reinforce the idea that when customers are aware of attractive alternatives, their likelihood of switching increases, regardless of their satisfaction levels. This underscores the necessity for companies that not only focus on customer satisfaction but also on understanding and improving the attractiveness of their services in comparison to competitors.

Aside from that, alternative attractiveness has a significant effect on customer intentions to switch to different service industries, but the impact varies depending on the type of service. For instance, Liu and Zhang (2020) found that customers are more likely to switch when they perceive attractive alternatives, highlighting the importance of understanding how alternative attractiveness differs across others. In contrast, Huang and Yu (2021) mentioned that in industries with fewer competitors or less differentiation, the influence of alternative attractiveness may be

less pronounced, as customers may feel limited in their options. Different customers may have different perceptions of what constitutes an attractive alternative, influenced by personal preferences, experiences, and expectations. As noted by Lin and Chen (2019), the availability of adequate alternatives can be difficult to quantify since it requires evaluating both the qualities of competing services and the consumer perceptions of those aspects. Besides that, Sharma *et al.* (2018) indicate that customer perception of alternative attractiveness has a substantial influence on brand loyalty. When consumers perceive that attractive alternatives are available, their loyalty to their current brand may diminish, even if they are satisfied with the service. Furthermore, demographic factors, such as age and gender, can also influence switching intentions based on alternative attractiveness. Studies by Hau and Thuy (2021) have shown that the young generation is more likely to explore alternatives and switch providers, influenced by a desire for novelty and better value. Conversely, older customers may have stronger brand loyalty and be less influenced by alternative attractiveness due to established preferences with service providers. Additionally, gender differences in customer behavior may affect how individuals perceive alternatives, with some studies suggesting that men and women may prioritize different attributes when evaluating competing services (Jang *et al.* (2019).

Other than that, technological improvements have a significant impact on the value of alternative services. As highlighted by Ismail and Marimuthu (2021), the availability of information via online reviews and social media has increased customer knowledge of alternative opportunities hence raising the possibility of switching. This trend requires that service providers frequently modify and enhance their products in order to keep themselves competitive, as technological breakthroughs can drastically alter the landscape of attractive alternatives. A study by Khan *et al.* (2021) highlights that in the rapidly evolving technology sector, where new devices and services are frequently introduced, the attractiveness of alternatives can lead to decreased customer loyalty. Social media has evolved as a useful tool for influence perceives of alternative attractiveness. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow users to share their experiences and reviews of various technologies, considerably affecting their impressions of available alternatives. According to a study by Dholakia *et al.* (2020), social media not only enables the spread of information about alternatives but also raises customer awareness of competitor offerings. This increased visibility might lead to higher expectations and review of existing products, reducing customer retention if the current offers do not satisfy these demands. The study by Anis and Noor (2021) consistently supports the notion that alternative attractiveness is a crucial factor influencing consumers' intention to switch service providers. As customers become more knowledgeable and have access to a wider range of options, the attractiveness of alternatives becomes increasingly essential in influencing their selections. While it has a significant effect on switching behavior, the difficulty of quantifying it, the influence of demographic considerations, and the implications of technological improvements must all be examined in order to understand its significance in customer decision-making completely.

H3: There is a positive relationship between alternative attractiveness and intention to switch.

The Influence of MNP-induced self-efficacy on Intention to Switch

Mobile Number Portability (MNP) has fundamentally transformed the landscape of mobile service provision and revolutionized the switching process by allowing users to retain their phone numbers when switching providers, thereby reducing the psychological barriers associated with changing service providers. This capability significantly enhances self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviors required to produce specific

performance attainments without complications. Chuah *et al.* (2017) found that MNP boosts consumer confidence, particularly among students who may be concerned about managing their mobile phone contracts autonomously. The concept of self-efficacy is closely tied to behavioral intention, as proposed by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Guo *et al.*, 2024; extended from Ajzen, 1991). This theory states that people's intentions to engage in specific behaviors (such as switching providers) are influenced by their attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. This theory states that people's intentions to engage in specific behaviors (such as switching providers) are influenced by their attitudes towards behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. When students perceive that they can easily switch without losing their number or facing significant hurdles, their intention to switch increases.

Furthermore, studies by Anis and Noor (2021) show that MNP not only simplifies the switching procedure, but it also acts as a motivator for students who might otherwise stay with their existing provider owing to inertia or fear of change. The empowerment provided by MNP fosters a more competitive environment where students feel more capable of exploring better options. Besides, MNP decreases the perceived risks and inconveniences associated with switching providers, empowering consumers, particularly students—who may be unsure about managing their mobile contracts (Lin & Hsieh, 2023). By eliminating the need to notify contacts about a new number, MNP alleviates one of the major barriers that previously deterred customers from changing providers. This increase in self-efficacy can lead to higher intentions to switch as students feel more capable of navigating the transition smoothly.

