

# Why Satisfied Consumers do not Repurchase ? The Perspective of Attribution Theory on Repurchase Intention

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## Abstract

Satisfied consumers may switch to another brand instead of repurchase. This study focused on whether the cause of satisfaction is attributed internally or externally and how these attributions can influence the repurchase intention differently among Korean consumers. The data set of 198 respondents were collected on internal and external attribution, knowledge, switching cost, and repurchase intention. The findings indicated that internal attribution did not mediate between consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention ; whereas, external attribution mediated between consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention. Second, consumers with high knowledge had a positive influence on repurchase intention through external attribution rather than internal attribution. Lastly, satisfied consumers had a positive effect on repurchase intention for those who attributed internally only if they perceived the switching cost. The study provided strategies for satisfied consumers with their purchased products who may not necessary repurchase. Furthermore, marketers should consider developing new products with unique and new properties or functions by managing the knowledge level of consumers. This research indicated for the first time that external attribution mediates between satisfaction and repurchase intention ; whereas, internal attribution does not mediate between satisfaction and repurchase intention.

**Keywords :** satisfaction, repurchase intention, attribution theory, knowledge, switching cost

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Companies invest in customer retention programs since it costs five times more to acquire a new customer than to keep an existing one (Pfeffer, 2005). Prior research has focused on developing loyalty programs that build positive relationships with customers to increase the retention rate. Satisfaction is the key driver for marketers since it leads to positive relationships with customers (Agarwal & Singh, 2018 ; Helgesen, 2010 ; Panigrahi, Azizan, & Varis, 2018). However, satisfaction does not necessarily guarantee loyal customers.

Muller (2010) stated that this was supported by a survey conducted in 2007 for a financial services provider. The customer satisfaction score consistently hovered above the 90% mark, yet, only 41% of respondents (all customers) in that survey claimed that they would not change to another provider if that provider offered a better interest rate and/or lower fees. A loyal customer is certainly a satisfied customer, but a satisfied customer is not necessarily a loyal customer.

Nevertheless, previous research has focused on the positive relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intention (Koklic, Kukar - Kinney, & Vegelj, 2017 ; Kurup & Jain, 2018 ; Picón, Castro, & Roldan, 2014 ;

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Yi & La, 2004), and investigated the moderating role of customer, relational, and marketplace characteristics and relationship duration (Cooil, Keiningham, Aksoy, & Hsu, 2007 ; Seiders, Voss, Grewal, & Godfrey, 2005). Thus, this research implies that the effect of satisfaction on repurchase intention is limited, and customer satisfaction does not always lead to repurchase behaviors. Studies suggest that satisfaction is not a sufficient factor in predicting the repurchase intention, which is also influenced by customer characteristics (i.e., gender, age, education level, etc.) and psychological processes (i.e., involvement, relationship-building programs, competitive density, etc.) (Kumar & Menon, 2017 ; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001 ; Voss, Godfrey, & Seiders, 2010). That is, even consumers who are satisfied with a brand may switch to another brand rather than to repurchase a product. Therefore, it is important to investigate how psychological processes of consumers interfere with repurchase intention.

Satisfaction is an important indicator (Kopalle & Lehmann, 2001 ; Oliver, 1980) to increase future repurchase behaviors (Blut, Frennea, Mittal, & Mothersbaugh 2015 ; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Festinger (1957) developed the theory of cognitive dissonance, which has been well-established in both psychology and consumer behavior research. It explains the discrepancies between one's attitude and actual behavior that creates an uncomfortable psychological state that triggers one to reduce cognitive dissonance (Schultz & Lepper, 1996). Furthermore, relationship marketing activities reduce cognitive dissonance, which increases consumer satisfaction (Sharifi & Esfandi, 2014). In various fields, the process and assessment of consumer satisfaction has been further researched through the expectation disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1980). It has indicated different effects of expectation, performance, and disconfirmation (Yi & La, 2003) and studies of customer satisfaction formation are the base of the disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1980). The disconfirmation theory, which is the extension of the cognitive dissonance theory in various sectors, understands consumer satisfaction, repurchase intentions, and switching behaviors (Kopalle & Lehmann, 2001 ; Saran & Swamy, 2018). The changes in switching behaviors occur even for satisfied consumers. Therefore, strategies should be applied to whether the cause of satisfaction is attributed internally or externally.

