What role does the staying power of customer delight have on customer loyalty rates, within high involvement purchases?

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MSc in Marketing

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Abstract

Satisfaction has been a focal point of much research in relation to its assumed establishment of business success, specifically the development of customer loyalty (Barnes et al. 2016). Emerging research however is contradictory of this viewpoint, instead identifying that satisfaction alone cannot guarantee successful customer retention and repurchase (Jones and Sesser 1995; Chitturi et al. 2008). As customer delight emerges as a topical solution and assumed generator of customer loyalty, this study aims to focus on the effects of customer loyalty specifically in relation to the purchase of high involvement products.

In order to identify the power of customer delight in relation to high involvement purchases, this study adopts a qualitative approach, where six delighted customers are interviewed, using a semi-structured method. The respondents were gathered via a snowball sample method, due to the hidden nature of delight customers. Their responses were collated into themes in relation to the study's research question and objectives, where the findings were compared and contrasted with existing literature.

Results found indicate that the use of customer delight should be confined as a marketing tool for customer acquisition, rather than as a tool for the development of customer loyalty. These findings suggest that the unique individual reactions the respondents experienced in relation to their delighting encounters suggest that in order to develop customer loyalty, a unique individual retention programme needs to be designed by service providers.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Cathal Moroney
Student Number: 14106621
Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc in Marketing
Material submitted for award

(a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.

(b) I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.
(c) My thesis will be included in electronic format in the College
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Signature of research student: _____

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Appendix 1 – Permission form for respondents

Dear Respondent,

As part of my research for my Masters in Marketing in the National College of Ireland, I have asked you to take part in a short interview. The purpose of this interview is to gauge your reactions in relation to your past experiences of purchasing products.

The interviews will take no more than 15 minutes, where the audio will be recorded in order to transcribe the content at a later period. Once the study has concluded, any audio will be deleted.

I would like to assure you that the strictest confidentiality will be maintained and that your name will not be included at any part of this study. Should any respondent wish to opt out of the study at any stage, having initially agreed to take part, any participation they have had will not be used in the study. Furthermore, any copies of the transcribed interviews, or of the final study as a whole, may be sent to you, the respondent, should you wish to view these.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Cathal Moroney

_____

Consent Form

I agree for my responses to be recorded, transcribed and used as part of this study

Signed: _____

Date: _____

1. Could you describe for me your typical shopping habits? Perhaps where you usually buy groceries, day to day ventures?

2. A high involvement product or service is something that you that is could be expensive or risky if you mistake is made. What kind of products come to mind for you when I talk about a high involvement product?
   Can you provide me of an example of a high involvement product you have purchased, at least 12 months ago, that you have since replaced

3. What expectations of your (product) did you expect prior to purchase??

4. What factors led you to the place of purchase in this instance?

5.

6.

7. Was there anything that occurred that exceeded your expectations?

8. How did this make you feel at the time?

9. Was there anything that occurred that was below your expectations?

10. How did this make you feel at the time?

11. Did you tell your friends/recommend this company to others after your purchase?

- (if yes) Do you feel you played a role, big or small, in their decision making of buying a new (product)?

12. / Was it an overall positive experience?

13.

14.

15. When you replaced this product, did you return to the same service provider?

16. What factors led you to the place of purchase in this instance?

17. What did you expect to receive in this instance from both a service quality and product point of view?

18.

19. Was there anything that occurred that exceeded your expectations?

20.

21. Was there anything that occurred that was below your expectations?

22.

23. Did you tell your friends/recommend this company to others after your purchase?

- (if yes) Do you feel you played a role, big or small, in their decision making?

1. / Was it an overall positive experience?

2.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Introduction

Satisfaction had often been regarded as a key element in the establishment of long term business success (Barnes et al. 2016). Research, however, has shown that satisfaction alone is not a guarantee for customer loyalty (Jones and Sesser 1995), and as such, the phenomena of customer delight became suggested as a method for developing long term customer relationships (Rust and Oliver 1994).

Delight has been argued as a profoundly positive emotional state, created as a result from having one's expectations exceeded in a surprising manner (Oliver et al. 1997). As delight was researched further, the necessity for surprise in delight's creation was argued against, as research has emerged with suggests focusing on hedonic needs instead can also elicit a delighting experience (Chitturi et al. 2008). Regardless of the antecedents of delight, most studies suggest that delight can develop higher levels of customer loyalty, commitment (Ockenden 2005), and memories of a transaction (Berman 2005), in comparison to merely satisfying one's customers, while a drawback of delight suggests that customer expectations are often raised as a result of a delighting encounter.

Focus and Objectives of the Study

The studies of customer delight have focused largely on low involvement products (Oliver 1997); those purchases which require minimal decision making capabilities (Safu and Scott 2009). As delight becomes an increasingly more studied aspect of consumer behaviour and marketing strategy (Barnes et al. 2011), the focus of this study therefore, is to ascertain the long term effects of customer delight in relation to high involvement products (Safu and Scott 2009). The lack of study surrounding customer delight and high involvement goods, therefore, coupled with the growth in customer delight research at present, suggests that this study is worthy of research. It is a topical, relevant and important research subject, which a number of high involvement product and service providers would find beneficial.

Research Question

The research question therefore is – 'What role does the staying power of customer delight have on customer loyalty rates, within high involvement purchases?'

Format of the Study

The research will consist first of a Literature Review Chapter, where current studies regarding customer delight will be synthesised, comparing similar results and arguing contradicting viewpoints. Customer delight's antecedents and its long term effects will be discussed, while the positives and negatives surrounding delight will also be identified. Where gaps in current literature emerge, it will be stated how this research will attempt to bridge these gaps.

A Methodology Chapter will follow, indicating the research questions and objectives that have stemmed as a result of the gaps presented in the Literature Review. The plethora of research methods available will be discussed, identifying the most suitable method in order to answer the aforementioned objectives. Furthermore, the researcher will discuss the specific method of data collection and method of data analysis, emphasising the precise procedures of both, including the pilot study that occurred. The method of sampling will be outlined, while ethical considerations and limitations of the study will be addressed.

This will lead into a presentation of the findings of the study, grouping the narratives of the sample in accordance with salient themes that emerged during the data collection. The findings that are central to the research question and objectives will be outlined, and these findings will be situated in the literature also, to identify similar and contradictory findings in correspondence with existing research.

The Discussion Chapter will follow to identify what the findings mean in relation to previous research. Exploring whether what was found is similar to previous studies, or whether this research can provide a new insight into the topic of customer delight.

The Conclusion Chapter will finally highlight the salient points of the research, recognise the limitations that occurred in this study, thus identifying specific areas in need of future investigation.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to identify the differences between customer satisfaction and customer delight, and the antecedents of both. The lasting effects that delight and satisfaction create will be discussed, in particular how delighting customers affects loyalty when compared to merely satisfying customers. The researcher will attempt to therefore synthesise the existing literature on customer delight, identify any areas of controversy, recognise gaps in existing studies, and formulate questions that need further research, based on these gaps.

2.2 Customer Satisfaction and Customer Delight

In order to understand the importance of delight, one must first understand exactly what delighting a customer means. Being closely linked to satisfaction, defining this term can help lead to defining customer delight. Satisfaction is an individual's perception of the performance of a product or service, in relation to their expectations (Schiffman and Kanuk 2004), while being derived from the cumulative service encounters the customer receives (Rust and Oliver 1994). With this in mind, one can suggest that where confirmation of expectations of a product or service is present, satisfaction occurs. However this can be regarded as the minimum requirements for a customer to purchase a service (Barnes et al. 2016). Confirmation of expectations does not excite the customer, and can therefore lead to their defect over time, from a lack of interest and commitment (Jones and Sesser 1995). Researchers such as Oliver (1997) suggest however that disconfirmation of expectations of a product or service, in a positive manner, is essential to encourage and enhance customer commitment level.

One of the emotional responses that a consumer extends to a situation of disconfirmation is known as delight (Verma 2003). Delight can encompass a range of emotions such as pleasure, contentment, or surprise (Oliver 1989). It is therefore a reaction that a customer experiences when they receive a product or service that not only satisfies their expectations, but exceeds them, providing an unanticipated value or unanticipated satisfaction (Chandler 1989).

To further understand delight, and the ability to create it, one must understand its relationship to satisfaction. Literature is often lacking in this area and when present holds conflicting viewpoints. Anderson and Mittal (2000) believe that satisfying one's customers does not mean they will always become delighted, but that delight is the top end of a consumer satisfaction model. In disagreement with this, Finn (2005) empirically finds that instead the top end of the consumer satisfaction model is the intention to buy, rather than to feel delight. Furthermore Oliver and colleagues (1997), suggest that delight requires more than simply gaining satisfaction, as, while satisfaction may incur a positive effect, it does not deliver a surprise or arousal, meaning it cannot lead to delight. Stemming from this, more contemporary literature instead treat the concepts of delight and satisfaction as separate entities altogether (Wang 2011; Barnes et al. 2016). The significance of this is that now satisfaction and delight are viewed as separate emotional and cognitive response sequences that can influence repeat purchase, retention, loyalty and intention in different ways (Finn 2005).

