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(AIJBES)www.aijbess.comEXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF BRAND EXPERIENCE AND
BRAND TRUST ON BRAND LOYALTY: THE MEDIATING
ROLE OF BRAND LOVEAimi Nadia Ibrahim^{1*}, Noor Hasmini Abd Ghani²¹ Department of Logistics and Operations Management, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
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Abstract:

In today's competitive and emotionally driven markets, fostering brand loyalty requires more than just functional value. It demands meaningful consumer-brand relationships. This conceptual paper investigates the interconnected effects of brand experience and brand trust on brand loyalty, emphasizing the mediating role of brand love. Drawing from recent advancements in brand relationship literature, this study posits that positive experiences and strong trust toward a brand encourage emotional attachment development, subsequently enhancing loyalty outcomes. Current research highlights the increasing relevance of brand love in strengthening consumer commitment, especially as consumers seek more personalized and emotionally fulfilling interactions with brands. The paper synthesizes insights from recent empirical findings to propose a framework that captures the pivotal role of brand love in translating brand perceptions into enduring loyalty. This conceptual model offers valuable implications for brand managers aiming to cultivate emotional engagement and trust, fostering long-term brand loyalty. Future empirical studies are encouraged to validate this framework across varied market contexts.

Keywords:

Consumer Engagement, Brand Love, Brand Experience, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Branding is now recognised as a key tactic for businesses looking to establish and preserve enduring relationships with their clientele in today's fast-paced, fiercely competitive commercial world. A brand goes beyond a mere name or logo; it embodies a collection of values, commitments, and experiences that connect with consumers and influence their perceptions and actions (Loureiro et al., 2018). Branding also lays the foundation for brand loyalty, which refers to consumers' positive feelings and strong association with a specific brand or product. Loyal customers stick with a brand and continue making repeat purchases, even when competitors try to win them over. This concept has garnered significant interest in marketing and retail research (Kostritsa et al., 2020). Experts in marketing and academia emphasize that brand loyalty is vital to a company's success and long-term health (Padma and Wagenseil, 2018). It helps businesses benefit from customer commitment and can encourage business partners to stay aligned (Tokman et al., 2012).

Brand loyalty gives companies a competitive advantage by making customers less likely to switch to competitors and discouraging new entrants from joining the market (Oh and Park, 2020). It helps bring in new customers and also retains the existing customers. Strengthening a brand can effectively bind customers to a company. Establishing strong brand loyalty creates a barrier for competitors, helps forecast future business risks more accurately, and fosters a positive consumer attitude, ultimately boosting profitability (Oh and Park, 2020). Over the years, many scholars have studied different models of brand loyalty to uncover strategies that work. Recent studies have highlighted various factors contributing to brand loyalty, including reputation, customer satisfaction, perceived quality, and emotional engagement. For instance, (Viando et al., 2025) found that brand reputation significantly influences brand loyalty through the mediating effect of competitive advantage, emphasizing the need for firms to invest in building and maintaining a positive brand image. The concept of brand experience has gained traction in loyalty. Many organizations have produced products or services that give memorable experiences, such as Apple iPhone, Victoria's Secret, Ford, and Disney Theme Park (Huang, 2017). This is the memory that customers will remember and make them come again or purchase the brand. Brand experience is crucial for fostering customer loyalty. The stability of an organization depends on the trust customers place in the brand.

Brand loyalty has been examined extensively in consumer behaviour research and is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including digital disruption, experiential marketing, and evolving consumer values (Iglesias et al., 2019). One of the primary challenges affecting brand loyalty is the proliferation of choices and access to real-time comparisons, which reduces consumer commitment. Modern consumers, empowered by digital tools and platforms, can easily switch brands based on real-time feedback, online reviews, and price comparisons. This has shifted from traditional, long-term brand allegiance to more situational or transactional loyalty (Ong, Lee, and Ramayah, 2018). Additionally, brand experiences include the emotional, sensory, and relational interactions with the brand, which have emerged as critical loyalty determinants in the current consumer era. Brands that fail to deliver consistent and engaging experiences across touchpoints may struggle to retain customers, especially among younger demographics like Gen Z and Millennials, who prioritize authenticity and personalization (Safeer et al., 2020).

The relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty has been extensively documented. Trust encourages consumers to develop emotional connections and positive attitudes, fostering both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Kumar & Kaushik, 2021). When customers trust a brand,

they are more likely to remain loyal through repeated purchases and advocacy, even in the face of occasional service failures (Bozbay & BAŞLAR, 2020). Furthermore, brand trust enhances customer satisfaction and increases the likelihood of forgiveness for minor mistakes, reinforcing long-term loyalty (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2022). Therefore, nurturing brand trust is crucial for businesses that build a loyal customer base, maintain a competitive advantage, and ensure sustainable growth. This study proposes the objectives:

1. To examine the impact of brand experience and brand trust on brand loyalty.
2. To examine the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between brand experience and brand trust on brand loyalty.

Literature Review

Brand Loyalty

A study of brand loyalty has a significant effect among academics and researchers. Two hundred definitions of brand loyalty can be found (Knox and Walker, 2001; Oliver, 1999a). Brand loyalty is important in marketing and retailing as it strengthens the relationship between the consumer and the brand. Consumers start switching to another brand when the price or product quality changes. It will reveal whether the consumer is loyal or not. As the loyalty of consumers goes higher, it assists firms to diminish the threat and attack of customers (Aaker, 1996). The great prominence of the loyalty concept can determine the sustainability of a firm's competitive advantage. Brand loyalty literature consists of unnecessary measures. Unfortunately, not clear and insufficient of theoretical meaning (Dick and Basu, 1994). A variety of factors used to measure include a percentage of purchase (Cunningham, 1966), the sequence of buying (Kahn, Kalwani and Morrison, 1986), and the probability of purchase (Massey, Montgomery and Morrison, 1970). Those are based on frequent consumer purchases and do not have a dynamic process (Berkowitz et al., 1978). Thus, it failed to understand because the content of the study on brand loyalty was unclear, or the findings were contradictory (Berkowitz et al., 1978). Brand loyalty consists of 2 dimensions, behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. Previous research on loyalty focused more on behavioral loyalty compared to attitudinal, which is said to directly translate to sales revenue (Dawes et al., 2015; Dawes et al., 2021; Srinivasan et al., 2002), and marketers are also interested in behavioral loyalty. Both are important to measure loyalty.

i. Behavioral loyalty

The behavioral loyalty adopted a quantitative measurement based on consumer purchase frequency in a specific brand category. The definition is based on the prior purchase (frequency) and considers a minor consumer commitment and motivation to the brand (Uncles et al., 2003). The determinant of consumer loyalty is solely based on efficient frequent purchase without considering the other factors such as emotional and cognitive (Tucker, 1964). The fact about brand loyalty is helpful for marketers in interpreting performance metrics for their own or competitor brands and planning for marketing strategy. In other arguments, purchase behavior (behavior loyalty) should not be consider as only determinant for loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994) and large number of variable can be considered as its consequences.

ii. Attitudinal loyalty

Attitudinal loyalty evaluates the emotional and cognitive components (Appiah et al., 2019). The emotion that customers attach to the brand (Ahn et al., 2020). The attitudinal loyalty, which is defined by (Kandampully et al., 2015; Oliver, 1999a), is a customer's deep commitment to rebuy or repatronise a preferred brand consistently in the future, despite situational influences

and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behavior. Commitment measurement in interpersonal love theory measures consumers' long-term relationship (Sternberg, 2004), which makes them remain in a close relationship. The commitment involves a feeling of passion to remain with the brand. Consumers are more likely to engage with a brand because of an intense emotional experience, positive word of mouth, and influence others to repurchase it. Loyalty requires a highly favorable attitude compared to other alternatives. Dick and Basu's (1994) framework are a refined concept that combined the effect of attitude toward brand and patronage behavior. Attitudes reflect behavior, and a favorable attitude must be counted as not the purchase because it gives a better attitude towards brands (Sheth and Park, 1974).