The attribution theory suggests that a person's behavior depends on how he or she interprets the cause of an outcome (Choi & Mattila, 2008) and whether one attributes a negative outcome through internal or external factors can induce a negative attitude toward a brand and switching behavior. This research aims to probe deeper into the relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intention through internal and external attribution. Furthermore, we investigate the moderating role of knowledge on the effect of internal or external attribution in consumer satisfaction. Lastly, we examine the mediating role of switching cost on internal or external attribution that results in satisfaction and repurchase intention. This research sheds new light on the relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intention by using the attribution theory moderated through knowledge level and perceived switching cost. The key takeaway from the findings is when considering these variables, it provides an alternative explanation for the divergent results in earlier works on repurchase intention.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Satisfaction and Attribution Theory***

Researchers and companies have invested significant amounts to improve and increase customers' satisfaction levels due to a positive linkage between customer satisfaction and benefits, including customer loyalty and repurchase intention that leads to formation of long term profitable relationships. Attribution models have been used to predict and explain consumer satisfaction. Furthermore, studies have concentrated on investigation of the satisfaction and attribution theory relationship (Iglesias, 2009). Furthermore, attribution theory been studied to better understand negative reaction of dissatisfaction behavior patterns (Folkes, 1984 ; Oliver & Desarbo, 1998).

Purchase dissatisfaction can be attributed to the consumer (internal) or situation/environment (external). External attributions evoke greater feeling of negative emotions than internal attributions (Folkes, 1984), which lead to negative WOM and repurchase intentions.

### ***The Relationship Between Attribution for Satisfaction and Repurchase Intention***

The concept of attribution and various dimensions (i.e., locus of causality, controllability, and stability) was introduced based on the works of Heider (1958). Later, Weiner (1979) proposed three properties : locus of causality (internal vs. external), casual stability (stable vs. unstable), and controllability (controllable vs. uncontrollable). Locus of causality explains the location attributed to the cause of a situation. By definition, if the locus of causality is internal, the cause of the satisfaction resides within the satisfied consumer. In contrast, if the locus of causality is external, the cause resides in other, external entities.

The model of attribution has explained the overlap of attribution theory and attributional theories through behaviors of antecedents, attributions, and consequences (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Continuous research links antecedents of attributions to information, beliefs, motivation, expectations, while consequences of attribution are linked to internal and external locus as well as to various causes of arousal (Jones & Davis, 1965 ; Kelley & Michela, 1980) and emphasize the importance of utilizing attribution as an explanatory factor of consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses.

Previous research has examined the relationship between satisfaction and internal or external attribution (Folkes, 1984 ; Oliver & Desarbo, 1998). Satisfaction and product success tend to be explained more through internal attribution as compared to external attribution (Weiner, 1979). However, prior studies have not investigated the relationship between satisfaction due to internal or external attribution and repurchase intention. This study examines the impact of internal or external attribution on repurchase intentions of satisfied consumers. Consumers who are satisfied with a product may attribute the outcome internally. For example, a consumer may be satisfied with a Product B because of his or her ability to use this product. Other satisfied consumers, in contrast, may attribute satisfaction externally to a product. For example, a consumer may be satisfied with a Product B because of the product's characteristics (design, performance, well-made features, etc.). Consumers who attribute internally would be more likely to switch to another product due to the higher weight of self-role in satisfaction rather than product quality. That is, they would perceive the same satisfaction even if they used another product. Therefore, we would expect that internal attribution would not mediate between satisfaction and repurchase intention. On the other hand, consumers who attribute externally would focus more on the role of product quality than their own ability. Therefore, external attribution is expected to mediate between satisfaction and repurchase intention. Thus, we hypothesize that :

⇒ **H1** : Internal attribution does not mediate the impact of satisfaction on repurchase intention.