Interestingly however, conflicting contemporary literature indicates that while surprise can lead to delight, it is not an essential aspect of the route to customer delight (Barnes et al. 2011). Instead, research has highlighted that once customers' utilitarian needs are satisfied, a focus on their hedonic needs can lead to delight (Chitturi et al. 2008). Utilitarian needs satisfy what are known as prevention emotions (Van-Dijk and Kluger 2011), emotions that revolve around safety, responsibility, and security. Hedonic needs satisfy what are known as promotion emotions (Wytykowska and Gabińska 2015), emotions that revolve around advancement, accomplishment, and aspirations. Focusing on utilitarian needs, can lead to the satisfaction of a customer, as feelings of confidence and security are established, while focusing on hedonic needs can lead to delight, as feelings of cheerfulness and excitement are established (Chitturi et al. 2008).

Therefore, researchers have identified two different approaches to achieving customer delight. The testing of these antecedents of customer delight however has been regularly confined to low involvement products (Arnold 2005), i.e. products that are bought frequently with a minimum of thought and effort as they do not have a great impact on the consumer's lifestyle (Safu and Scott 2009). Literature therefore is lacking in terms of indicating the antecedents of customer delight specifically among high involvement products, i.e. products that are

purchased after very careful consideration as opposed to impulse purchasing (ibid.). It is incredibly important therefore to bridge the gap between high involvement products and the antecedents of customer delight.

Satisfaction revolves around getting the expected or fulfilling utilitarian needs, whereas delight revolves around getting the unexpected or fulfilling hedonic needs (Verma 2003). Regardless of the antecedent debate, however, delightful experiences have been deemed easier to remember than satisfying experiences (Berman 2005). These experiences involve delivery of a product or service to achieve joy, excitement and elation. It is these elements which are the crux of delight which make the delivery pleasurable (Oliver et al. 1997).

2.3 The Staying Power of Customer Delight

Once a company understands the differences between delight and satisfaction, the strategic implementation of customer delight can be achieved, in terms of using it as a marketing tool. In an attempt to illicit a delighting experience, one must understand the staying power of delight (Rust and Oliver 2000), and the implications of this. To incorporate delight in a strategic manner, one must become aware of the length of time a delighting experience will remain with a customer, and how this experience will affect future encounters with a service provider (ibid.) Delight, as discussed, is an emotion on par with elation and anticipation, in terms of its arousal (Verma 2003; Berman 2005), where the staying power of delight is based on one's unique memory of these emotions; memories of which are fallible and distinctive for every customer. Where customers claim they can recall the feelings of surprise or joy, which are synonymous with delight, they are instead discussing their memories of their surprised or joyous experience (Levine 1997). This can momentarily trigger emotional markers. The memory of delight, or its staying power, therefore, can cause a variety of responses to a service, depending on the type of staying power the delighting experience creates. Rust and Oliver (2000) suggest three different types of "delight staying powers", which they title "Assimilated", "Re-enacted", and "Transitory". Each of these staying powers result in a varied outcome to a product or service offering. "Assimilated" and "Re-enacted" staying powers both deal with customers' memories, while "Transitory" staying power deals with customers forgetting the delighting experience. Where delight is ephemeral or fleeting

and the customer has no stimulus to remember it, little is gained by the cost or exertion exhausted. However, if a memory is created, then the effort could in fact be valuable.

The memory of delight is important for what it causes, such as the heightening of expectations. Expectations are integral for the evaluation of a product or service (Johnson et al. 1995) and the intensity of delight may have the ability to affect customers' expectations (Rust and Oliver 2000). It is not just those who experienced the delighting encounter first-hand, however, whose expectations would be raised, but also those who learn of the delighting experience through word of mouth or vicarious observations (File et al. 1994). The function of memory, in this manner, creates two opposing implications.

The first implication the function of memory creates is the first staying power of delight; "Assimilated". When recalling or remembering a delighting experience, customers may anticipate this delight again as a normal occurrence, in that delight could become "institutionalized" (Rust and Oliver 2000). This is highlighted clearly via Clemmer's Rings Model (1990). In this model, the bull's eye symbolises the basic functions of a product or service. Moving outwards, the next section refers to the satisfiers, accounting for those features that are present that can satisfy beyond the basic product function. The final section are delights, those attributes of a product or service that create a positive response via a surprise or delivery of the unexpected. As delights become institutionalized, attributes of delights migrate inwards. These become satisfiers or even basic functions. From a customer's point of view, their expectations are raised and a firm will falter in their eyes if the basic product or service is not enhanced to meet their raised needs. "Assimilated" delight therefore, means that the previously delighting experienced is now considered normal, expected, and a property of the normally delivered product or service.

The second implication the function of memory creates is the second staying power of delight. In this occurrence the emotion of the delighting encounter deteriorates over time, however, the memory is still savoured (Finn 2005). Customers can recall the delighting experience in this instance, although they do not allow this to build upon their basic expectations of a product or service. They instead acknowledge it as a onetime event, cherish the moment they have experienced and hope it may happen again, but will not be disappointed should their next experience with the same product or service simply satisfy,

rather than delight (Rust and Oliver, 2000). This second staying power of delight is referred to as "Re-enacted" (ibid.).

"Assimilated" delight requires the presence of surprise in the delighting package. Once customers are surprised, their expectations are raised as a result. "Re-enacted" delight, however, does not require surprise as an antecedent of delight. Therefore, the "Assimilated" staying power relates back to earlier literature, which believes to delight one's customers, a positive disconfirmation of expectations must occur (Finn 2005; Berman 2005; Verma 2003; Rust et al. 2000; Oliver et al. 1997; Chandler 1989). While the "Re-enacted" staying power, relates back to more contemporary literature, which believes focusing on hedonic needs, rather than surprise, can also deliver delight (Chitturi et al. 2008; Barnes et al. 2011;).

The final staying power of delight stems from a customer forgetting the original delighting experience entirely, thus allowing themselves to be delighted by the same occurrence again (Rust and Oliver 2000). A customer may put their delighting experience down to fate (Anderson and Mittal 2000), serendipity (Verma 2003) or may not be able to remember the experience should it have happened a long time ago (Rust and Oliver 2000).

If a company is exerting huge efforts in an attempt to delight its customers, and these delighted customers are forgetting their delighted experiences, they may not return to the same company again, should they need repurchase a product or service. If this situation occurs, can a company deem delighting customers a desirable marketing strategy, considering that the costs of delighting customers is present, while the reward of acquiring loyal consumers is not present? Furthermore, delight, with antecedents of surprise, leads to "Assimilated" delight, and thus leads to heightened expectations, which is an obvious negative result for a delighting company. Perhaps, it would be more beneficial for a company to focus on delight, with antecedents of promotion emotions, considering this leads to "Re-enacted" delight, and does not lead to heightened expectations.

Considerable studies have been conducted in Fast Moving Consumer Goods, i.e. those products sold quickly and at a low cost, and frequently required services to assess the three staying powers of delight and its effects on repeat purchase, retention and loyalty (Ockenden 2005; Jones and Sasser 1995; Schneider and Bowen 1999; Finn 2005). Where gaps are present in the literature, however, is how effective the staying power of delight is on repeat

purchase, retention and loyalty in high-involvement purchases, where a period of time elapses between purchasing encounters. Would a customer develop "Assimilated", "Re-enacted", or "Transitory" delight, in this situation? Alternatively, would any of these staying powers be applicable at all in high involvement purchases? This is an obvious gap in the delight literature which has, thus far, concentrated on low involvement purchases that take place on a frequent basis (Barnes et al. 2010).

2.4 The differences between how satisfaction and delight affect loyalty

For quite some time satisfaction was considered essential for long term business success (Keiningham et al. 2014; Barnes et al. 2016Ackoy, 2013). However, an increasing amount of studies have been conducted, which highlights that the relationship between satisfaction and numerous other behavioural outcomes is not that straight forward. Such studies explore the fact that satisfied customers are not always loyal (Jones and Sasser, 1995); that only 2% of firms who are satisfying customers are able to measure any improvement to their bottom line figure (Hepworth and Mateus 1994); and finally that changes in customer satisfaction levels accounts for just a 1% change in customer category spending (Keiningham 2014). Customers expect at a minimum to be satisfied, suggesting a firm must exceed satisfaction in order to achieve customer loyalty (Arnold et al. 2005). A way in which to potentially achieve this is to delight one's customers.

Literature again is contradictory in its viewpoint on the importance of the relationship of delight and loyalty. Ngobo (1999) argues that loyalty rates increase as satisfaction occurs, but that once consumer delight occurs, no major difference in loyalty rates are present. In contrast to this, Dick and Basu (1994) indicate that loyalty slows down as satisfaction occurs, and that delight actually increases loyalty rates.

