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The Relationship between Brand Personality and Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

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ABSTRACT: Background and Aim: This study was designed to further investigate this issue by exploring the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty with considering the mediating role of brand trust

Methods: A descriptive-correlation approach was employed in the current investigation, utilizing structural equation modeling. The study consisted of 425 customers (290 women) of different malls in Tehran, aged between 17 and 48 years (with a mean age of 29.51±5.79 years), who willingly participated. The research was conducted in Tehran, Iran, in the year 2023. The participants were selected through a convenience sampling method. Standard questionnaires were used for data collection. Data was analyzed using Pearson correlation test and the structural equation modeling through SPSS-26 and Lisrel software.

Results: Results reveled that brand personality significantly affected brand loyalty (T=4.527). Moreover, brand personality significantly affected brand trust (T=5.394). Furthermore, brand trust affected brand loyalty (T=6.517). Finally, brand trust has significantly mediated the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty (T<0.001). Results of model fit indicated that the research model has good fit.

Conclusion: The managerial implications derived from this study are twofold. Firstly, it is essential for marketers to recognize that trust serves as a crucial factor in fostering customer loyalty and encouraging repeat purchases. Trust is cultivated through customer satisfaction, which in turn enhances the retention of the customer base, even during challenging circumstances.

Keywords: Brand Personality, Brand Loyalty, Brand Trust, Marketing, Modelling

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary marketplace, possessing an appropriate understanding of brand strategies and brand personality plays a crucial role in an organization's success. Brand personality serves as the fundamental element and the most influential factor in a customer's decision-making process when selecting a product (Choi et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2006). Furthermore, a distinguished brand name inherently suggests superior product quality to consumers. When customers purchase a branded product, they perceive that they have acquired something of significant value for their investment. Once a consumer has the experience of using a particular brand, their comfort level with it increases, leading to a higher likelihood of continued use (Japutra & Molinillo, 2019; Li et al., 2020). Consequently, brand personality becomes a pivotal factor in attracting customers and fostering attitudinal loyalty, which ultimately translates into behavioral loyalty. A key component in cultivating customer loyalty towards products, services, and the overall brand of an organization is the brand's personality image as perceived by customers. As a result, companies engage in substantial and long-term investments in their branding efforts, particularly in advertising, sales promotions, and packaging, recognizing that their market

competitiveness hinges on the strength of their product brand, which in turn cultivates customer loyalty (Adha & Utami, 2021; Darmawan, 2018; Lau & Lee, 1999; Farhat & Khan, 2011).

Over the centuries, literature on branding has highlighted the significance of establishing robust brands through fostering an emotional bond between the brand and its consumers. Research indicates that consumers are motivated to purchase not only products and services but also the sensory experiences associated with them (Indrajati, 2020; Ling et al., 2014; Wirayat & Rachmawati, 2020). Consequently, the concept of brand experience has garnered considerable attention in marketing, leading experts to assert that comprehending how consumers perceive brands is crucial for formulating effective marketing strategies for goods and services. Given the critical role of brand experience in both marketing and management, it is imperative for marketers to gather substantial empirical evidence to cultivate this experience in consumers, thereby eliciting emotional responses that shape their perceptions and attitudes toward the brand (Choi et al., 2017; Lin, 2010; Roy et al., 2016).

A crucial element in establishing customer loyalty and commitment to products, services, and the overall brand of an organization is the perception of that brand's personality held by consumers. Consequently, companies are inclined to make substantial and long-term investments in their branding efforts, particularly in advertising, sales promotions, and packaging. They recognize that their competitive strength is derived from the development of a robust product brand, which fosters customer loyalty and commitment (Kim & Zhao, 2014; Molinillo et al., 2017). Therefore, it is essential for companies to assess the perception of their brand personality among customers and its influence on customer loyalty and commitment to enhance and advance their market position. A well-defined brand personality attracts consumers to various attributes of the brand, leading them to favor the intended brand. Generally, a brand encompasses a combination of functional and emotional values that promise unique experiences to its beneficiaries. When emotional values create a robust connection with the brand, this can foster a sense of commitment and loyalty (Ly, 2017; Suddin et al., 2014). Consequently, if the benefits derived from using the products exceed the anticipated values, the customer experiences satisfaction, which is often manifested in repeat purchases. This satisfaction encourages the customer to advocate for the brand among their acquaintances. A brand wields power when it can effectively shape consumer behavior, resulting in consistent preferences, inclinations, and purchasing habits associated with that brand (Bozbay & Baslar, 2020).