⇒ **H2** : External attribution mediates the impact of satisfaction on repurchase intention.

### ***The Relationship Between Attribution and Knowledge in Satisfied Consumers***

The fundamental of consumer behavior research is that people often make decisions through the information set of intangible and tangible factors. Therefore, it is necessary to provide consumers with adequate information through association to better connect with them and create an attitude toward a certain product. If the purchaser knows about specific information of the products when these are just purchased, knowledge might be the determining factor in their choice (Liefeld, 2004).

Consumer knowledge gained from consumer information processing, including information search, evaluation process, and quality perception is an important concept (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987 ; Bettman & Park,

1980). Consumers can be quite aware of a product's performance and effectiveness because of their increased knowledge. Knowledge can influence attitude, evaluation, and consumption behaviors (Rortveit & Olsen, 2007). Therefore, a consumer can have self-confidence, believing in his or her ability to choose a product that satisfies his or her needs (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991 ; Park & Hastak, 1994).

Satisfaction is the overall consumer evaluation of the relationship with a product or brand. Consumers with a higher level of knowledge are able to determine a product's attributes and benefits than those with a lower level of knowledge (Chen & Li, 2007). Consumer knowledge affects how consumers gather and organize information, and consumers with high knowledge information are not only more likely to identify relevancy (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987), but are more stable in satisfaction ratings results compared to those consumers with lower knowledge (Fabrigar, Petty, Smith, & Crities, 2006).

Furthermore, when the cause of satisfaction is attributed internally through ability or self-effort, the consumer experiences feelings related to competence, self-fulfillment, and autonomy (Rodríguez, Látková, & Sun, 2008). High knowledge consumers tend to express their attributional thoughts (Chang, 2004). Therefore, we expect that a satisfied consumer with higher knowledge will attribute internally. On the other hand, if consumers with a low level of knowledge are satisfied, they usually attribute satisfaction externally to product design, function, and performance of the product rather than to self-role. Thus, we expect that the knowledge of satisfied consumers will not make a difference in the degree of external attribution. Thus, we hypothesize that :

✍ **H3** : Satisfied consumers with higher knowledge will attribute internally.

✍ **H4** : There is no difference in external attribution between satisfied consumers with high knowledge and low knowledge.

### ***The Mediating Role of Switching Cost***

Switching cost has been studied intensively in literature. According to Burnham, Frels, and Mahajan (2003), switching cost can be defined as the one time costs that customers associate with the process of switching from one provider to another. Switching is associated with service quality, price, and product complexity for satisfied and unsatisfied consumers (Bell, Auh, & Smalley, 2005 ; Bowen & Chen, 2001). Switching cost is a vital issue in marketing to explain consumer behaviors and companies are strategically planning to prevent consumers from switching to their competitors.

Switching cost has been categorized by studies as a moderating variable (Blut et al., 2015 ; Nagengast, Evanschitzky, Blut, & Rudolph, 2014) and mediating variable (Picón et al., 2014). When perceived switching cost is higher, there will be a greater influence on repurchase intention. Therefore, this study examines whether perception of switching cost predicts repurchase intention when customer satisfaction is the result of an internal or external attribution process. As previously stated, we expect that internal attribution would not mediate between satisfaction and repurchase intention.

In other words, if consumers attribute the cause of satisfaction internally, it would be expected that switching to another product would lead to results with an equal level of satisfaction. However, according to the endowment theory and mere ownership (Morewedge, Shu, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2009 ; Strahilevitz & Loewenstein, 1998), a sense of ownership and attachment to a product is generated when satisfaction is due to an internal attribution process or through one's effort and ability. Therefore, if the cause of satisfaction is attributed internally and generates a sense of product ownership, it can influence perception of switching cost that is expected to have a positive effect on repurchase intention. Thus, we hypothesize that :

✍ **H5** : The higher level of switching costs from internal attribution resulting in satisfaction will be associated with higher levels of repurchase intention.