Brand Experience

Consumers tend to change their attitudes when they engage in immersive experiences that stimulate all their senses and emotions (Girish and Lee, 2019). Brand experience arises from consumers' involvement across emotional, physical, intellectual, and even spiritual domains. The concept was first conceptualized by Pine and Gilmore (1998), who emphasized "staged experiences" in retail and event settings. Over time, researchers have expanded this idea by incorporating various consumption activities, such as product trials, leisure, and entertainment, as integral elements of brand experience (Holbrook & Gardner, 1993).

Developments in consumer behaviour studies have acted as a catalyst, emphasizing the importance of emotional and rational involvement in shaping consumer responses (Cova and Cova, 2012). Marketers are thus encouraged to design experiences that go beyond the functional aspects of products to address emotional resonance (Pine et al., 1998, 1999; Schmitt, 1999a). Schmitt (1999a) noted that satisfaction is no longer purely derived from price and product quality, as modern consumers increasingly seek emotional experiences that trigger feelings and passions. Consequently, enhancing experiential value has become a critical differentiator in competitive markets.

In recent years, the influence of brand experience on consumer outcomes has been widely supported. Mostafa and Kasamani (2021) found that experiential brands foster brand loyalty through passion, emotional bonding, and self-brand connection. Similarly, Adha and Utami (2021) demonstrated that brand experience positively affects brand loyalty, mediated by brand personality and trust. Sumarmi and Wijayanti (2023) also confirmed that brand experience indirectly contributes to brand loyalty through brand trust, underlining the importance of emotional consistency in building consumer commitment. The dimensions of brand experience have been consistently validated in literature. Schmitt (1999) initially identified five core dimensions: sensory, affective, behavioural, intellectual, and relational. Later, Brakus et al. (2009) proposed four primary components: sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual, which remain prevalent in contemporary branding research. These dimensions have been reaffirmed in diverse sectors, including hospitality and tourism, where brand experience has been shown to significantly enhance brand equity and customer retention (Ozretić Došen, 2023).

Brand Trust

Trust is fundamentally a calculative construct, grounded in the expectation that an entity will consistently fulfill its obligations, weighed against perceived costs and benefits (Ebrahim, 2020). In the branding context, it is defined as a consumer's willingness to depend on a brand's ability to meet performance expectations. Brand trust offers several strategic benefits to

marketers, including the reduction of perceived risk and uncertainty among consumers (Yousaf et al., 2020), enhancement of brand performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), and support for effective corporate branding (Rampl and Kenning, 2014). It also facilitates positive interpersonal consumer relationships across various cultural settings (Hegner and Jevons, 2016), provides resilience during crises or product launch delays (Hegner, Beldad, and Kamphuis, 2014), and increases consumer receptiveness to corporate social responsibility initiatives (Yousaf et al., 2020).

Recent studies conceptualize brand trust as a higher-order construct of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, reflecting its multidimensional nature (Monahan and Romero, 2020). It is widely recognized as a critical determinant of successful consumer brand relationships (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999) and relational marketing effectiveness (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), further underscoring its importance in long-term brand strategy.

Brand Love

Brand love has emerged as a significant concept within experiential consumption (Roy et al., 2013). Early conceptual foundations were laid by Shimp and Madden (1988), who introduced the notion of "consumer-object love," drawing parallels with Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love. Shimp and Madden's model emphasized that consumers could develop deep emotional bonds with non-human entities, referred to as "love objects" such as musical instruments, pets, artwork, or even vintage cars. These attachments demonstrate that love in consumption is not limited to interpersonal relationships but can extend to physical objects. This conceptual alignment was later supported by (AARON C. AHUVIA, 2013; Ahuvia, 2005), who compared the cognitive and emotional models of interpersonal love with those directed at consumption objects, revealing notable structure and emotional intensity similarities.