The satisfaction-profit chain (Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann 1994; Rucci, Kirn and Quinn, 1998; Kamakura et al. 2000) highlights that increased customer satisfaction leads to greater customer retention which in turn leads to greater profitability. However there is an asymmetric and nonlinear nature to each of these links (Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Mittal, Ross and Baldasare 1998), in that a rise in satisfaction will not lead to an identical rise in customer retention. To increase retention and thus increase profitability, an increase in

customer delight is required, rather than an increase in customer satisfaction (Anderson and Mittal 2000)

Research has therefore been conducted to highlight the actual benefits of loyalty taking into account those customers who have been either simply satisfied or altogether delighted (Keiningham and Vavra 2001; Ockenden 2005; Barnes et al. 2010; Barnes et al. 2016). Satisfied and delighted customers have been found to have contrasting relationships with important outcomes, as delighted customers have shown higher levels of loyalty, commitment and repurchase (Barnes et al. 2010). For example, dissatisfied customers of DVD rental stores, will buy from the same company again only 10% of the time (Keiningham and Vavra, 2001), compared to 29% of satisfied customers. Once delighted however, 86% of customers will buy from the same DVD rental company again (ibid.). Satisfied customers of electricity suppliers in the U.K. are 150% more likely to switch to a competitor supplier than delighted customers (Ockenden 2005). Delighted Toys "R" Us customers in the US, shop one and a half times more often than non-delighted customers (Keiningham and Vavra 2001). Delighted customers are also more prone to report back on their positive experiences via word of mouth (Heskett 2002). Again in the electricity market in the U.K., just 45% of those satisfied customers would report back on their experiences, compared to the 61% of those who were delighted (Ockenden 2005). Therefore, delighting customers can lead to a great deal of benefits such as lower costs due to increased word of mouth, reduced advertising costs, higher revenue due to increases in additional and repeat sales, and the ability to withstand new entrants (Berman 2005). In relation to these examples, the delighting mechanism however revolved around surprising the customer. However, the literature failed to discuss any long term negative effects of these delighting encounters, which the researcher assumes would be the heightening of customers' expectations.

Where literature remains further silent is the effects of delight on loyalty when purchasing a high involvement product or service. Would customers remain loyal to every firm that delights them, or would the time elapsed between purchases affect the power of delight? Would delighted customers of high involvement products also report back on their experiences more than satisfied customers? This again is another gap in the literature of delight, and in this instance relates to the effects delight would have on loyalty of customers purchasing a high involvement product.

2.5 The differences between how satisfaction and delight can negatively affect loyalty

In academic literature, the most discussed and ultimately feared negative implication of a delight programme is the raise in expectations that it will create for customers who learn to expect the delight that initially surprised them (Rust and Oliver 2000). What previously created delight in the mind of the customers, now has been reduced to simply satisfying (Berman 2005). Firms now need to continuously enhance their delight packages in order to surpass the growing expectations of consumers (Finn 2005), for fear that they will become dissatisfied with their service, ultimately defecting. Therefore delighting and even satisfying customers becomes increasingly difficult for repeat customers and those initially customers who have become aware of the delighting surprise (Berman 2005).

This of course will only occur in cases of the aforementioned first staying power of delight; "Assimilated" delight (Rust and Oliver 2000), as this is the only staying power of delight that increases expectations. Firms should attempt to therefore create a staying power of delight for their customers that resembles the latter two staying powers, where customers either forget the experience or put it down to serendipity.

Berman (2005) has discussed three possible solutions to this issue. The first is allowing the customer the ability to choose the delight they receive, among a possible selection, such as free delivery, free installation, free disposal etc. (Ockenden 2005). By also changing the possible selection over time, surprise is still maintained. The second is that the surprise element is altered at random over time. In this case the customer has the potential of receiving free delivery, free installation, free disposal etc., but this is a complete surprise for them upon their purchase. As it is a randomized process, the company can now prevent an expectation from being formed, particularly via word of mouth as different customers are receiving different surprises (Arnold 2005). As well as this, it is difficult to be copied by competing companies, due to its unsystematic nature (Berman 2005).

Another downfall of delight is whether it can be created and implemented at all for a firm. For delight to operate as a motivating factor, Oliver and colleagues (1997) suggest that a range of exceedingly pleasing possibilities that are unexpected, because of their low frequency or simply that they did not exist in the consumer's schema, must be present. The alternative to this of course is that a focus on customers' hedonic needs must be achievable

by a firm (Chitturi et al. 2008). However, in mundane and low involvement services, such as milk delivery (), one could argue that there is limited to no possibility for a consumer to be delightedibid..

The third negative result of implementing a delight programme is the increase in costs and expense of time associated with the programme itself (Rust and Oliver 2000). Logistically, the costs of designing, implementing and marketing a delight programme must be outweighed by the loyalty generated by delighting its present customers, and those new customers acquired via word of mouth (Hicks et al. 2005). Where customers are repeat purchasers and their expectations are raised via "Assimilated" delight (Rust and Oliver 2000), there is a potential that the costs to create a new delight programme will eventually outweigh the return on this investment (Bartl et al. 2013)

Customers acquired via word of mouth will also naturally deplete over time (Rust and Oliver 2000), as a market will eventually run out of potential customers willing to purchase from a company (Berman 2005). It may be wise therefore to only implement a delighting experience to the most profitable customers (Finn 2010). Not only would this lead to retention but it might also convince other customers to increase their spending to become recipients of the delight package.

A final way in which a firm would not benefit from a delighting experience is if their package was easily copied by a competing firm (Berman 2005). In this instance the costs associated with designing would not be as large for the copying firm, meaning their return on the implementation could be much larger (ibid.). Further problems derive from this, however, as a delight programme becomes analogous to an arms race (Oliver 1989). In this situation, profits from both firms decrease and the only group that benefits is the customer. A way to prevent this is to consistently improve the delighting experience, meaning competitors are always one step behind. This can be achieved utilising competitive advantage over a firm, such as expertise in an area or financial resources in designing the delight (Rust and Oliver 2000). The competitor will in actual fact be more significantly affected than the designing firm, should they not be able to copy the delight programme. This is driven by the idea that a customer will shape their expectations through the best possible service available in the market (ibid.), meaning the relative inadequacies exposed in the competitor's offering will diminish their profits.

2.6 How the staying powers of customer delight affect the loyalty rates of high involvement purchases

While delight has been argued as a similar concept to satisfaction, they are both separate entities altogether. In understanding this, a firm can establish the different levels in which delight is remembered, and this, combined with understanding the positive and negative implications of programme, can lead a company to decide whether or not it is best practice to instigate a delighting experience for its customers in its market place. Contemporary literature has endeavoured to build upon these points in an attempt to highlight customer delight's effect on repeat purchase, retention, loyalty and intention (Keiningham and Vavra 2001; Ockenden, 2005; Barnes et al. 2010; Wang 2011; Barnes et al. 2016). A key gap in the literature, however, concerns customer delight in high involvement purchases.

It needs to be established therefore, whether customers achieve delight in high involvement purchases in a similar manner to low involvement purchases. In that, whether the antecedents of delight are identical, regardless of the purchase made. Once delighted, the long term effects of customer delight need to be identified among high involvement purchases. The relevance of the identified three staying powers of delight need to be discussed, in that whether alternative staying powers are existing in high involvement purchases. On top of this, the relationship between delight and loyalty needs to be explored in high involvement purchases, and if loyalty is present, an indication of how it manifests itself needs to be identified.

Ultimately, this research will attempt to identify what role does the staying power of customer delight has on customer loyalty rates, within high involvement purchases?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

In this chapter, the research question and objectives will be outlined, while also highlighting the choice to approach these using a qualitative method, as opposed to a quantitative alternative. The procedure of addressing the research objectives will be discussed, while the sampling method choice will be presented, including how this was implemented, while any ethical considerations will be highlighted and any limitations of the research addressed.

3.1 Research Questions

The gaps present in the customer delight literature (as described above) have presented the following research question and research objectives:

3.1.1 Research Question:

What role does the staying power of customer delight have on customer loyalty rates, within high involvement purchases?

3.1.2 Rationale:

As discussed in the literature review, customer delight greatly affects customer loyalty levels *(*Keiningham and Vavra 2001; Ockenden 2005; Barnes et al. 2010; Barnes et al 2016). It has been indicated that loyalty rates increase as customers move from being satisfied to being delighted (Dick and Basu 1994) and in accordance with the Satisfaction – Profit chain, delight is essential to increase customer loyalty (Andreson and Mittal 2000). A range of studies in low involvement products have assessed the immediate impact delight has on customer loyalty, such as purchases at Toys "R" Us (Keiningham and Vavra 2001) and Electricity Suppliers (Ockenden 2005). However, these studies all take into account delight's immediate effect on customers, and do not analyse its effect over a considerable period of time, i.e. the discussed "Staying Powers" *(*Rust and Oliver 2000) of delight. Furthermore, the studies also concern low involvement purchases, rather than high involvement alternatives. Gaps in existing literature mean the antecedents of customer delight, its staying powers, and its effects on loyalty in high involvement purchases remain unclear. As such the following research objectives need to be addressed:

24. What antecedents of customer delight were exhibited by high involvement customers?
25. What long term effects of customer delight, if any, were present?

26. Was a relationship established between the respondents and the original company, following the delighting experience?

3.2 Research Rationale

It is important when selecting a research method that precedent exists within the delight literature. Research philosophies are divided into two key sections; ontology and epistemology, with epistemology being of concern in this instance. Epistemology concerns thoughts, intellect, information, awareness, imagination, perceptions, and sensations (Browaeys and Fisser 2012). This meaning stems from its original philosophic definition of science and study (Cuvillier 1966). When used in an academic sense however, epistemology is broadened to refer to the theory of knowledge (Browaeys and Fisser 2012), a system to establish and explain the connections between thoughts and the outside world (Audi 2003). Expanding on epistemology, when tackling customer delight research, positivism and interpretivism are the most common methods used (Finn 2005; Barnes et al. 2016). In order to assess the most appropriate research tactic for this dissertation, an assessment of both positivism and interpretivism will be conducted.