Likewise, even if the cause of satisfaction is attributed externally, the consumer will perceive switching cost for the current product. It is likely that consumers will perceive costs when switching to other brands, even if they are satisfied with the quality and function of the products used prior to switching (Blut et al., 2015 ; Picón et al., 2014). Thus, it is hypothesized that :

✍ **H6 :** Higher level of switching costs from external attribution resulting in satisfaction is associated with higher levels of repurchase intention.

## Methodology

### *Participants and Procedure*

A total of 198 undergraduate students at the university participated in this study for course credit from July – September 2019. Participants were 104 males (52.3%) and 95 females (47.7%) with an average age of 23.80. All participants were asked to write the experience of satisfaction and dissatisfaction while using their smartphone. After writing the experiences of satisfaction and dissatisfaction while using their smartphone, each participant was asked to indicate the extent to which he/she agreed with the statements depicted in the next section.

### *Operational Definition and Measurements*

This study defines satisfaction as a favorable emotion or attitude by consumers through the experience process of purchasing, using, and evaluating goods and services (Ahrholdt, Gudergan, & Ringle, 2019 ; Oliver, 1980). Based on the definition, three statements were included : (a) I think that I did the right thing when I decided to buy a smartphone, (b) My choice to buy a smartphone was a wise choice, and (c) I am satisfied with my decision to buy a smartphone. The data were collected using a 5-point Likert scale (1 : *strongly disagree*, 5 : *strongly agree*) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .862$ ).

Attribution is the process that perceives the responsibility of an act and the direction of the responsibility categorized through oneself (internal attribution) or the company (external attribution) (Dixon, Spiro, & Jamil, 2001 ; Weiner, 2000). For internal attribution, four questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale (1: *strongly disagree*, 5 : *strongly agree*) : (a) I am satisfied with my smartphone because of my ability, (b) I have made the necessary efforts to make sure that I use the product well, (c) I spent a lot of time trying to use my product well, and (d) Satisfaction is due to my personal interest and competence rather than the product's performance (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .848$ ). For external attribution, four questions were asked using a 5-point Likert scale (1: *strongly disagree*, 5 : *strongly agree*) : (a) The product's performance is excellent, (b) The product has the right technology that I need, (c) The after service of the product is excellent, and (d) The reason for the satisfaction is because of the product's excellence rather than my effort (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .716$ ).

Knowledge is defined as the amount of information that consumers have acquired about a product and stored in their memory prior to purchase (Bettman & Park, 1980 ; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999). For knowledge, three statements were included and were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1: *strongly disagree*, 5: *strongly agree*) : (a) I know pretty much about a smartphone, (b) I do not feel very knowledgeable about a smartphone (reverse scored), and (c) Compared to most other people, I know more about a smartphone (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .786$ ).

Switching cost is defined as time, money, and effort caused by changing the company or brand (Jones, Mothersbaugh, & Beatty, 2000 ; Picón et al., 2014). For switching cost, four statements were included using a 5-point Likert scale (1: *strongly disagree*, 5 : *strongly agree*) : (a) Switching to a new brand would involve some up-front cost (application, clouding services, deposits, etc.), (b) Switching to a new brand will probably involve hidden costs, (c) I consider that it takes a lot time and effort to get the information needed to feel comfortable