Fournier (1998) further argued that love is essential in consumer-brand relationships. According to Fournier and Mick (199), brand love represents one of the most intense and meaningful forms of consumer satisfaction. Carroll and Ahuvia, (2006) define brand love as "the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name" (p. 81). This concept encompasses multiple dimensions: emotional passion, cognitive appraisal, affective response, attachment, and explicit affirmations of love toward the brand (Ahuvia, 2005). However, despite using the term "love" about brands, consumers often express it more lightly and casually than they would in interpersonal contexts (Ahuvia, 2005; Oliver, 1999b; Shimp and Madden, 1988). As such, while brand love may not entirely mirror the depth of interpersonal love, it still plays a central role in the emotional landscape of consumer behavior.

Table 1: Summary of the Past Study of Brand Experience and Brand Trust

Authors	Year	Context	Methodology	Key Findings
Sumarmi & Wijayanti	2023	Herbal oil consumers (Indonesia)	PLS-SEM, n = 150	Brand trust mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Ambarwati et al.	2024	Culinary product consumers (Indonesia)	SEM-PLS, n = 150	rand trust indirectly affects loyalty through brand performance; no significant direct effect.
Azarah et al.	2024	Batik MSME customers (Indonesia)	SEM-PLS, n = 230	Brand trust positively affects satisfaction, which contributes to brand loyalty.
Iglesias, O., Singh, J. J., & Batista-Foguet, J. M.	2020	Multiple industries (Spain)	SEM	The direct relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty is strong and positive.
Rather, R. A.	2021	Hospitality (India)	SEM, n = 330	Brand experience has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.
Ata	2025	Online Shopping (Turkiye)	SPSS, n=423	Online brand experience has a significant positive effect on e-loyalty.

Conceptual Model

Brand experience and brand loyalty

Brand experience results from sensory and emotional stimuli that evoke consumer enthusiasm and enjoyment. Customers who derive pleasure from these experiences are more likely to seek out and repeat them over time (Mostafa and Kasamani, 2020). Previous research has consistently demonstrated a significant positive association between brand experience and brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009; Huang, 2017; Mostafa and Kasamani, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Brand experience has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Brand Trust And Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a deeply rooted commitment by consumers to repurchase or continue supporting a preferred product or service over time. This commitment often results in repeated purchases of the same brand or brand set, even in the presence of situational factors and competitive marketing efforts that might otherwise encourage switching behavior (Oliver, 1999b). Within the literature, trust is recognized as a foundational construct in both social and business contexts, characterized as a belief, emotional state, or evaluative attitude that simplifies consumer decision-making by reducing cognitive complexity and enhancing confidence (Marmat, 2023).

Brand trust and brand loyalty are widely acknowledged as core components of effective brand management. Trust is generally conceptualized as a consumer's belief in a brand's integrity, reliability, and competence, and it is expected to yield favorable outcomes for both consumers and firms. Consistent with this view, the current study explores brand trust as a key antecedent of brand loyalty (Hidayanti et al., 2018). Empirical evidence supports this relationship, indicating that higher levels of brand trust are associated with stronger brand loyalty (Şahin et al., 2011). This positive influence is further validated by additional studies demonstrating that trust significantly contributes to consumer loyalty toward brands (Mazaheri et al., 2012). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty

Brand Love And Brand Loyalty

Brand love has garnered significant attention in branding literature due to its influential role in shaping consumer loyalty. As an intense emotional attachment to a brand, brand love goes beyond satisfaction and reflects a deeper bond that motivates repeat purchases and advocacy behaviors. Several studies have explored its relationship with constructs such as brand experience, brand trust, and brand loyalty. In an empirical analysis, Huang (2017) demonstrated that brand love is a critical antecedent that positively influences brand loyalty. This suggests that emotionally engaged consumers are more likely to remain committed to the brand over time. This finding is consistent with earlier research by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010), who also confirmed the strong predictive power of brand love in fostering both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. These studies collectively support the notion that cultivating brand love is essential for developing long-term consumer-brand relationships and sustaining competitive advantage. Given the preceding discussion, it is emphasized that both brand loyalty and brand love play vital roles in shaping and sustaining the relationship between consumers and brands. Therefore, this study proposed the hypothesis:

H3: Brand love has a positive effect on brand loyalty

The Mediating Role Of Brand Love

Recent research underscores the pivotal role of brand love as a mediator in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. Brand experience, encompassing sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, significantly influences consumers' emotional connections with brands, leading to brand love and loyalty. In recent studies, brand experience and brand loyalty have been found (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Huang, 2017), and both have a positive relationship with brand love as a mediating variable. Similarly (Eklund, 2022) examined the automotive sector and demonstrated that brand love and brand image are parallel mediators between brand experience and brand loyalty. The findings suggest that enriching brand experiences can cultivate brand love and a positive brand image, strengthening customer loyalty. Thus, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H4: Brand love mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Madadi et al. (2021) emphasized that brand trust and love are critical components in fostering strong and positive relationships with brand loyalty. Brand love plays a transformative role by converting loyal customers into brand advocates and influencers, enhancing brand visibility and consumer engagement. These constructs, brand trust and brand love, have been widely acknowledged as key indicators valued by marketers seeking to build and maintain sustainable consumer–brand relationships (Albert and Merunka, 2015; Marmat, 2023). Brand loyalty is generally categorized into two dimensions: behavioral loyalty, which is characterized by repeated purchases, and attitudinal loyalty, which reflects a consumer's emotional attachment and preference for a brand (Ishak and Ghani, 2010). Prior research has shown that brand love significantly influences behavioral and attitudinal loyalty (Albert and Merunka, 2013). Drennan et al. (2015) argued that brand love cannot exist without brand trust, positioning brand love as a mediating factor between trust and loyalty. Supporting this view, Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) proposed a conceptual model indicating that brand love reinforces the effects of brand trust in sustaining long-term brand relationships. More recently, Marmat (2023) confirmed that both brand trust and brand love exert a direct and significant influence on brand loyalty, further establishing that trust is a strong predictor of brand love.

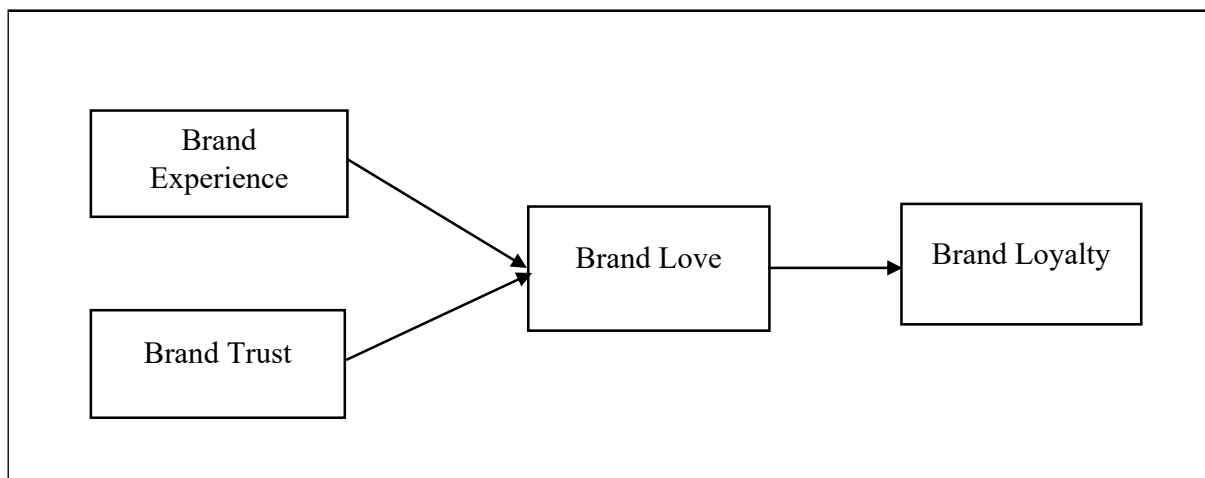
H5: Brand love mediates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