The desire to purchase a particular brand, which pertains to behavioral intentions, necessitates an analysis of the brands present in the marketplace. Conversely, exploring the dynamics between consumers and brands has been identified as a significant research domain for marketers. Marketing scholars are particularly keen on comprehending the essence of the brand and the outcomes generated from the relationship and communication between the brand and the consumer (Mabkhot et al., 2017). Furthermore, a strong brand equity significantly enhances customer satisfaction, intentions to repurchase, and overall loyalty. Moreover, a significant determinant of customer loyalty is the reliability of a brand. This reliability stems from years of consistent performance and plays a crucial role in fostering customer loyalty. A brand's ability to effectively communicate with its customers, honor its commitments, and deliver products and services of exceptional quality contributes to this reliability (Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014). Such trust is cultivated and solidified over time through ongoing interactions between the customer and the company. Should this trust be compromised, the brand's reputation can deteriorate rapidly. This study was designed to further investigate this issue by exploring the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty with considering the mediating role of brand trust. The conceptual model of this study was presented in Figure 1.

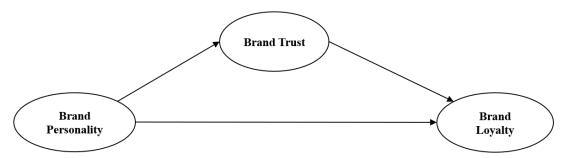


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

METHODS

A descriptive-correlation approach was employed in the current investigation, utilizing structural equation modeling. The study consisted of 425 customers (290 women) of different malls in Tehran, aged between 17

and 48 years (with a mean age of 29.51±5.79 years), who willingly participated. The research was conducted in Tehran, Iran, in the year 2023. The participants were selected through a convenience sampling method.

The Brand Personality Scale, introduced by Aaker in 1997, is founded on five fundamental dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, all derived from the initial items suggested by Aaker. Similarly, the Brand Trust Scale, developed by Gurviez and Korchia in 2003, is based on four core dimensions - credibility, integrity, and benevolence - comprising their original items. Lastly, the Brand Loyalty Scale, created by Yoo and Donthu in 2001, was derived from one dimension of the brand value scale, which includes three original items: 'I consider myself to be loyal to some brands,' 'There is always a brand that would be my first choice,' and 'I will not buy other brands if my favourite brand is available at the store.' (Mabkhot et al., 2016).

We employed SPSS-26 and Lisrel software for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to define the variables. A Pearson correlation test was performed to evaluate the relationships among the variables. The structural equation modeling approach was utilized to explore the influence of brand personality on brand loyalty with considering the mediating role of brand trust. The significance threshold was established at P < 0.05.

RESULTS

Descriptive data are presented in Table 1. Descriptive results show that in general the level of brand personality was higher than the average. However, brand loyalty and brand trust were at medium level. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests revealed that all variables were normally distributed (all P>0.05). Results of Independent t tests showed that there were no significant differences between men and women in all variables of the study.

Table 1. Descriptive data

	Brand Personality	Brand Loyalty	Brand Trust
Mean	3.21	2.57	2.41
SD	0.98	0.84	0.88

Bivariate relationships between brand personality, brand loyalty and brand trust are demonstrated in Table 2. Results revealed significant direct relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty (P<0.001). Moreover, brand personality was directly and significantly associated with brand trust (P<0.001). Finally, brand trust was directly and significantly associated with brand loyalty (P<0.001).

Table 2. Results of bivariate relationships between variables

	1	2	3	
1. Brand Personality	-			
2 D	r=0.443			
2. Brand Loyalty	P<0.001	-		
2 D 1 T 4	r=0.528	r=0.637		
3. Brand Trust	P<0.001	P<0.001	-	

Table 3 and Figure 2 show the results of structural equation modelling. Results reveled that brand personality significantly affected brand loyalty (T=4.527). Moreover, brand personality significantly affected brand trust (T=5.394). Furthermore, brand trust affected brand loyalty (T=6.517). Finally, brand trust has significantly mediated the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty (P<0.001). Results of model fit are presented in Table 4 and indicated that the research model has good fit.