**Table 1. Measurement Item**

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<b>Satisfaction (Oliver, 1980)</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha = .862$ )	
S1.	I think that I did the right thing when I decided to buy a smartphone.
S2.	My choice to buy a smartphone was a wise choice.
S3.	I am satisfied with my decision to buy a smartphone.
<b>Attribution (Dixon et al., 2001)</b>	
<b>Internal Attribution</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha = .848$ )	
IA1.	I am satisfied with my smartphone because of my ability.
IA2.	I have made the necessary efforts to make sure that I use the product well.
IA3.	I spend a lot of time trying to use my product well.
IA4.	Satisfaction is due to my personal interests and competence rather than product performance.
<b>External Attribution</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha = .716$ )	
EA1.	The product's performance is excellent.
EA2.	The product has the right technology that I need.
EA3.	The after service of the product is excellent.
EA4.	The reason for satisfaction is because of the product's excellence rather than my effort.
<b>Knowledge (Flynn &amp; Goldsmith, 1999)</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha = .786$ )	
KN1.	I know pretty much about a smartphone.
KN2.	I do not feel very knowledgeable about a smartphone. (Reverse scored)
KN3.	Compared to most other people, I know more about a smartphone.
<b>Switching Cost (Picón et al., 2014)</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha = .703$ )	
SC1.	Switching to a new brand would involve some up-front cost (application, clouding services, deposits, etc.).
SC2.	Switching to a new brand will probably involve hidden costs.
SC3.	I consider that it takes a lot time and effort to get the information needed to feel comfortable evaluating new brands.
SC4.	I will lose the benefits of being a long-term customer if I switch to a new brand.
<b>Repurchase Intention (Mittal &amp; Kamakura, 2001 ; Yi &amp; La, 2004)</b> (Cronbach's $\alpha = .954$ )	
RI1.	Based on my ownership experience, I will purchase a smartphone made by the same brand at my next purchase occasion.
RI2.	The probability of repurchasing a smartphone of the same brand is high.

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evaluating new brands, and (d) I will lose the benefits of being a long-term customer if I switch to a new brand (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .703$ ).

Repurchase intention is defined as the likelihood that a consumer will repeatedly use related products or services in the future (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999 ; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001 ; Yi & La, 2004). For repurchase intention, two statements were included, which were measured using the 5-point Likert scale (1 : *strongly disagree*, 5 : *strongly agree*), : (a) Based on my ownership experience, I will purchase a smartphone made by the same brand on my next purchase occasion, and (b) The probability of repurchasing a smartphone of the same brand is high (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .954$ ).

Table 1 indicates the measurement items and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the main variables used in this study.

## Analysis and Results

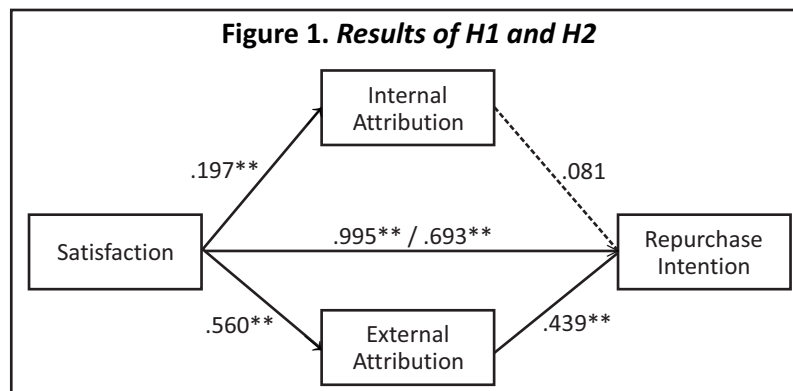
H1 explores whether the effect of consumer satisfaction on repurchase intention is mediated by one's perception

of internal or external attribution. Bootstrapping (5,000 samples) results with PROCESS module in SPSS (Hayes, 2017 Model 4) support an indirect effect through the external attribution, but not through the internal attribution, as predicted. In other words, the relationship between consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention is significantly mediated by external attribution ( $ab = .246$ ,  $SE = .074$ ,  $CI\ 95\% = .112 - .402$ ), but not through the internal attribution ( $ab = .016$ ,  $SE = .016$ ,  $CI\ 95\% = -.014 - .069$ ). Therefore, both H1 and H2 are supported (Table 2 and Figure 1).

We expected that satisfied consumers with high knowledge would attribute internally compared to consumers with low knowledge for H3. H4 predicts that there would be no difference for the knowledge levels to be attributed externally for satisfied consumers. To test H3 and H4, satisfaction (4.00) and knowledge (3.33) are grouped based on median. The group for high satisfaction ( $M = 4.691$ ) shows higher satisfaction compared to the low satisfaction group ( $M = 3.556$ ) ( $t(196) = 13.686$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Also, high knowledge group ( $M = 4.004$ ) is higher than low knowledge group ( $M = 2.756$ ) ( $t(196) = 18.096$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The results indicate that satisfaction is attributed internally for satisfied consumers with high knowledge ( $M = 3.533$ ) than low knowledge ( $M = 3.059$ ) ( $t(128) = 4.045$ ,  $p < .01$ ). On the other hand, there is no difference in external attribution of satisfaction between satisfied consumers with high knowledge ( $M = 3.342$ ) and low knowledge ( $M = 3.324$ ) ( $t(128) = .156$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Therefore, H3 and H4 are supported.

