

# **THE EFFECT OF BRAND TRILOGY ON COSMETIC BRAND LOYALTY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Brand loyalty is claimed as a MUST ingredient for businesses to ensure their business sustainability. This article joins the long list of brand research by investigating the effect of brand trilogy. Specifically, this study examines the direct relationship between brand experience, brand personality and brand trust on cosmetic brand loyalty in the Indonesian context. Drawing from 110 respondents, this study found that brand experience and brand trust are responsible for improving brand loyalty. In contrast, brand personality does not affect the strength of brand loyalty. The theoretical and managerial implications and the directions for future research are presented.

**Keywords:** Brand loyalty; Brand personality; Brand trust; Brand experience.

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*Received: 17 September 2018*

*Accepted: 20 February 2019*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the last few years, Indonesia, as one of Asia's economic powerhouses, has enjoyed positive economic growth. Between the 2013 and 2017 financial years, Indonesia successfully reduced the unemployment rate from 6.2% to 5.5%, lowered the inflation rate from 8.1% to 3.6% and maintained their annual GDP growth of 5% (Focus Economic, 2018). This success has placed Indonesia as one of the world's fastest growing economic countries (Indonesia Investments, 2017a). In an effort to take its national economy to another level, the Indonesian government enacted dramatic economic reform by reducing investment barriers and liberalizing the economy. As a result, foreign and local investors now find it easier to obtain a business license and more importantly, to enjoy a friendlier tax scheme (Oxford Business Group, 2018). Consequently, in 2016, foreign direct investment in Indonesia grew by 9% and domestic direct investment increased by 21.3% (Normala, 2018). In this current economic climate, Indonesia has become more economically attractive and multinational companies are racing to invest and open businesses (Cochrane, 2013).

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One of the businesses that is taking advantage of this economic reform is the cosmetic industry. In 2015 alone, international cosmetic brands aggressively led the Indonesian cosmetic market, accounting for 60-70% of domestic cosmetic sales and at a value of half a billion dollars (Kinasih, 2017). According to Indonesia Investments (2017b), this lucrative market reflects Indonesians' growing awareness of their well-being and cosmetics are an important factor in this. Despite this success, however, international cosmetic brands have received strong resistance from local brands (Euromonitor International, 2018). For example, popular domestic cosmetic firms such as Mustika Ratu, Sari Ayu Martha Tilaar and Wardah continue to push their brands and as a result, they are now considered the top local cosmetics brands in Indonesia (Global Business Guide, 2018). Both international and domestic cosmetics brands are aware that in order to maintain their position as leading brands, they must build stronger brand loyalty (Casalo, Favian & Guinaliu, 2010). Without this, customers are likely to switch brands (Verhoef, Langerak & Donkers, 2007). According to Jensen and Hansen (2006), it is of utmost importance that cosmetic firms create safeguards and place customer brand loyalty as their top priority.

Given the importance of brand loyalty in business's sustainability, scholars have extensively investigated the antecedents of brand loyalty from behavioral, attitudinal and multi-domain approaches (Cengiz & Cengiz, 2016). Despite such intensive efforts, the findings remain inconclusive. Thus, scholars conclude that the investigation into brand loyalty should be continued (Dhurup, Mafini & Dumasi, 2014) and extended by integrating different dimensions that may affect brand loyalty (Lin, 2010). Thus, the present study aims to continue brand loyalty examination by integrating the brand trilogy (brand experience, brand personality and brand trust) as the predictors of brand loyalty. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Which elements of brand trilogy is the strongest predictor of brand loyalty?

RQ2: Do Indonesian cosmetic customers follow the international brand loyalty model?

This study is structured and presented as follows. First, discussions on brand loyalty and the brand trilogy are presented. Second, the methodology employed for this study is elaborated. Third, the findings are discussed and finally, the study presents the conclusion, implications, limitations and future research directions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Brand Loyalty*

Brand loyalty refers to the level of consumers' faithfulness toward a particular brand (Rangkuti, 2008). That is, brand loyalty reflects customers' strong preference for particular brands and their tendency to select such brands as their primary choice (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Previous studies have found that the strength of brand loyalty determines future purchasing behavior (Kumar & Advani, 2005), promotes positive WOM (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004), improves market share (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), enhances salesperson performance (Herjanto & Franklin, in press), develops better buyer-seller communications (Gaur, Saransomrurtai & Herjanto, 2015), and more importantly, it is a firm's ultimate weapon to win the brands war and maintain their

profitability (Reichheld, Markey & Hopton, 2000). Based on this understanding, every firm aims to strengthen their brand loyalty (Zehir, Sahin, Kitapci & Ozsahin, 2011).