3.2.1 Positivism

Positivism is a research paradigm deriving from natural sciences that assumes that natural and social sciences should, and can, apply the same principles to collecting and analysing data. Only phenomena and knowledge confirmed by the sense can be warranted as knowledge, therefore positivism relies on absolute clarity and direct observational experience. However, with the emphasis on direct observations, criticism of the positivist approach have been highlighted due to its disregard of value, informed opinion, moral judgements and beliefs (Browaeys and Fisser 2012). The level of certainty required with this approach ordinarily leads researchers to use a quantitative design method.

3.2.2 Interpretivism

In contrast to the positivism paradigm, interpretivism views the world in a different manner. An interpretivist's view is that the elements of natural sciences are fundamentally different from the subject matter of social sciences, and therefore requires a different logic of research procedure (Bryman and Bell 2007). One such difference is the encouragement of an inductive nature, rather than the deductive approach set out by the positivism paradigm (Johari 2009).

An interpretivist would therefore observe aspects of the social world and discover patterns in this world that could be used to explain wider principles (Babbie 2005). Finally, aspects of the real world that are distinctly human are considered to be lost when they are analysed and reduced to the interaction of variables (Hughes and Sharrock 1997). As such, positivists believe that reality can be measured to a certain degree, while an interpretivist would suggest that reality can never be fully measured (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). Expanding further on positivism and interpretivism is the use of either a quantitative or qualitative research method.

3.2.3 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research follows a confirmatory scientific method, which is deductive, meaning theories are used in establishing a hypothesis and this hypothesis is tested so that laws can be assessed (Bryman 2008; Antwi and Hamza 2015). When adopting this approach, methods such as data analysis, questionnaires, surveys and experiments are used. Though the growth in popularity of qualitative research can be seen, quantitative research is still a hugely dominant method in business management and consumer behaviour (Johari 2009). This is exemplified through the many quantitative research approaches seen in the study of customer delight thus far, particularly in relation to the antecedents of delight.

In their study in relation to the antecedents of customer delight, Oliver and colleagues (1997) selected 200 respondents to complete questions in relation to delight. Their questionnaire highlighted how respondents who reported a maximum level of surprise in relation to what they expected of the service they purchased, reported the highest level of satisfaction amongst all respondents. By contrast, Kumar and colleagues (2001) again adopted a quantitative approach to reassess these considered foundations of delight. They sampled 100 people to gain insight into the emotions that related to concepts such as delight, satisfaction and disappointment. The results of these questionnaires allowed the researchers to argue against the theory that both surprise and joy are required to create delight, in that just 25% of their respondents associated delight with surprise. Thirdly, Barnes and colleagues (2016) used quantitative methods to again test the antecedents of delight. They surveyed 512 shoppers of a grocery store to establish the effects employee effort and expertise had on customers' shopping experiences. From their survey, they highlighted these two elements

had an impact on customer joy and surprise, and that significant joy and surprise created customer delight.

In all examples quantitative research was able to produce precise, numerical data. This method also allowed a clear determination of the extent of agreement or disagreement between respondents (Yauch and Steudel 2003), in that the antecedents of customer delight were clear, as respondents collectively agreed on specific emotions that elicited a delighting feeling (Barnes et al. 2016).

However, concerning the studies of customer delight as examined in the literature review, there is a consensus that the staying power of delight is based on one's unique memory of it, memories which are fallible and distinctive for every customer (Rust and Oliver 2000; Verma 2003; Berman 2005), and therefore cannot be measured in a quantifiable manner. Furthermore there are clear disadvantages with quantitative research in general. Another disadvantage is what is referred to as the confirmation theory (Nickerson 1998), where researchers may potentially miss out on phenomena occurring as they are focused on hypothesis testing, rather than hypothesis generation. When research is exploratory in nature, such as this dissertation, a quantitative approach may not be suitable. These disadvantages, coupled with the aforementioned unique memory each customer feels in relation to delight, suggests a quantitative approach may not be a suitable method to understand customer loyalty in relation to the staying powers of customer delight in high involvement purchases.

3.2.4 Qualitative Research

An interpretivist viewpoint identifies a qualitative research approach provides the best insight (Lehman 2008). Qualitative research is a complex approach that explores behaviour, culture and society through a synthesis and analysis of people's words and actions (Hogan et al. 2009). It attempts to interpret phenomena from the meaning that people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). While a qualitative researcher will design a study, collect and analyse data, and interpret their findings similar to a quantitative researcher, they follow an inductive method, building theory and creating concepts with an emphasis on constructing theoretical interpretations (Neuman 2006). While not as common as the quantitative approach in the research of customer delight, qualitative research is still present in a number of studies, both in terms of customer behaviour, and indeed customer delight.

Fournier (1998) approached the relationship consumers have with brands in a qualitative manner. Over a 3 month period, 3 consumers were interviewed in depth to identify the relationships they have with brands and the research showed how brands are a representation of additional elements in their lives, such as their marriages, their children, their former financial status, and the specific idiosyncrasies they want to be known for. From a specific customer delight point of view, Verma (2003) used a qualitative approach to understand the antecedents of customer delight and outrage. 115 people responded to an unstructured interview, indicating that emotions such as surprise, joy, and elation can lead to delight.

Qualitative data is incredibly useful in studies regarding unique experiences as it provides rich, realistic results, identifying the meaning of an experience, and placing a phenomena under context (Miles and Huberman 1994). Generation of theory is a key aspect of qualitative research (Gummesson 2005), contrasting with quantitative approaches, where the aim is often instead to test hypotheses or theories (Bryman and Bell 2007). Instead, qualitative research can be used to generate theory through the analysis of data (Kuczynski and Daly 2003). Qualitative Research also does not seek to generalise as quantitative research does (Silverman 2005).

There are, however, considerable drawbacks in adopting a qualitative research approach. Results in data generated are often considered not objectively verifiable (Choy 2014), as researchers' interpretations are limited, and respondents have more control over the content of the data collected (Yauch and Steudel 2003). While also listed as an advantage, qualitative research is not generalizable, which can be a disadvantage to some. On top of this, qualitative data is far more labour intensive to complete (Hogan et al. 2009).

3.3 Research Method

Following a review of the above research philosophies and methodologies, it is now important to select a methodology most appropriate for this study, ensuring it will best assist with addressing the discussed research aims and objectives.

The main aim of this study is to gain a better understanding into how the staying powers of customer delight affects customer loyalty rates in relation to the purchase of high involvement products. The study hopes to explore if customer delight in high involvement

products creates loyal customers, where the power of delight leads to positive word of mouth and repeat purchases. The study also aims to investigate whether any negative effects of delighting customers in a high involvement sector exist.

The unique experiences a customer feels when they experience delight, cannot be analysed in a linear process (Oliver 1997). At first glance, a positivist approach in the realm of social science seems ideal. It promises to provide the certainties that are enjoyed in the natural sciences to areas of incredible complexity (Houghton 2011). However a great shortcoming of positivism is its failure to distinguish between the natural and social worlds (Marsh and Stoker 2002). Structures in a social setting are shaped by a range of factors, such as time, location and personal perception. Conclusions from a positivist approach are surrounded by absolute clarity, something that can never be achieved when a study needs to take into account customer experiences. As such, in order to understand the personal experiences of the study's respondents, an interpretivist approach will be taken. Furthermore, the nature of this study cannot be measured using quantitative methods, and as such, a qualitative approach will occur.

3.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interpretivist approach to research is based on understanding the world of human experiences (Cohen and Manion 1994). To gather and analyse human perceptions, an interpretivist approach revolves around the creation of a reciprocal and communicational environment between the researcher and the research respondents (Mojtahed et al. 2014). Such an environment would lead to the building of theory that comes from the discussion of experiences (Mills et al. 2006). These environments include interviews and focus groups. There is a clear distinction between qualitative and quantitative interviews, with the latter normally following a more structured approach. However, in order to fulfil the aim of the study, a semi-structured interview approach will be used.

A semi structured interview allows the interviewees a degree of flexibility in their answers (Bryman 2012). The interviews adhere to a set list of questions, however these questions will not necessarily follow a linear fashion, while additional questions can be added where needed. Questions were also designed in an open-ended manner, to further ensure that

research respondents could openly provide narratives on their views of the phenomena being studied.

To guarantee that the respondents will elaborate significantly, the questions will also be probing in nature. This is important as the nature of the study requires the respondents' in-depth unique experience of customer delight. Probing techniques are an essential part of qualitative research, as regardless of the type of qualitative research being undertaken, questions will often arise where a probe is required to help the respondent in order to maintain clarity and understanding (Henderson 2007).

3.4.1 Pilot Study

For the benefit of the researcher and the study as a whole, a pilot study was also conducted with Respondents 1, 7 and 8. The pilot study was a small scale trial run of the semi structured interview, used to prepare for the interviews of the remaining respondents (Polit et. al 2001). Respondents were contacted by phone inviting them to be part of the research, where they were advised that their numbers had been provided by the previous respondent, as per the snowball sample method. They were advised that their interviews would be recorded and transcribed, where their consent was provided via a permission form (Appendix 1). The pilot study tested out the effectiveness of the research method and the questions contained in the interview guide (Baker 1994). The pilot study indicated important findings that would benefit the remaining interviews.