Table 3. Results of structural equation modelling

	Path	β	T-value
1	brand personality => brand loyalty	0.453	4.527
2	brand personality => brand trust	0.542	5.394
3	brand trust => brand loyalty	0.659	6.517
		Z	P-value
4	brand personality => brand trust => brand loyalty	5.938	P<0.001

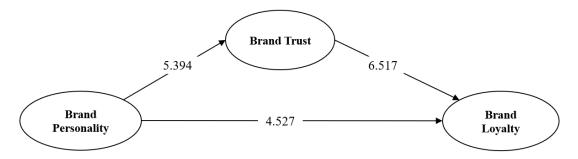


Figure 2. Structural equation modelling in the form of T-values

Table 4. Results of model fit

Index	Optimal Range	Obtained Value	Conclusion
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.06	Good fit
X^2 / df	< 3	2.97	Good fit
RMR	Closer to 0	0.03	Good fit
NFI	> 0.9	0.94	Good fit
CFI	> 0.9	0.96	Good fit

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to further investigate this issue by exploring the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty with considering the mediating role of brand trust. Results reveled that brand personality significantly affected brand loyalty. Moreover, brand personality significantly affected brand trust. Furthermore, brand trust affected brand loyalty. Finally, brand trust has significantly mediated the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty.

The rationale may be that brands which resonate with the personality traits of their consumers facilitate self-expression, resulting in heightened satisfaction and, subsequently, increased trust. Trust in brands has a statistically significant impact on brand loyalty. This finding suggests a novel perspective on the factors that drive brand loyalty, highlighting the crucial mediating role of trust within these relationships (Dehdashti et al., 2012; Menidjel et al., 2017). While earlier research has examined the interplay between brand personality, trust, and loyalty, this explanation posits that when brands align their personality traits with those of their consumers, it enhances consumer satisfaction and, in turn, fosters trust in the brands. This sequence of effects indirectly contributes to the development of brand loyalty. Brand trust serves as a conduit that channels the influence of brand personality onto brand loyalty (Dewi et al., 2015; Ghorbani & Mousavi, 2014). Therefore, this observation highlights the synergistic relationship between brand personality and brand trust in fostering brand loyalty towards local automobile brands. A brand experience refers to a form of experiential marketing that encompasses a wide array of conditions created by a company to influence the way a customer perceives a particular product or brand (Akin, 2017; Pandiangan et al., 2021; Tong et al., 2018). Organizations aim to cultivate an overall environment of positivity, reliability, or trustworthiness by utilizing various channels through which consumers engage with the brand, thereby fostering a connection between the brand and specific needs or emotions. This suggests that when customers perceive a brand as effective or meeting their expectations, they develop a favorable attitude towards it. The findings of the study further reinforce this assertion and align with previous research (Shin et al., 2019; Vahedi et al., 2014). Consequently, a positive experience with a brand fosters customer loyalty, even in situations where the product is unavailable or priced higher than usual. Consumers can cultivate various emotions towards a reputable brand, including joy, surprise, frustration, or dissatisfaction, particularly when they believe that the brand can effectively meet their needs and desires. This trust in a brand can also foster customer loyalty, manifesting in both attitudes and behaviors (Ragda et al., 2023; Venkateswaran et al., 2011; Villagra et al., 2021; Wantini & Yudiana, 2021). In order to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior, numerous studies have examined the concept of brand loyalty. This understanding can aid companies in enhancing their profitability and expanding their market presence. Research on brand trust as it relates to consumer behavior has been ongoing since the 1990s. A variety of scholars are investigating the interplay between brand trust and consumer behavior, particularly in relation to brand loyalty. Nevertheless, there exists a limited number of studies that focus specifically on the mediating effect of brand trust in the relationship between brand experience and customer brand loyalty (Bernarto et al., 2020; Jain, 2017; Sindhu et al., 2021; Sung & Kim, 2010; Sung et al., 2009).

CONCLUSION

The managerial implications derived from this study are twofold. Firstly, it is essential for marketers to recognize that trust serves as a crucial factor in fostering customer loyalty and encouraging repeat purchases. Trust is cultivated through customer satisfaction, which in turn enhances the retention of the customer base, even during challenging circumstances. Secondly, in addition to satisfaction, effective brand management - particularly through the alignment with personality traits - can significantly contribute to building trust. When communication and brand management strategies emphasize storytelling, narrative creation, and authentic engagement, reinforcing personality attributes and aligning with customer identities can facilitate the development of trust and loyalty. This insight carries significant consequences for brand management and the formulation of communication strategies, which should prioritize the expression of distinct personality traits in the brands they oversee, thereby establishing a unique identity that promotes differentiation. While the sample size is notably representative due to the number of participants, a limitation of the study is its focus on a single country. Future research should seek to validate the proposed hypotheses across diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, the study presumes an average consumer profile representative of the market; applying the model to specific industries could enhance its validity across various sectors, such as tourism, services, or financial services.

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