Building strong brand loyalty is tough and challenging (Schoenbachler, Gordon & Aurand, 2007). This is because brand loyalty is a complex and multifaceted construct (Kim, Kim & Holland, 2017). For example, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), cognitive, affective, conative and action loyalty (Oliver, 1999) and psychological loyalty (Day, 1996) are some of the faces of brand loyalty. In an effort to understand this phenomenon, scholars have investigated various antecedents of brand loyalty. Studies have focused on three important components: brand experience, brand personality and brand trust. For example, Sahin, Zehir and Kitapci (2011) investigated the effect of brand experience, brand satisfaction and brand trust on brand loyalty. Sung and Kim (2010) examined the role of brand affect and brand trust on brand loyalty. More recently, Ramaseshan and Stein (2014) studied the effect of brand experience, brand personality and brand trust on brand loyalty. Based on these studies, Choi, Ok and Hyun (2011) argue that brand trilogy is strongly responsible for brand loyalty. In addition, Ramaseshan and Stein (2014) suggest that the employment of these three constructs provides comprehensive insights into brand loyalty. However, despite these significant findings, Ramaseshan and Stein's (2014) model does not examine the direct effect of brand trust and brand personality on brand loyalty. Similarly, Choi et al.'s (2011) model does not investigate the direct influence of brand experience and brand personality on brand loyalty. Thus, in order to provide a better picture of the effect of the brand trilogy on brand loyalty, this study attempts to replicate and extend the findings of prior studies by investigating the direct impact of brand experience, brand personality and brand trust on brand loyalty in the context of Indonesian cosmetic brands.

## **2.2. Brand Experience**

Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) define a brand experience as consumers' subjective, internal and behavioral reactions toward a brand's created stimuli. According to Biedanback and Marcell (2010), brand experience depends on direct and indirect interactions with products services or the company. This includes customers' interactions with advertising, logos, packaging and different brand touch points at malls and public spaces (Landa, 2005) as well as shopping experience (Lee & Kang, 2012). For Brakus et al. (2009), such interactions can be classified into four important brand experiences. The first is sensory experience, which occurs when a brand creates a memorable experience through a customer's sensory organs. The second is affective experience, which happens when the brand generates an emotional experience. The third is behavioral experience, which develops through customers' lifestyle and or physical experience. Finally, the fourth brand experience is intellectual experience, which is generated when customers activate their cognitive involvement in response to brand stimuli. Lee and Kang (2012) suggest that customers treat these experiences differently, and because of the different intensity (Brakus et al., 2009) and importance (Lee & Kang, 2012) of such experiences, customers face short- or long-lasting brand experiences, which can be either positive or negative (Lee & Kang, 2012) and ultimately affect brand loyalty (Nysveen, Pedersen & Skard, 2013).

## **2.3. Brand Personality**

Brand personality is conceptualized as a set of human-like traits endowed to a brand (Keller, 2001). In other words, brand personality is the process of humanizing a brand and symbolizes the personal

qualities of people (Clow & Baack, 2016). Because of this humanizing process, a brand is regarded as having a psychological personality and attitudes (Thongthip & Polyorat, 2015) which result in consumers' emotional attachment to the brand (Bouhel, Mzoughi, Hadiji & Slimane, 2009). Aaker (1996) argues that the degree of emotional attachment is determined by different qualities reflected in the brand personality, such as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness, and by consumers' evaluation of the product brand category, packaging, price and other related attributes. According to Rajagopal (2006), emotional connectedness allows customers to become deeply emerged in a relationship with a brand and as a result, customers utilize the brand as a tool to express their identity. Because of this relationship, brand personality is considered to be an essential core dimension that guides the communication effort, creates brand equity (Aaker, 1996) and builds a stronger brand identity (Rajagopal, 2006). For that reason, brand personality is regarded as the strongest influence on consumers' buying decision making (Rajagopal, 2006).

#### **2.4. Brand Trust**

Brand trust refers to the degree of consumers' willingness to rely on the capacity of the brand to perform its functions (Wang & Emurian, 2005). Brand trust reflects customers' confidence in the integrity of the brand and its ability to fulfill their needs (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In other words, as Ballester (2003) suggests, brand trust serves as a customer's sense of security or piece of mind when consuming and interacting with a particular brand. According to Lau and Lee (2000), the degree of brand trust is determined by brand predictability, brand liking, brand competence, brand reputation and trust in the company. That is, when brand performance is consistent and meets the customer's expectation, brand reputation is improved and accordingly, customers like and trust the brand. Thus, the higher the brand trust, the stronger a customer's intention to repurchase (Jones & Kim, 2010) and the less uncertainty and risk associated with the brand (Hur, 2014). As a result, a high level of brand trust improves a customer's personal reciprocity (Wu, Chan & Lau, 2008), enhance brand attachment and commitment (Esch, Langner, Schmitt & Geus, 2006) and generates stronger brand equity (Delgado-Ballester & Manuera-Aleman, 2005). For this reason, Xie, Peng and Huan (2014) suggest that brand trust is a must have ingredient for business success.

