THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF BRAND LOVE ON BRAND TRUST AND BRAND LOYALTY: CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstract:

Brand loyalty is the optimistic association consumers attach to a particular product or brand. Customers who exhibit brand loyalty are devoted to a product or service, demonstrated by their repeat purchases despite competitors' efforts to lure them away. Based on Dick and Basu's customer loyalty model, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for brand trust, brand love, and brand loyalty. Brand trust and brand loyalty have been widely discussed. However, some research on brand trust has modeled trust as an outcome, mediator, or moderator, and very few studies have modeled trust as the main predictor of brand loyalty. Therefore, trust as a predictor is introduced in the conceptual framework to determine if a positive behavioral outcome exists. Given that it is important, the study examined the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. This study predicts that brand trust has a positive on brand loyalty. The mediating effect of brand love has mediated the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

Keywords:

Attitudinal Loyalty, Behavioral Loyalty, Brand Love, Brand Loyalty, Brand Trust

Introduction

The key objective of marketers is not only to satisfy customers but also to develop and maintain enduring relationships with them. Creating and maintaining customer loyalty helps brands develop long-term, mutually beneficial customer relationships (Menidjel et al., 2017). Brand loyalty is consumers' positive association with a particular product or brand. Customers who exhibit brand loyalty are devoted to a product or service, demonstrated by their repeat

purchases despite competitors' efforts to lure them away. In the marketing and retailing literature, brand loyalty has gained great interest from scholars and researchers (Kostritsa et al., 2020). Brand loyalty provides more opportunities to succeed in a highly competitive environment (Bozbay & BAŞLAR, 2020). Customers will likely prefer and continuously buy products from the store without switching to other brands. Nevertheless, a recurring issue exists in how companies communicate information to customers, often leading to doubts about the quality of their products or services.

Brand loyalty contributes to a continued competitive advantage by reducing consumers' willingness to select competitors as alternatives and deterring potential new competitors from entering the market (Oh & Park, 2020). It helps the firms retain and attract new customers. Firms need to strengthen their brands as it will tie their customers to them. It says that creating brand loyalty for a particular brand increases the initial entry barrier for competitors, increases the ability to predict future risks, and ensures that consumers have a positive attitude toward the company. Thus, it will generate profit (Oh & Park, 2020). Brand loyalty also gives organizations an advantage in increasing sales growth, cost efficiency, profitability, and brand referral (Zaidun et al., 2020). Even though brand loyalty gives advantages to the organization, it is also tricky for the organization to retain its customers. Further research could explore how certain variables contribute to enhancing brand loyalty.

One of the concepts that affect brand loyalty is brand trust. Trust is essential to building and maintaining long-term relationships (Rousseau et al., 1998). As one of the most relevant antecedents of stable and collaborative relationships, trust is a significant factor in determining brand loyalty and is highly correlated with customer satisfaction (Menidjel et al., 2017). Brand trust creates a guarantee for the customer and provides information about the product. It also affects buying behavior and accelerates the decision-making in the buying behavior (Bozbay & BAŞLAR, 2020). Brand trust is a cognitive accelerator and influences consumer buying patterns. Thus, it becomes one of the competitive indicators for the firm to develop a competitive business strategy to compete with other competitors (Zaidun et al., 2020).

Love is a construct that describes consumers' intense emotional attachments to love objects, whether a brand, product, or service(Drennan et al., 2015). Brand love is the degree of passionate, emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a brand name (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love, therefore, incorporates passion and declarations of love for the brand, attachment to the brand, and positive emotions in response to the brand.

The concepts of brand trust and brand love have been recognized as key measures most valued by marketers to establish a sustainable customer-brand relationship. Widespread research revealed that the construct of brand trust and brand love is associated with word-of-mouth, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty(Albert & Merunka, 2013; Drennan et al., 2015; Ferreira et al., 2019). Various studies indicate that both constructs are conceptually different (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Brakus et al., 2009) and play different but important roles in improving marketing and branding decisions related to strategy formation (Huang, 2017; Loureiro et al., 2012). Most existing research focused on and revealed similar benefits for decision-makers through brand trust, brand love and brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, and positive WOM(Marmat, 2023). Brand trust and brand love appear to have a direct effect on brand loyalty.

Even if customers are satisfied with a product's performance and implicitly trust the brand, they are emotional about it; however, relationships do not always form. Most research involving trust has modeled trust as an outcome, mediator, or moderator variable (Kwan Soo Shin et al., 2019). Very few studies have modeled brand trust as the main predictor of brand loyalty. It needs trust to make consumers remain with the brand no matter what happens to change the brand. As consumers have more options to choose from among hundreds of products and services, firms should gain consumer's trust to make them competitive in the fierce environment.

Based on the above discussion, this study proposes to address two key questions:
1. What is the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty?
2. What effect might brand love have in mediating the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty?

By addressing the gaps mentioned above, it is essential to investigate whether brand trust and brand love result in positive behavioral outcomes. Investigating this relationship can develop an understanding of brand trust and loyalty (Marmat, 2023).