The researcher initially opened the interview immediately discussing high involvement products. This did not allow a rapport to build among respondents, and generated less elaborate answers. The researcher implemented a number of opening, general questions, in relation to buying habits instead to open the interviews, which eased respondents in to the interviews, making them more comfortable and more willing to provide more elaborate answers. The researcher also felt that following the pilot study, the questions asked reflected a more deductive approach. The interview guide was relying on existing theories, where the researcher was asking too many questions that could lead to a "yes" or "no" answer. These questions were omitted and replaced with more open ended questions, so that respondents could provide their insight into the phenomenon of customer delight, rather than providing their opinions on current literature.

The researcher also quickly learned that certain key terms needed to be explained to the respondents. Words such as "high involvement" and "expectations" caused confusion among respondents. This confusion was rectified in the main study. Finally, the researcher realised that field notes were essential once analysing the data collected. In the pilot study, the researcher relied solely on the interview transcripts when data was analysed. In the main study, field notes were implemented to remind the researcher of specific thoughts felt during the interviews. The pilot study ultimately enhanced the interview questions guide, as they became more open ended, more deductive in nature, and more beneficial to the study. The enhanced interview guide is detailed in Appendix 2.

3.5 Sample Method

The difficulty in deciding a sampling method links back to the research question. In order to assess the staying powers of delight and its effects on customer loyalty in high involvement purchases, the sampling method must ensure that the respondents selected have experienced delight and have experienced this in a high involvement purchase. With such requirements, the method of snowball sampling was selected. Snowball sampling involves the researcher using the contact information of existing study respondents to recruit new study respondents. By nature, it is repetitive as existing informants refer the researcher on to other informants, who refer the researcher on to other informants, and so on. A snowball effect occurs as a result, due to the accumulative nature of the method.

Snowball sampling is often employed when trying to obtain information on a hidden population. These could include intentionally hidden groups, such as drug users (Sifaneck and Neaigus 2001) and the unemployed (Atkinson & Flint, 2001), or unintentionally hidden groups, such as social elites (Moyser and Wagstaffe 1987). Customers who have experienced delight are part of an unintentionally hidden group. There is no database of those customers, where a rare way to locate such a group is via the snowball method, as delighting experiences may be shared among social groups. Contacting one customer who has been delighted would lead on to another delighted customer in their social group, and so on.

While the merits of this method are evident, it is important to highlight that there is a precedent for the use of snowball sampling in this area. In their study on the effects of service recovery on customer satisfaction, Kau and colleagues (2006) employed a snowball sample

method. Furthermore, in studying the relationship between customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and financial performance, Chi and Gursoy (2009) used the snowball technique. Thirdly, in a study of online customer loyalty, Ribbink and colleagues (2004) again used the snowball method. As such, there is a huge precedent existing already in customer satisfaction studies that have successfully used the snowball sampling technique successfully.

The initial participant was a member of the researcher's own extended family, who had recently purchased a car. This first respondent was asked to provide the information of another respondent, who was then in turn asked to provide the name of another respondent, and so on. A total of 14 respondents were invited to be part of the study. Four declined, while two lived abroad, making them unable to be interviewed. Eight respondents were found therefore who were willing to participate in an interview, while also living in a feasible location for the researcher to travel to. The data was collected over a four day period, where interviews lasted approximately ten minutes for each participant. Two of the interviews ultimately had to be discarded as the respondents had not actually experienced any form of customer delight, and their contribution was therefore not relevant to this study.

There was no predetermined number of respondents needed for the interview, rather, after the conclusion of the sixth interview, the researcher believed that theoretical saturation had been reached, meaning that the researcher has continued sampling and analysing data until no new data appeared and all concepts of the theory are well-developed (Lewis-Beck et al. 2004). Six interviews were therefore deemed satisfactory in order to fulfil the research objectives. The respondents' information was as follows:

Respondent 1 was female, 41 years of age, a housewife, and had purchased a car.

Respondent 2 was female, 24 years of age, a teacher, and had purchased a television.

Respondent 3 was male, 25 years of age, a student, and had purchased a phone.

Respondent 4 was female, 61 years of age, a housewife, and had purchased a holiday.

Respondent 5 was male, 58 years of age, a principal, and had purchased a car.

Respondent 6 was female, 22 years of age, a student, and had purchased a laptop.

Respondent 7 (not used) was female, 52 years of age, a housewife, and had purchased a car.

Respondent 8 (not used) was male, 54 years of age, an accountant, and had purchased a car.

3.6 Procedure

Once respondents agreed to be part of the study, suitable meeting times and places were agreed to conduct the interviews. These took place in the National College of Ireland, in a quiet unoccupied classroom. Prior to the interview commencing, all respondents were asked to sign a permission form, so that their answers could be used as part of the study. All respondents were then informed that their interviews would be recorded on an audio device, to be transcribed later. The researcher also explained to the respondents how the recordings would be used, and were provided with the researchers' contact details, if they wished to receive a copy of the transcription. Respondents were assured that their narratives would be kept completely anonymous. The researcher interviewed the respondents guided by the interview questions developed from the pilot study. Field notes were taken throughout the interview when salient points were made by the respondents.

3.6.1 Method of Data Analysis

Once all interviews were transcribed, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews. Thematic analysis is a widely-used qualitative analytic method (Roulston 2001). It focuses on identifying patterned meaning across a dataset, where coding and theme development are directed in an inductive way (Frith and Gleeson 2004); being directed by the content of the data.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2007) method for thematic analysis, the following approach was adhered to; the data was read, and re-read so that the researcher could become intimately familiar with the content gathered. Codes were generated to identify important areas of the data. The entire dataset was coded and collated, with relevant data extracted. Once extracted, the codes were examined to identify broader patterns of meaning. Data was collated and organised based on potential themes, and then reviewed for validity. Themes were refined, to ensure they were relevant to the research objectives of the study. Themes were then defined, an analysis was developed of each, and themes were named. Finally the data was collated, combining the data of the interviews and their analytic narrative. This was then contextualised in relation to the existing literature.

Thematic coding confers accuracy and intricacy, which will ultimately enhance the meaning of the phenomena being researched (Ibrahim 2012). It is also accessible to researchers with little experience in qualitative research, highlight similarities across a data set, and can generate unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke 2007).

3.7 Limitations

The main limitation of the study links back to the sampling method. While a snowball sample was necessary to identify the hidden population of delighted customers, this method can be complex and costly to find a considerable number of cases for the study. Barriers exist using a snowball application as many subject suggestions were difficult to contact, were located too far away to meet face to face, and were unknown to me, thus requiring a period of trust building. Furthermore, this method is biased toward more cooperative individuals who possess a large personal network. The results of this limitation meant that the sample were from a similar cultural and social background.

The second limitation revolves around semi structured interviews. This method has the advantage of being objective while also allowing a more thorough understanding of subject's views in relation to customer delight than what could be achieved via a quantitative method. However, while comparable data across respondents is obtained, based on the structure of the questions asked, one loses the opportunity to comprehend how the respondents themselves structure the topic at hand (George, 2007). To counter this, it is important to ask open ended questions, making sure the respondents are demonstrating their viewpoint in relation to the situation. However, semi structured interviews according to George (2007) suffer from the dangers inherent in all research methods that rely on self-reported data in that respondents may self-censure, under report, or over report.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Consent forms were prepared prior to interviews taking placed, while the respondents were informed that they would be referred to as Respondents 1 to 8 within the analysis of the data, and the discussion of this study throughout the dissertation. Respondents were informed that at any point during the research process that they could drop out of the study, where their data would be removed from the analysis. The respondents were reminded that their

interviews were recorded, and were provided with the researcher's contact details, should they wish to view a copy of their transcript, or the analysis of their data.

Chapter 4 - Findings

As discussed in the methodology chapter, eight interviews were completed over a four day period, with two discarded as they were not relevant to the study, leading six relevant interviews in total. This Findings chapter will detail the responses, the themes that stemmed from these responses, and how these are relevant to the research objectives that were identified in the methodology chapter.

4.1 Research Objective 1

What antecedents of customer delight were exhibited by high involvement customers?

4.1.1 Theme 1: Emotions of surprise and joy following positive disconfirmation of expectations.

With the lack of research conducted in customer delight and high involvement products, the first research objective revolved around establishing whether customer delight could be present in high involvement purchases at all, in the way in which it can be found in low involvement purchases. In order to establish this, the researcher needed respondents to describe the entire transaction experience, indicating what they expected to receive. Once this occurred, respondents were asked if all their expectations were met, and if anything exceeded or in fact went below their expectations. Finally, respondents were asked how this specific management of their expectations made them feel.

In low involvement purchases thus far, customer delight is thought to be created by two different methods, as highlighted in contrasting research. Studies exist which suggest that delight is created when customers' expectations are exceeded, leading to feelings of surprise and joy (Chandler 1989; Oliver 1989; Rust and Oliver, 2000). However, other research suggests instead that once utilitarian benefits are satisfied, focusing on hedonic benefits can lead to delight, as the provision of hedonic benefits leads to the feeling of promotional emotions such as excitement and cheerfulness (Keiningham and Vavra 2001; Chitturi et al. 2008). Therefore it is possible to delight customers without surprise, once significant focus on customer's hedonic needs are present (Barnes et.al 2011).