**Table 2. The Mediation Effects of Attribution Between Satisfaction and Repurchase Intention**

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Dependent variable: Internal attribution			Dependent variable: External attribution			Dependent variable: Repurchase intention		
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.495	9.598	.000	1.335	7.511	.000	-.777	-1.929	.055
Satisfaction	.197	3.053	.003	.560	12.671	.000	.693	6.605	.000
Internal attribution							.081	.934	.352
External attribution							.439	3.471	.001
<i>F</i>	9.321 ( $p < .01$ )			160.549 ( $p < .01$ )			55.191 ( $p < .01$ )		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.045			.450			.461		

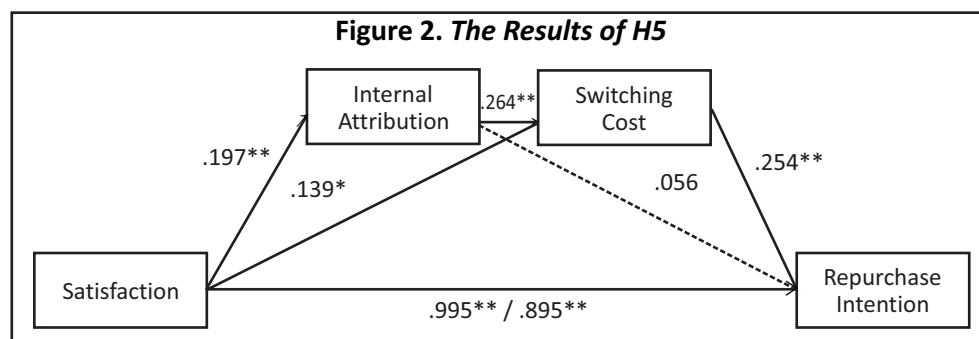


We ran a PROCESS module in SPSS (Model 6 Hayes, 2017 ; using 5,000-bootstrap resampling) wherein satisfaction predicts internal attribution, which predicts switching cost and, in turn, predicts repurchase intention. The results reveal that satisfaction predicts internal attribution ( $b = .197, SE = .065, CI\ 95\% = .070 - .325$ ). Internal attribution predicts switching cost ( $b = .264, SE = .071, CI\ 95\% = .123 - .405$ ), and switching cost predicts repurchase intention ( $b = .254, SE = .087, CI\ 95\% = .083 - .425$ ). The indirect effect of the overall model is also statistically significant ( $b = .060, SE = .032, CI\ 95\% = .011 - .138$ ). When we examine the single mediator model using internal attribution as the sole mediator, the indirect effect is not significant ( $b = .011, SE = .020, CI\ 95\% = -.020 - .061$ ). However, when we examine switching cost only, the indirect effect is significant ( $b = .035, SE = .024, CI\ 95\% = .002 - .102$ ). Furthermore, we also examine a model wherein satisfaction predicts internal attribution, which predicts switching cost, which predicts repurchase intention. This mediational model is also significant, but is weaker than the first model in that the confidence interval is closer to spanning zero ( $b = .013, SE = .008, CI\ 95\% = .003 - .040$ ). Therefore, H5 is supported (Table 3 and Figure 2).