Consumers who believe they can readily switch are more likely to be favorable about switching behaviors. Studies suggest that when students perceive MNP as facilitating a hassle-free transition, their intention to explore alternative service options increases significantly (Kar, 2021). This empowering effect is critical in competitive markets because service distinction is frequently based on customer impressions of ease and convenience. In summary, MNP-induced self-efficacy is a pivotal factor influencing university students' intentions to switch mobile service providers. Price serves as a primary motivator due to its direct impact on perceived value and affordability. It also enhances self-efficacy by lowering barriers to switching, enabling students to take advantage of competing alternatives in a crowded market. Understanding these dynamics provides valuable insights for telecommunications companies aiming to attract and retain this tech-savvy demographic effectively.

H4: There is a positive relationship between MNP-induced self-efficacy and intention to switch.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature reviewed and findings from previous studies, the framework for this research has been established, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. The independent variables include price, satisfaction, alternative attractiveness, and MNP-induced self-efficacy, while the dependent variable is the intention to switch.

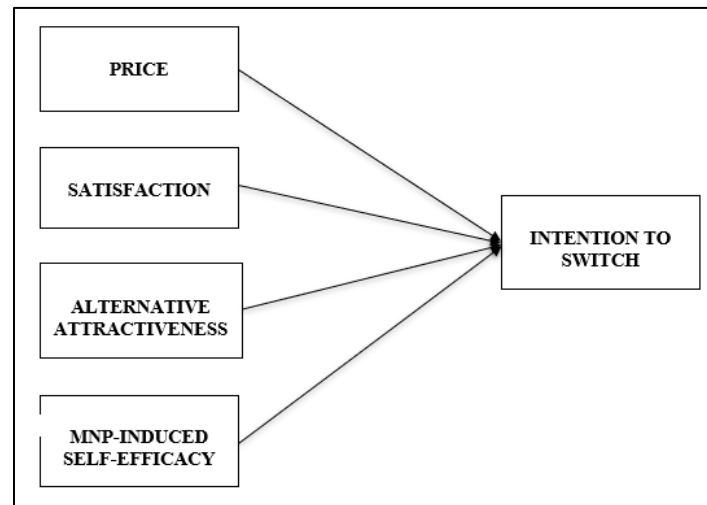


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Factors Affecting Service Provider Switching Intention

Methodology

This study will employ a quantitative research approach to test the hypotheses and validate the proposed framework, which examines the relationships between price, satisfaction, alternative attractiveness, MNP-induced self-efficacy, and the intention to switch. A cross-sectional method will be used in collecting data on each variable at a single point in time to address the research questions. This study will employ survey methods as it is effective for collecting personal and social facts, beliefs, and attitudes (Kerlinger, 1973). The data collection will be carried out through online survey which focusing on university students in Northern Peninsular Malaysia, including Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah dan Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang. The first section of the survey will include demographic questions, while the second section will comprise questions about the antecedent factors and the intention to switch, utilizing items specifically designed for each variable: price (10 items), satisfaction (5 items), alternative attractiveness (5 items), MNP-induced self-efficacy (3 items), and intention to switch (5 items). All items will use a five-point Likert scale, ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '5' (strongly agree). Data will be analyzed using SPSS software and Smart-PLS software. This analysis will involve descriptive statistics for profiling, as well as the measurement and structural models to assess factor loadings, reliability, and validity, along with path coefficients and t-values obtained through bootstrapping for hypothesis testing.

Expected Output

This study aims to provide insights into the factors influencing university students' intentions to switch mobile service providers into a highly competitive market. Key elements analyzed include price, satisfaction, alternative attractiveness, and the role of mobile number portability (MNP) in enhancing self-efficacy regarding switching. By exploring these factors, the research will identify the key drivers behind their switching decisions, allowing service providers to focus on the elements of their offerings that appeal to this demographic. The results will aid in developing targeted marketing strategies to attract and retain students while enhancing customer loyalty through improved service quality and support. Furthermore, the insights gained will give telecommunications companies a competitive advantage, establish a foundation for future research in the industry, and guide policymakers in enhancing consumer protections and fostering fair competition. Additionally, this study aims to close the gap in understanding student motivations, promoting a more competitive and consumer-friendly

marketplace.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical factors that drive university students to switch mobile service providers in an increasingly competitive landscape. By examining elements such as pricing, customer satisfaction, the appeal of alternative options, and the impact of mobile number portability on self-efficacy, we gain valuable insights into consumer behavior among prepaid subscribers. These findings stress the importance for service providers to adopt flexible pricing strategies, improving customer satisfaction, and introducing innovative solutions to stand out in a saturated market. Additionally, policymakers can use these insights to create regulations that encourage fair competition and protect consumer choice, empowering individuals to make well-informed decisions. In the rhomburstness, the study not only enhances our understanding of the drivers behind provider switching but also provides actionable recommendations for both service providers and policymakers to cultivate a more dynamic and customer-focused telecommunications sector.

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