As this study adopted an inductive approach, however, the researcher appreciated the previous studies existing in relation to the antecedents of customer delight, but now needed to look at the data collected from the interviews to establish whether different key elements exist in the creation of customer delight among high involvement consumers. There also needed to be an appreciation for the possibility that high involvement customers could not

be delighted at all. There has been discussion in literature already to identify where it may not be possible to delight customers, which revolved around mundane low involvement purchases, such as milk delivery (Berman 2005).

The narratives of the interviews find a variety of expectations revolving around the specific products purchased. These ranged from specifications relating to televisions, cars, phones, laptops and holidays, where respondents were probed to make sure everything they expected to happen was discussed. It was important for the researcher to identify both the utilitarian expectations and the hedonic expectations for each respondent. Following this, the subjects were asked whether they received anything that they did not expect, and how this made them feel. Interestingly, all six respondents stated that there were aspects of their transaction that exceeded their expectations. In relation to receiving a free smart remote, 3D glasses and free delivery, Respondent 2 stated:

"The smart remote was 45 euro so I was happy I got this for free. I didn't expect to be given the additional aspects. I was thrilled!"

While Respondent 3, when receiving a phone plan for their smart phone, stated:

"I was genuinely surprised! Pleasantly surprised even."

There were two key distinct emotions that began to emerge as interview responses were obtained. All respondents spoke using similar emotive words when describing how pleased they were with their exampled companies exceeding their expectations. Respondents 2, 3, 4 and 6 all explicitly mentioned the word surprise, while every respondent stated emotions related to joy, such as "ecstatic" (Respondent 5) and "very happy" (Respondent 1). It was clear, therefore, that all respondents reported positive emotions following positive disconfirmation of their expectations, but there was no presence of such emotions when discussing their feelings of the companies satisfying their hedonic expectations. It appears, therefore, in relation to this study of high involvement products, that to achieve customer delight, the feeling of surprise was a necessity.

Furthermore, the researcher was intrigued that respondents were able to describe in great detail when they were asked to remember as much about their original transaction as possible, which was particularly remarkable considering some transactions took place several years before. The researcher was told of specific sales staff who assisted them, the variety of products they were offered, and prices. Respondent 1 was able to remember aspects such as the smell of the showroom, even though they purchased the car from that dealer over fifteen years ago, while Respondent 6 could recall the very detailed questions their sales assistant asked her.

This falls in line with existing literature, which identifies that delighting experiences are easier to remember than satisfying ones (Berman 2005). Based on these six interviews, therefore, it appears that the presence of customer delight was achievable for these customers, following a positive disconfirmation of their expectations that led to the feelings of joy and surprise, and that these feelings also led to a better retention of the memories of the delighting transactions.

4.2 Research Objective 2:
What long term effects of customer delight, if any, were present?

- Rise in expectations
- Delighting customers a second time

4.2.1 Theme 1 – Rise in Expectations
It was now important for the researcher to understand whether any long terms effects of customer delight was exhibited by the respondents. In order to establish whether delight affected these customers in any way, or not, respondents were asked to describe the experience when replacing the high involvement product they purchased in their first transaction. They were again asked to describe the entire transaction experience, indicating what they expected to receive, if their expectations were met, if anything exceeded or in fact went below their expectations, and how this management of their expectations made them feel.

As interviews were collected, there was an obvious change in expectations held by respondents from the first transaction to the second. The researcher appreciated that considerable time had passed from one transaction to the next, allowing respondents to have

their expectations adapted over time by advertisements and word of mouth. However, it was interesting that in five of the six accounts, what delighted the customers in the original transaction, now became expected in the second:

"I expected the service though to be similar if not better than the previous place, or I'd go somewhere else!" (Respondent 1 when purchasing a car)

"Everything I got in the previous transaction, including to be honest, the 50 quid worth of petrol." (Respondent 4 when purchasing a car)

"I also expected, to be honest, that I'd get the free transfers again, considering I got this last time." (Respondent 5 when purchasing a holiday)

Obviously, this is an incredibly important aspect of the long term effects of customer delight in high involvement purchases. The delighting experience, as discussed, was memorable for each customer, meaning they were able to recall specifically what features of the transaction delighted them, thus they now expected this feature again. As such, what previously delighted the respondents, now became anticipated.

However, expectations for the respondents also developed between the first transaction and the second, without being related to the delighting experience becoming expected. Considering that for all customers at least twelve months had passed between purchases, and in the case of Respondent 1 some fifteen years, expectations could have been affected by other factors such as the power of advertisements and word of mouth experienced over time.

Respondent 3, for example, stated that they "expected that I'd at least get a decent smart phone. I now wanted access to all my social networks…". Unlike the other five respondents, Respondent 3's raised expectations were not as a result of the previous delighting experience becoming anticipated, rather their change in expectations were completely unrelated to the delighting experience. When probed further whether Respondent 3 expected the plan that they had received in the previous transaction, i.e. if they expected the very thing that delighted them, they stated that this "wasn't something they were really thinking about before the buy."

Furthermore, Respondents 1 and 6 also had raised expectations unrelated to their previous expectations, or those stemmed from their delighting experience:

"Well, I was looking for a better, bigger car, more expensive. Because I was going to a bigger garage I expected more variety." (Respondent 1 on purchasing a car)

"I needed something powerful, and that combined solid state with a HDD. And I needed it to be quite graphic heavy." (Respondent 6 on purchasing a laptop)

These six interviews therefore have suggested three possible ways in which customer expectations in relation to high involvement products can change in response to customer delight:

i. That customers' expectations are raised as the previously delighting feature(s) becomes anticipated.

ii. That customers' expectations are raised as they are continuously exposed to word of mouth and advertisements.

iii. That customers' expectations are raised from both the previously delighting feature(s) becoming anticipated, and as they are exposed to word of mouth and advertisements.

In relation to low involvement products, the long term effects of customer delight are known as the staying powers of delight. The concept of the staying power of delight was first brought up by Rust and Oliver (2000), where three possible staying powers were discussed, as highlighted in the literature review, and the implications of these. A key effect of these staying powers is the often rise in expectations, directly associated with a delighting feature of a transaction. This rise in expectations, in relation to the staying powers of delight, has been discussed in much literature revolving around this topic (Finn 2005; Berman 2005; Barnes et al. 2016).

Interestingly, however, while these staying powers were relevant for low involvement purchases, they are not applicable with high involvement purchases, as it seems the passage of time, where word of mouth and advertisements becomes more influential, coupled with the power of delight, creates three different staying powers. The six respondents in this study therefore cannot be limited to any of these three staying powers of delight discussed in literature thus far, highlighting that in relation to high involvement products, the presence of customer delight results in three different potential long term effects, i.e. three different staying powers.

4.2.2 Theme 2 - Delighting customers a second time

With the researcher now establishing that expectations had been raised, it was now important to see if any additional effects of customer delight were present among respondents. To explore this, the researcher continued to query respondents in relation to the second transaction that took place, i.e. the replacement of their first discussed high involvement product.

With higher expectations when purchasing for the second time, however, respondents were asked how their expectations were managed in the second transaction and what emotions were felt by them. In this instance, there again was no presence of highly emotive language when remembering the focus placed on their hedonic needs, while only three of the six respondents now explicitly highlighted their surprise as a result of their expectations being exceeded:

"Absolutely over the moon! I didn't ever think those things would be offered at all. I was very happy." (Respondent 1 on receiving a free warranty for their car)

"Based on the previous experience, I really didn't expect that to happen. It was a really nice bonus for me to be honest." (Respondent 2 on receiving free installation for their television)

"I was surprised that it could be fixed, but I was happy that it was in safe hands." (Respondent 6 on receiving free set up for their laptop)

Respondents 3, 4, and 5, however, all indicated merely being satisfied with their purchase. They were pleased with their decision making, but they didn't suggest that they were surprised by what they received. There was no presence of highly emotive language, either, when discussing the focus on their hedonic needs. In this instance, they were far less impressed by their second purchasing experience:

"I was really pleased with my decision if I'm honest" (Respondent 3 on purchasing their phone)

"They gave us everything I asked for. I wasn't as ecstatic as before, but I was satisfied. I got what I was after at a good price." (Respondent 5 on purchasing their holiday)

"Very much looked after, satisfied" (Respondent 4 on purchasing their car)

What is striking from their responses in comparison, is that all six respondents displayed signals of customer delight in their first transaction, which then saw the respondents experience one of three potential ways in which their expectations were raised. Following this transaction, the second purchasing experience saw half the respondents using less emotive language. Now only three of the respondents could be classified as being truly delighted in the second instance, as only three highlighted their surprise and joy (Respondents 1, 2, and 6), while three respondents are now simply classified as being satisfied with their purchases (Respondents 3, 4 and 5).