We also ran a PROCESS module in SPSS (Model 6 Hayes 2017 ; using 5,000-bootstrap resampling) wherein satisfaction predicts external attribution, which predicts switching cost, and which, in turn, predicts repurchase intention. The results reveal that satisfaction predicts external attribution ( $b = .560, SE = .044, CI\ 95\% = .473 - .647$ ). External attribution predicts switching cost ( $b = .153, SE = .107, CI\ 95\% = -.059 - .365$ ) and switching cost predicts repurchase intention ( $b = .240, SE = .082, CI\ 95\% = .078 - .401$ ). The indirect effect of the overall model is also statistically significant ( $b = .281, SE = .074, CI\ 95\% = .144 - .436$ ). When we examine the single mediator model using external attribution as the sole mediator, the indirect effect is significant ( $b = .235,$

**Table 3. The Sequential Mediation Effects of Internal Attribution and Switching Cost**

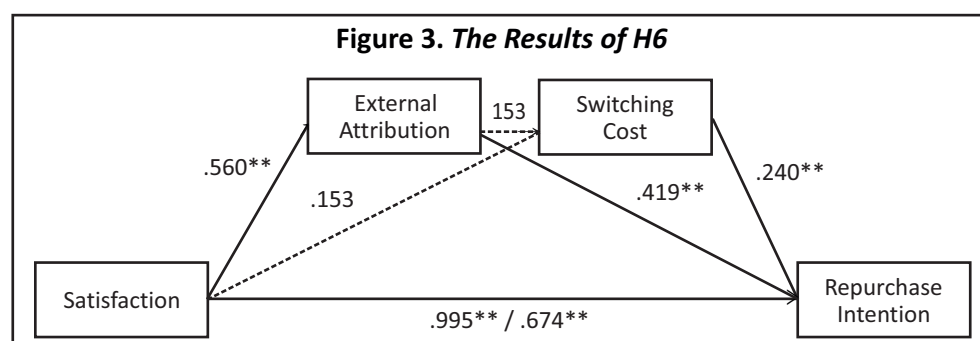
Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Dependent variable: Internal attribution			Dependent variable: Switching cost			Dependent variable: Repurchase intention		
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2.495	9.598	.000	1.687	5.361	.000	-.723	-1.771	.078
Satisfaction	.197	3.053	.003	.139	2.109	.036	.895	11.053	.000
Internal attribution				.264	3.699	.000	.056	.624	.534
Switching cost							.254	2.925	.004
<i>F</i>	9.321 ( $p < .01$ )			11.238 ( $p < .01$ )			53.162 ( $p < .01$ )		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.045			.103			.451		





**Table 4. The Sequential Mediation Effects of External Attribution and Switching Cost**

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Dependent variable: Internal attribution			Dependent variable: Switching cost			Dependent variable: Repurchase intention		
	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.335	7.511	.000	2.142	7.064	.000	-1.110	-2.854	.005
Satisfaction	.560	12.671	.000	.106	1.181	.239	.674	6.545	.000
Internal attribution				.153	1.423	.156	.419	3.392	.001
Switching cost							.240	2.921	.004
<i>F</i>	160.549 ( $p < .01$ )			5.163 ( $p < .01$ )			59.901 ( $p < .01$ )		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.450			.050			.481		



$SE = .068$ ,  $CI\ 95\% = .111 - .381$ ). Furthermore, when we examine switching cost only, the indirect effect is not significant ( $b = .025$ ,  $SE = .023$ ,  $CI\ 95\% = -.009 - .085$ ). We also examine a model wherein satisfaction predicts external attribution, which predicts switching cost, which predicts repurchase intention. This mediational model is not significant ( $b = .021$ ,  $SE = .019$ ,  $CI\ 95\% = -.004 - .075$ ). Therefore, H6 is rejected (Table 4 and Figure 3).

These results show that external attribution consumers do not repurchase because of perceived switching costs. In other words, external attribution is not a necessary condition for perceiving conversion costs. Therefore, the conversion cost of loyalty programs to increase repurchase rates may not always be effective.

## Discussion and Theoretical Implications

This study examines consumers' repurchase intentions according to how they attributed (i.e., internal vs. external) satisfaction. In addition, this study examines in detail the process of repurchase intention through the attribution of satisfied consumers by the mediating effect of knowledge and switching cost. The results and implications of this study are as follows.