Methodology

In the context of private label brands, this study used a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate how brand experience and trust impact brand loyalty, with brand love acting as a mediator. Customers who have bought private label goods during the last three months will be the focus of a purposive sampling technique. A systematic questionnaire with known measurement scales for each variable will be used to gather responses via an online survey. There will be a minimum of 200 responders in the sample. SmartPLS 4 will analyse the data using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This involves evaluating the mediation effect of brand love and direct and indirect linkages, validity, and dependability.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper underscores the critical role of brand love in strengthening the relationships between brand experience, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Recent literature consistently demonstrates that when consumers have favorable experiences with a brand and perceive it as trustworthy, they are more likely to develop an emotional bond known as brand love. This emotional connection is a potent mediator that translates positive brand perceptions into deeper loyalty outcomes (Madeline and Sihombing, 2019). Brand love enhances consumers' willingness to remain committed to the brand, recommend it to others, and resist switching behaviors, even in highly competitive environments. Emotional attachment to a brand is increasingly recognized as a more influential driver of long-term loyalty than rational evaluation alone. Furthermore, brand trust reinforces this emotional pathway, providing a strong foundation upon which consumers build affection and long-term loyalty intentions (Ibrahim and Abd Ghani, 2024).

Given the growing complexity of consumer-brand relationships, businesses are encouraged to move beyond functional offerings by cultivating trust and emotional engagement. By doing so, brands can create meaningful bonds that drive loyalty and advocacy. Future empirical research is recommended to test the proposed relationships across different product categories and market contexts, particularly in emerging markets where emotional branding continues to gain momentum. This paper provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how brand love operates as a central mechanism that connects brand experience and trust to developing enduring brand loyalty.

Implication and Contribution

This conceptual paper offers several significant contributions to academic literature and marketing practice.

Theoretical Contributions

First, the study enriches existing brand relationship literature by highlighting brand love as a central mediating construct between brand experience, brand trust, and brand loyalty. While past research has often examined these relationships separately, this paper integrates them into a unified conceptual framework, emphasizing the emotional mechanisms that convert brand perception into loyalty (Ibrahim and Abd Ghani, 2024). This model contributes to a more nuanced understanding of consumer-brand dynamics, particularly in emotional branding and attachment studies.

Second, the paper contributes to the growing body of work that advocates for emotional constructs in branding, suggesting that emotional responses like brand love are equally, if not more important than, cognitive evaluations in sustaining long-term loyalty. By conceptualizing brand love as a mediator, the study opens new avenues for empirical research to test its role in various consumer and cultural contexts.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings of this paper underscore the importance of crafting brand experiences and trust-building strategies that evoke emotional responses. Marketers should focus on delivering consistent brand performance and cultivating emotional engagement through authentic communication, trustworthiness, and customer-centric practices. As emotional bonds deepen, consumers are more likely to develop loyalty resistant to price-based switching or competitor promotions (Madeline and O. Sihombing, 2019).

Furthermore, this framework is especially relevant for emerging markets and private label brands, where building consumer trust and emotional resonance can significantly differentiate a brand in saturated categories. Emotional branding strategies, such as storytelling, ethical sourcing, and personalized experiences, can enhance brand love and secure long-term customer commitment.

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