There has been considerable research done as to whether delighted customers would repurchase from the same company again (Keiningham and Vavra, 2001; Ockenden 2005), yet these studies do not look at whether a customer can be delighted again, aside from customers who experience transitory delight in low involvement purchases (Rust and Oliver 2000). This study, therefore, has attempted to bridge a gap in the literature in highlighting the possibility of delighting a customer for a second time.

With the first company, respondents were more easily delighted than the second company, as the second company faced customers with higher expectations. With many of these expectations associated with their initial delighting experience, it is evident, therefore, that to attempt to continuously delight customers grows increasingly more difficult. On top of this, however, as expectations rise following a delighting experience, it should be also increasingly more difficult to merely satisfy customers.

4.3 Research Objective 3:
Was a relationship established between the respondents and the original company, following the delighting experience?

- Loyalty following positive word of mouth and advocates
- Repeat purchases

4.3.1 Theme 1 – Loyalty following positive word of mouth and advocates
The researcher wanted to illustrate whether the six respondents established a relationship with the original delighting company. In order to do this, the researcher probed respondents in relation to their actions following their first purchase, including whether they spoke about their experiences with anyone and if they assisted anybody in the purchase of a similar high

involvement product. The researcher allowed respondents the freedom to speak openly, in order to identify if a relationship was present or not.

When asked whether the respondents spoke to anyone in relation to their transaction, all six respondents stated that they spoke positively about their purchase within their social groups:

"Yes I did. I had friends who had young children who were looking at getting a car, and I recommended that garage to them." (Respondent 1)

In some instances, this resulted in respondents' family or friends purchasing from the same company, where the respondents stated that they felt they played a role in their decision making:

"I did, I mean I told people where to go, what plan to get and spoke highly of my phone." (Respondent 3)

"For the people who were thinking of buying televisions, I made an impact on them" (Respondent 2)

This level of positive word of mouth suggests that a relationship was established among the respondents and the delighting companies, in that respondents were indicating signs of loyalty. This suggests similarities to the literature discussing delighted customers of low involvement purchases, and the respondents in this study of high involvement purchases, as delighted customers are more prone to report back on their positive experiences (Heskett 2002) via positive word of mouth (Chitturi et al. 2008). Furthermore, these findings complement existing literature that suggests loyal customers play a powerful role in the decision making process of others (Hallowell 1996; Reichheld et al. 2000; Zeithaml 2000).

4.3.2 Theme 2 - Repeat purchases

Following on from their initial signals of a relationship, the researcher wanted to probe respondents in relation to their second purchase of a high involvement product, i.e. when they needed to replace the product bought in the first transaction.

All respondents were asked where they went to purchase the replacement for their high involvement product, and why they chose that place. At the time, while not disclosed to the respondents to remain unbiased, the researcher expected that the majority of respondents would say that they returned to their original destination. This was expected as all six

respondents had exhibited customer delight from that transaction, and that they had all suggested signs of loyalty to this company. Remarkably, however, only one of the six respondents stated that they returned to the same company when their product needed replacement:

"I changed it about 3 years later. I went to the same dealer, they're a main dealer, I was still living in the area and I enjoyed the relationship we built up over the years." (Respondent 4)

All five other respondents explicitly stated that they didn't return to the same company again. Some commented on the gap in time between the two purchases:

"I replaced it after, eh, about 15 years. I have to say I didn't return there, no. Because I had seen an awful lot of advertisements. I had been looking online. I had wanted a newer car, a better car and I suppose I went for a drive one day and this garage I just called in, I didn't even think of the first place." (Respondent 1)

While others stated that they tried a different store based on friend's recommendations:

"About two years after I bought a new one. But no, I went to Arnott's. Other friends had gone and bought things and were happy with their service." (Respondent 2)

"I changed after about two years but I went somewhere else. I got recommendations from my friend because they were doing good deals." (Respondent 3)

This was an incredibly surprising discovery in this research. It completely contradicts the existing literature which highlights that delighted customers show higher levels of loyalty, commitment and repurchase than satisfied customers (Barnes et al. 2010). Delighted customers are seemingly more likely to repurchase from a firm again (Ockenden 2005), as seen in customers in low involvement areas (Finn 2005).

In existing literature, delighting companies assume they will exert greater effort in costs and times associated with delighting their customers (Rust and Oliver 2000), however, this is recouped in the benefits of securing loyal customers and acquiring new customers via word of mouth. Incredibly, in this study of high involvement purchases, while the assume greater effort in costs and times to delight customers is still present, the reward for delighting customers is significantly less, considering that loyal customers were not acquired and the only real reward was the acquisition of new customers via word of mouth:

"My sister used them to book her trip to France." (Respondent 5)

"Yes my family were looking for a laptop for another family member and I said go see Pamela in that particular branch." (Respondent 6)

However, as discussed in the literature review, those customers acquired via word of mouth will naturally deplete over time (Rust and Oliver 2000), as a market will eventually run out of potential customers willing to purchase from a company (Berman 2005). Delighting companies therefore are dependent on repurchasing to occur. Considering that they were able to acquire the business of the six respondents initially, and secure the business of their friends via word of mouth, this findings chapter indicates that while companies are able to delight their customers, effort now needs to be made in designing a more effective retention package. The effects of word of mouth in the purchasing behaviour of the respondents, and those in their social groups, is present. Perhaps companies should look at this important factor in the decision making of its customer when addressing their customer retention issues.

What is also evident therefore is that the feeling of loyalty in relation to high involvement purchases can diminish over time. Respondents demonstrated key antecedents of delight, saw their expectations raised, and exhibited initial feelings of loyalty toward their delighting companies. Yet, once time had passed these delighted customers were not always loyal to their delighting companies, as a repurchase, following the delighted encounter, only occurred with one of the respondents (Respondent 4), which contradicts the viewpoint held among most customer delight literature at present (Barnes et al. 2016). In other customer delight studies, where low involvement purchases had been the focus, considerable time between purchasing periods has not been looked at as a factor which could affect loyalty. In high involvement purchases, as in this study, there was a longer time from one purchase to the next, allowing a depreciation of the loyalty generated by customer delight, thus reducing the feeling of loyalty among customers. While firms obtained customers via word of mouth, the expense in delighting customers, coupled with the rise in their expectations could be more detrimental to profits, than it will be beneficial.

4.4 Conclusion

There have been considerable findings therefore in this study of customer delight among high involvement purchasers:

i. High involvement customers experience delight in a similar manner to low involvement customers, in that emotions of surprise and joy followed a positive disconfirmation of expectations at the time of their original purchase. Focusing on hedonic needs was not present among respondents, as so delight was not achieved in this manner.

ii. Delighted customers experienced a rise in their expectations, following an anticipation of the previously delighted feature, or a development of their expectations over time following an exposure to word of mouth and advertisements, or a combination of both.

iii. Delighting high involvement customers for a second time is more difficult, considering their rise in expectations, however, it is a possibility for firms.

iv. Delighted high involvement customers can exhibit initial feelings of loyalty such as positive word of mouth.

v. Delighting high involvement purchasers, however, is not intrinsically linked to developing long lasting loyal customers.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Within the findings of this study, much similarity between delight in high involvement purchases and low involvement purchases has been established, such as the antecedents of delight and its initial signs of loyalty. However, it is the new insight on delight that this study has indicated which require further study; in that customer delight does not necessarily lead to customer loyalty.

5.1 Delight does not guarantee loyalty

The link between meeting consumer expectations and consumer satisfaction has been referenced in literature for many years (Barnes et al. 2010), where more recently satisfaction has become regarded as the minimum requirement in a transaction (Arnold et al. 2005) and that delight instead should occur to achieve customer loyalty (Barnes et al. 2011). This concept has been discussed in numerous studies of low involvement products (Chitturi et al. 2008).

This study on the effect of customer delight on high involvement purchases initially complimented the viewpoint that delight leads to customer loyalty. This study saw all six of its respondents report back positively on the transaction that had occurred, thus becoming advocates of their delighting companies. Their positive word of mouth among their social group saw additional purchases made as a result of this vicarious activity. It was clear, therefore, that customer delight resulted in customer acquisition, which led to positive word of mouth, resulting in additional acquisition from those affected by vicarious activities.

Firms that delight their customers are able to create higher levels of loyalty than non-delighting firms (Keiningham and Vavra 2001; Berman 2005). In studies, it is assumed that loyalty can lead to staying with a provider, increasing the number or frequency of purchases, becoming advocates of an organisations, while exhibiting positive word of mouth. ()

The problem however with this assumption is that studies that have existed in relation to delighting customers revolve around highlighting customers' repurchase intentions. Researchers have simply identified customers' future intentions to repurchase a given product or service. Yet this method, while an indicator of future behaviour, is not an assurance of loyalty. It has been proven that customers believe they will repurchase again at higher levels when delighted, compared to when they are satisfied (Chitturi et al. 2008), yet the rare

study that exists which highlights actual repurchasing found that a 50% decrease occurs between delighted customers' repurchase intentions and their actual repurchase (Jones and Sasser 1995).

It can therefore be argued that the effect of delighting a customer and the loyalty created by such an encounter decreases over time, which, interestingly, is exactly what was found in this study. Of all the six respondents, each exhibited feelings of initial loyalty, via positive word of mouth, while they all also indicated repurchase intentions. Incredibly however, just one of the six actually repurchased from the same firm.