First, the results indicate that external attribution mediates between satisfaction and repurchase intention ; whereas, internal attribution does not mediate between satisfaction and repurchase intention. It is suggested that if consumers attribute internally, even when they are satisfied with their products, they may not repurchase. Existing studies focused on the fact that satisfaction affects repurchase intention (Agarwal & Singh, 2018 ; Koklic et al., 2017 ; Panigrahi et al., 2018). However, this study theoretically reveals that even a satisfied consumer may not have an effect on repurchase intention depending on attribution (i.e., internal or external).

Second, the results of this study indicate that satisfied consumers do not have an effect on repurchase intention when they attribute internally. Also, even if a satisfied consumer attributes internally, perceived switching cost can positively be influenced by repurchase intention. Existing studies indicate the relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intention (Koklic et al., 2017 ; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001) as well as between switching cost and repurchase intention (Blut et al., 2015 ; Picón et al., 2014). However, our study further examines the consumers' attribution to satisfaction and switching cost. Furthermore, this research has theoretical implications in that it proves the relationship between repurchase intentions through sequential mediation.

Finally, the causes of satisfaction for consumers with higher knowledge tend to attribute internally. Our results are consistent with previous studies that the causes of satisfaction are attributed internally when competence, self-fulfillment, and autonomy are perceived when using and experiencing a product (Chang, 2004 ; Rodríguez et al., 2008). The results of our study have detailed implications for consumers' knowledge and satisfaction as well as for establishing a relationship between cause of satisfaction and attributions.

## **Managerial Implications**

First, the study focuses on how knowledge strengthens the internal or external attributions of satisfied consumers. In the higher knowledge group, satisfied consumers are more likely to attribute internally. However, there is no change in external attribution for satisfied consumers in both high and low knowledge groups. This result suggests that as consumers' knowledge increases, they tend to attribute satisfaction internally. Therefore, marketers considering developing new products with unique and new properties or functions should consider managing the knowledge level of consumers.

Second, this study examines how switching costs affect repurchase according to attribution types for satisfied consumers. The results of this study suggest that switching cost perception is a mediator for consumers' intentions to repurchase even if they attribute internally. However, for externally attributed consumers, switching cost affects repurchase intention independently rather than acting as a mediator to increase repurchase intention. In the case where the consumer attributes internally through mere ownership, the perception of switching cost can have a positive effect on the repurchase intention. Based on these results, marketers should integrate a marketing mix that considers switching cost for consumers who attribute internally.

Finally, in the case of products that are in the introduction or growth stage of the product life cycle, consumers are relatively low in knowledge. However, consideration should be given to the increasing knowledge of consumers as the product moves from growth to maturity (Harrell & Taylor 1981), which can affect whether they attribute their satisfaction in the introduction stage internally or externally. In the growth stage of the product life cycle, we predict a higher probability that the causes of satisfaction are attributed internally. Therefore, when attempting to increase purchase intention in the introduction stage, companies should focus upon improving on the product quality and service rather than developing loyalty programs to increase switching cost. On the other hand, given that consumers' cause of satisfaction is attributed internally in the growth stage of the product life cycle, in the maturity stage of the product life cycle, it can be expected that the repurchase intention will increase if the customer perceives differentiated value obtained through a loyalty program as a switching cost. Thus, energy should be directed to this area rather than improving product and service quality.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research**

We believe that opportunities exist for additional research. This study concentrated on the locus of attribution through addressing internal and external attribution. According to the attribution theory (Weiner, 1979), there are three types of attribution properties : locus of control, stability, and controllability. Therefore, we suggest that

further research can consider other attribution types. We expect to find new perspectives through other attribution properties. Second, attribution studies have focused on how emotions derive from consumers' attribution. In the future, it seems necessary to examine the relationship between specific emotions and attribution types. Lastly, since this study focused on satisfaction for high technology products, it would be interesting to study the differences between different product types and services.

## Authors' Contribution

Dr. Kun Woo Yoo and Dr. Sung Eun Kim designed the model, developed theoretical framework, planned the experiments, and analyzed the data. Both authors wrote the manuscript, discussed the results, and provided critical feedback on the manuscript.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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