Literature Review

Brand Loyalty
Based on the Dick and Basu (1994) brand loyalty model, brand loyalty should be greater under conditions of positive emotional mood or affect. Brands that make consumers happy will likely encourage more excellent purchases and attitudinal brand loyalty. Customer loyalty has been defined as a commitment to re-purchase the product again in the future (Dick & Basu, 1994). Oliver (1999) proposed loyalty as a commitment to re-buy or re-patronize preferred products or services consistently in the future. Brand loyalty is defined as an emotional bond between the customer and the brand, which will turn the customer into an advocate for the brand and subsequently promote the brand to others. Loyal customers tend to have long-term relationships with brands or companies and will remain customers, even if cheaper or better alternatives exist. In business, brand loyalty is paramount because it can help increase sales and foster loyal customers, which can, in turn, help build a positive and sustainable brand reputation (Sugiarti et al., 2023). Besides its expected impact on profitability (Louis et al., 2021), long-lasting customer relationships provide a competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to understand, imitate and displace (Day, 2000). Loyalty is an asset for companies and is a central variable in business strategy and success, providing long-term competitive advantages (Barbosa et al., 2023).

Brand Trust
The concept of trust in the context of consumer behavior refers to the confidence customers have in a company to meet their expectations (Barbosa et al., 2023) and fulfill their needs and desires with their offerings (Ebrahim, 2020). Brand trust is the customer's belief in the value of a brand based on their cognitive knowledge and experience about its products, services, attributes, benefits, etcetera, which shows from their positive attitude to the brand(Aisyah, 2023). Brand trust gains from solid customer relationships based on constant satisfying experiences, eventually building customers' loyalty to the brand (Aisyah, 2023; Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2018). Brand trust is the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Extant literature in the field of consumer behavior shows that trusted brands are bought more

frequently (Barbosa et al., 2023) and generate a higher level of attitudinal commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Kaur & Soch, 2018) and attitudinal loyalty.

Trust is a core component for building and maintaining a long and stable relationship with consumers (Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Lee et al., 2015), whose emotional investment facilitates greater loyalty. Customers with significant brand trust are highly committed to the product and start seeking ways of interacting with something and expressing their opinions with others. Studies that have empirically analyzed the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty have discovered brand trust to be a key determinant (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ramesh Kumar & Advani, 2005). Brand trust is decisive in developing consumer-brand relationships(Jain & Sharma, 2019; Kaur & Soch, 2018). Brand trust is a multidimensional variable. The conceptualization has been offered by various research, such as brand reliability and brand intentionality (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005), benevolence (Sichtmann, 2007), and competence (Li et al., 2015). Brand trust in this study refers to confidence in the brand's benevolence, competence, and reliability.

Brand Love
Brand love was an attempt to deepen the understanding of consumer behavior beyond satisfaction or from the like–dislike notion (Kiatkawsin & Sutherland, 2020). Good brands should be able to create desire or preference and make customers loyal beyond reason. the concept of consumer "love" to a brand has gained some attention among the academic community, though it has yet to be fully explored. This offers the opportunity to examine new roles of brand love. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as "the degree of passionate, emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name." Brand love includes "emotion (passion) for the brand", "connectedness (attachment) to the brand", "positive evaluation(cognitive) of the brand", "positive emotions (affective) in response to the brand" and" affirmations love for the brand" (Ahuvia, 2005). However, consumers still speak lightly when they use the word love in addressing a brand compared to when they say love to a person. Despite this, it does not fully form a strong interpersonal love (Ahuvia, 1993, 2005b; Oliver, 1999; Shimp & Madden, 1988).

Table 1 shows a summary of the findings of prior studies of brand trust toward brand loyalty.

Table 1: Summary of Findings of the Previous Studies

Variables	Authors & Year	Findings
Brand Trust	Agus et al., (2021)	Brand trust has a positive effect and significant effect on brand loyalty.
	Hung et al., (2023)	Brand trust is positively related to brand loyalty.
	Wardhana & Yulia (2021)	Brand trust has an impact on brand loyalty.
	Atulkar (2020)	Brand trust has a significant positive influence on brand loyalty.
	Nasir & Sularso (2020)	Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty.
	Kwon et al., (2020)	Brand trust was positively associated with brand loyalty.

	Cardoso et al., (2022)	Brand trust influences loyalty to the brand.

Conceptual Model

Relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is described as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior (Oliver, 1999b). In the literature, "trust" is a fundamental belief, emotion, or attitude in social and business interaction; it frees consumers from complex thoughts and provides confidence in decision-making (Marmat,2023). Brand trust and loyalty are the main factors of brand management. Trust is a specific belief in integrity and competency. Trust is believed to deliver positive outcomes. This study will investigate brand trust as a predictor of brand loyalty(Hidayanti et al., 2018) . Brand trust positively affects brand loyalty (Şahin et al., 2011). The higher the brand trust, the higher the brand loyalty. Supported by other studies, brand trust influenced brand loyalty (Mazaheri et al., 2012).