Delight appears therefore to be a tool for customer acquisition. It assists in closing the sale for customers, as they are made to feel joyous and excited, where these emotions are then fed back to social groups, which increases purchases made again as a result of positive word of mouth. The issue however arises where a space of time elapses between the purchase and the replacement of high involvement goods, which occurred for all respondents in this study. Their feelings of joy and excitement depleted over time, and so the previously delighted customers did not automatically repurchase from the delighting company. Instead, this study has found, that the recommendations of friends and family, i.e. word of mouth, was a key factor in where customers went to replace their product. Through word of mouth, the delighted customers initially became important actors in the decision making process of their friends and family. Interestingly, as time passed, those delighted customers instead became influenced by word of mouth recommendations from their social groups, which swayed them to go with another company.

While literature suggests that disconfirmation of expectations of a product or service, in a positive manner, is essential to encourage and enhance customer commitment level (Oliver, 1997), this study suggests delight is actually a customer acquisition tool, which stimulates positive word of mouth among its customers initially. Companies now need to understand, however, that they must either maintain the emotions customers' felt after their initial delighting experience, or enhance their customer retention models. Applying these strategies could transform delighted customers into loyal customers. Delighting alone, in high involvement purchases, cannot guarantee loyalty, as the memories of joy and excitement that delight creates depreciate over time as a result of alternative word of mouth recommendations.

5.2 Maintaining Customer Loyalty

If a firm is increasing efforts to delight a customer in order to acquire them, they now need to increase efforts in designing a method to retain them. Attracting customers is three to five times more costly then retaining existing customers (Jang and Mattila 2005), as cost advantages such as reduced service costs, increased spending, lowered price sensitivity, and elevated word-of mouth referrals occur (O'Brien and Jones 1995). As delight is recognised as an acquisition strategy, rather than an antecedent of customer loyalty, companies need to begin understanding how they can maintain the loyalty of these customers.

Companies must understand that their initial word of mouth recommendations were generated because of the feeling of joy and excitement that delight created. All six respondents of this study exhibited early loyalty signals, and so the long lasting loyalty of all six respondents could be achievable. The findings did not insinuate that customers grew negative toward the delighting company over time. Rather, it was found that recommendations from social groups eventually outweighed the memory of the previously delighting experience.

As delight becomes part of the respondents' memories, companies should look at reminding these customers of their delighting experience, in that they want to maintain the feeling of joy among the delighted respondents. This will maintain the intense experience that they felt initially, prompting them to remember how positively they feel toward the delighting company. This could maintain customer interest, which could mean that when the time comes to replace their respective high involvement product, the delighting firm will not be as easily dismissed, or heavily influenced by their social groups.

While there are numerous methods to maintain customer interest, such as rewards programmes and point systems (Jang and Mattila 2005), the long term success rates of loyalty programmes have been criticised. Loyalty programmes can create a sense of false loyalty, meaning once a customer has received a reward from a company, they defect (Fournier et al. 1998). On top of this, the respondents of this study have all exhibited unique reactions to being delighting, meaning they would require a tailored loyalty programme suitable to maintain their unique memory of delight. It may be possible for companies to begin to segment customers by their response to being delighted, but this will require further research to identify the various reactions delight can cause to a company's delighting programme. The

speculation that delight will cause a varied response among high involvement purchasers, is routed in the contradictory results of this study to existing literature:

While delight has previously been suggested as key to developing customer loyalty, five out of six of the respondents were not loyal customers following their delighting encounter. Literature has also suggested three staying powers of delight, yet none were applicable to the respondents of this study when their purchases were of high involvement. Furthermore, there was no obvious indication as to why certain respondents had expectations raised in relation to word of mouth, while other respondents' expectations rose as a result of their delighting experience. Moreover, of the eight original respondents obtained via the snowball sample method, a quarter didn't experience any kind of delight at all. The variance in responses to customer delight is incredible, considering all respondents accounted for a similar set of emotions that they felt in relation to their delighting transaction.

This study has identified that delight is an acquisition tool, which generates word of mouth referrals. Yet the power of customer delight may not last from purchase to purchase, as previously thought, as delighted customers forget the emotions they felt when they experienced delight, as a result of word of mouth from their social groups. While it is now imperative for companies to develop customer retention programmes that will maintain the interest, and business, of their delighted customers, such a programme cannot be developed until companies understand why delight affects different customers in different manners, and if they can segment the response customer have to being delighted into targetable groups.

Once delighted customers can be segmented, companies can begin to target them in order to remind them of the joyous feeling the delighting experience created for them. A reminder of such a feeling should maintain their positive word of mouth from one purchase to the next, increasing their probability of repurchase, retention, and loyalty.

Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Customer delight is a growing popular topic in consumer research (*Keiningham* and *Vavra 2001; Ockenden, 2005;* Barnes et al. 2010; Wang 2011; Barnes et al. 2016). As continuous studies are made in this area, an advancement occurs in terms of developing an understanding of its antecedents, useful implications, and negative drawbacks. This study echoed numerous existing material on the topic of customer delight, in particular how it is created and the initial feelings of loyalty it generates (Chitturi et al. 2008). Interestingly, this is one of the rare studies that focuses solely on the effects of customer delight on high involvement products, resulting in a new suggestion that delight is instead a customer acquisition tool. The study also criticised the relationship between customer delight and long term loyalty, as previous research relied on repurchase intention (Barnes et al, 2011), whereas this research used data based on actual repurchases. Delight has previously been suggested as an essential aspect for customer loyalty (*Ockenden 2005)*, whereas this study suggests that delight cannot maintain loyalty in high involvement purchases, unless a company implements a retention programme.

The study is particularly relevant therefore to marketing managers of high involvement companies. An understanding needs to develop in relation to the limitation of customer delight. Once delight is understood as merely an acquisition tool, managers can begin evaluating and improving their retention schemes, so that their newly acquired delighted customers can become loyal to their firms. Without an appropriate retention scheme, the bulk of the delighted customers, as seen in this study, may defect, while the costs associated with acquiring them will fail to be recouped.

6.2 Recommendations
6.2.1 Data Shortcomings

There are of course shortcomings in the data collected, in particular revolving around the questions asked to the respondents. The researcher was unaware that the findings suggested the emotional memories of delight among respondents would decline over time, as a result of word of mouth from their social groups. It would have been extremely beneficial to have

probed further about the factors that impacted their repurchasing decision between their first high involvement product and the second, in particular the word of mouth and advertisements they were subject to during the elapsed times between purchases.

The study has also suggested, based on the findings that a retention programme should occur between the delighted customers and the delighting company. However, the researcher did not investigate whether a programme already actually existed for some respondents and if this simply did not have an effect on their loyalty to that company. Ultimately, the researcher should have queried further in relation to the gap in time between the first purchase and the second. The researcher should have identified relevant advertisements the respondents were subject to, if members of their social group purchased a similar high involvement product from a different firm, whether the respondents were subject to positive word of mouth following their friends or family's purchase, and whether the respondents received communication from the original delighting firm or not.

A third shortcoming was the fact that the researcher broadly investigated high involvement products, as research was lacking in this area. It could have potentially been more interesting to compare respondents if they all purchased the one type of product. Their results would have been more analogous, as it is difficult to compare the results in this study considering certain respondents purchased a car, a television, holidays, a phone, and a laptop, where they naturally provided different reactions to the delighting experience.

The use of qualitative research was considered at the time to be essential for this study, as it revolved around understanding the experiences that delight created for each respondent. While it took a considerable amount of time to find respondents, build a rapport with them, as well as making sure that the questions they were to be asked were of high quality, the researcher feels that for the intention of this study, qualitative methods, in particular the semi structured interview, was most suitable to the research.

6.2.2 Further Research

As more and more studies on customer delight occurs, the demand for further research also increases. This study, while an indicator that delight is an acquisition tool, has led to the need for much more research to be completed on customer delight in high involvement products.

The time elapsed between one purchase to the next should be investigated to cement the idea that word of mouth creates a pivotal reason as to why the power of delight diminishes over time, while also such an investigation can indicate if any other factors diminishes the power of delight instead. Research needs to occur to understand why customers respond to delight so differently, and whether the varied responses among customers can be segmented into targetable groups for companies. This research has occurred in relation to low involvement purchases, but as the segmented groups are not applicable to high involvement customers, research is therefore necessary to fill this gap. Thirdly, as this study was broad in nature, it could be interesting for future studies to focus solely on one specific high involvement product, rather than the varied products discussed in this research. A study such as this could be more beneficial to specific service providers.

The greatest surprise of this study, which therefore warrants additional research, is the conclusion that delight is not a guaranteed mechanism to achieve higher loyalty rates, as previously thought. Rather, it should be used to acquire customers, but that this acquisition needs to be maintained via a suitable customer retention model. This is an eye opening conclusion, applicable to numerous high involvement purchase providers. At present, many companies are delighting their customers, increasing their costs as a result, benefiting from positive word of mouth, but not benefiting from long term customer loyalty. Future research must centre on the applicable retention schemes necessary to ensure delighted customers repurchase from the same firm. Until such retention schemes are researched and devised, delighting customers in high involvement products cannot be considered a viable option for most companies, as the long term effect of delight diminishes over time in relation to loyalty, meaning the additional costs and negative incurred via delighting customers, outweighs the benefits achieved.

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