H1: Brand trust has a positive relationship with brand loyalty

The Mediating Role Of Brand Love

Madadi et al., (2021)found that brand trust and love are essential to developing a strong positive relationship with brand loyalty. Brand love "adopts brand-loyal customers and turns them into advocates or influencers for your brand." the concepts of brand trust and brand love have been recognized as key measures most valued by marketers to establish a sustainable customer-brand relationship (Noël Albert & Merunka, 2015; Marmat, 2023). Brand loyalty includes behavioral loyalty, when a consumer repeatedly purchases a brand, and attitudinal loyalty, when brand preference reflects an emotional connection between a consumer and a brand (Ishak & Ghani, 2010). Brand love has been shown to influence behavioral and attitudinal loyalty (Noel Albert & Merunka, 2013). Drennan et al. (2015) argued that brand love is impossible without brand trust and considered the role of brand love as a mediator between brand trust and loyalty. Carrol and Ahuvia's model (2006) found that the brand love construct has value in reinforcing brand trust to contain and sustain the relationship. Brand trust and love directly affect brand loyalty (Marmat, 2023). They found brand trust to affect brand love significantly.

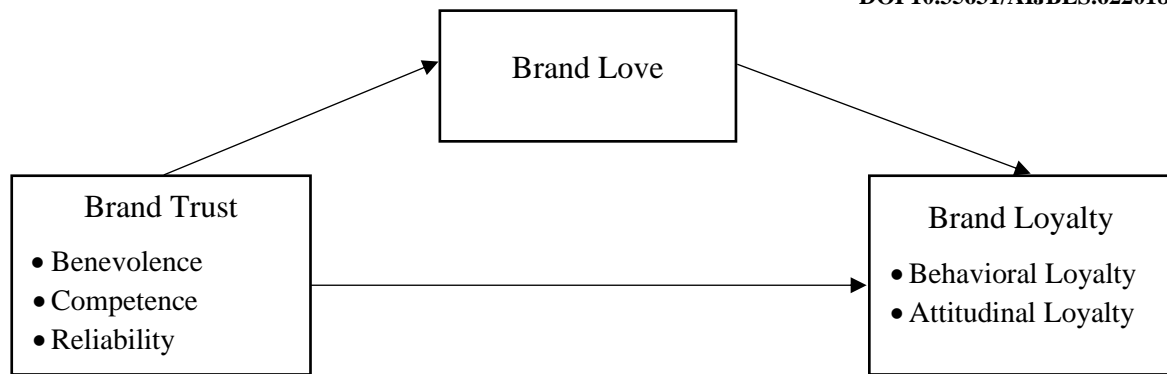H2: Brand love mediates brand trust and brand loyalty.

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                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │   Brand Love    │
                        └─────────────────┘
             ↗                                    ↘
┌─────────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────────┐
│    Brand Trust      │              │    Brand Loyalty        │
│  • Benevolence      │─────────────▶│  • Behavioral Loyalty   │
│  • Competence       │              │  • Attitudinal Loyalty  │
│  • Reliability      │              │                         │
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Figure 1: Propose Conceptual Framework

Methodology

This study investigates the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty and brand love and choosing private label brands in Malaysia. The study is expected to adopt a cross-sectional survey and use purposive sampling. The data collection will be analyze using PLS-SEM.

Conclusion

Brand loyalty has become the main objective of firms in today's business due to their contribution to the market competition. Brand loyalty contributes to a continued competitive advantage by reducing consumer's willingness to select competitors as alternatives and deterring potential new competitors from entering the market. It helps the firms retain and attract new customers. Therefore, brand trust has received broad attention and is widely recognized as a variable that affects consumer brand relationships at all stages. Trust creates exchange relationships that are highly valued.

Additionally, brand love become an emergent concept in the primary experiential consumption. The relationship between brand love and the outcome of brand loyalty has been widely discussed. brand trust and brand love are related to customer-brand relationships. However, very few studies modeled brand trust as a predictor of brand loyalty and the relationship mediated by brand love. Thus, this study proposes to investigate brand loyalty, trust, and love as the mediator variables. This study predicts that brand trust and brand love will result in positive behavioral outcomes.

Implication and Contribution

First, from the theoretical perspective, it will contribute to the knowledge of brand loyalty that provides the conceptual foundation for the marketing strategy of brand trust. Building brand loyalty is not merely measured through repeat purchases or frequent buying but also from the attitudinal perspective, including cognitive, affective, and conative elements. The strategy of brand loyalty helps firms retain their existing consumer, thus attracting new consumers. At the same time, it helps to reduce marketing and predict future risk (Casteran et al., 2019; Dawes et al., 2015; Girish & Lee, 2019). The relationship between brand trust and brand love is important to improve robust brand loyalty in national or private label brands. From a managerial perspective, this study also contributes to the branding strategy in the context of the study, private label brand products in Malaysia are produced by SME retailers. This managerial contribution will help SME retailer improve their brand image, enhance brand awareness, and align with the consequence of brand loyalty that resulted in the current study.

It also assists marketing managers in promoting and pulling out all the stops of consumer engagement to their brand. The most important contribution of this study will give a view how a firm can build and maintain their consumer-brand relationship with the implication of brand love to the brand loyalty.

Acknowledgments

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