Landa (2005) argues that both direct and indirect brand experience generates a specific perception toward the brand. Such perception creates a relationship between the cognitive and affective components of the brand and customers' memory (Dolbec & Chebat, 2013). That is, the stronger customers' cognitive and affective perception toward the brand, the stronger customers' memory toward that brand experience. As Russell (2002) suggests, the degree of this memory is responsible for customers' attitude toward the brand. To illustrate, Sukoco and Hartawan's (2011) study on brand loyalty in the Indonesian context found that a positive cognitive and affective perception toward a brand experience activates customers' brand loyalty. Thus, based on this argument, we hypothesize:

*H1: The degree of brand experience will have a stronger effect on brand loyalty.*

During customers' interaction experience with a brand, customers evaluate different components and features of the brand (Keng, Tran & Thi, 2013), including the brand's users, endorsers, attributes, brand name, brand product category (Brakus et al, 2009) and brand personality (Keng et al., 2013). According to Choi et al. (2011), the frequency of customers' interaction with the brand improves customers' ability to classify the brand and identify its brand personality. Being

able to identify brand personality, according to Brakus et al. (2009), not only helps customers to understand a brand's humanized attributes (i.e., honesty, ruggedness, sincerity etc.), but more importantly, it helps customers to relate this brand personality to their own personality. As Mulyanegara, Tsarenko and Anderson (2007) found in their study, customers tend to buy a brand that has a similar personality to them. This phenomenon, according to Brakus et al (2009), is because a brand with a similar personality to the customer is more attractive and offers a closer and better chemistry. Based on this discussion, we hypothesize:

*H2: The degree of brand experience will have a stronger effect on brand personality.*

Ballester (2003) asserts that brand trust serves as a barometer to measure customers' confidence in a brand. According to Rehman, Ahmed, Mahmood and Shahid (2014), the strength of brand confidence is determined by customers' experience. That is, the more customers engage in positive experiences with the brand, the higher customers' confidence in the brand. Positive experiences with a brand generate higher satisfaction, improve emotional brand attachment (Oliver, 1999) and as a result, create stronger brand trust. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H3: The degree of brand experience will have a stronger effect on brand trust.*

Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer (2013) suggest that the secret of powerful brand personality lies in brand communication, activities, country origins and consumer personalities. Among these components, the authors argue that clear brand communication plays the most important role in building brand personality. Clear brand communication allows customers to identify the brand personality and accordingly, customers feel comfortable in interacting with the brand and regard it as more credible (Mazur & Miles, 2007) and trustworthy (Brakus et al., 2009). Thus, we hypothesize:

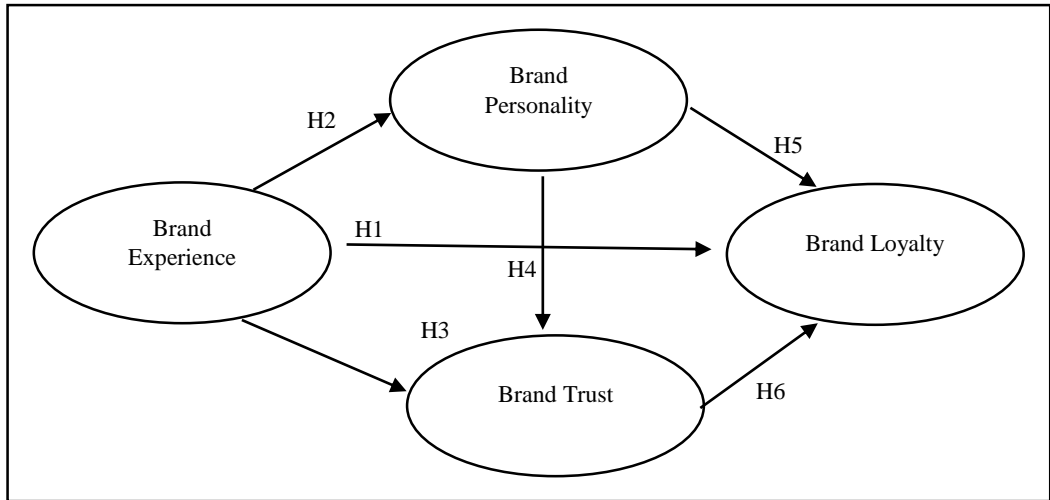
*H4: The degree of brand personality will have a stronger effect on brand trust.*

One way to help customers to identify a brand, therefore, is through brand personality (Bashar, Malin, & Bolman, 2014). According to Brakus et al. (2009), brand personality helps customers to relate their own personality to a brand and therefore it assists customers to express their identity. The ability of brand personality in helping customers express their identity generates a unique relationship and stronger emotional brand attachment. This in turn guides customers' brand preferences and creates stronger brand loyalty. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H5: The degree of brand personality will have a stronger effect on brand loyalty.*

Delgado-Bellester, and Manuera-Aleman (2001) suggest that the most important component of brand trust is customers' evaluation of any direct and indirect experience with the brand. In other words, the degree of customers' satisfaction with brand performance determines the strength of customers' brand confidence. Further, Marist, Yuliati and Najib (2014) conclude that strong brand confidence increases customers' commitment to re-purchasing the brand. Therefore, based on this argument, we hypothesize:

*H6: The degree of brand trust will have a stronger effect on brand loyalty.*

**Figure 1.** Proposed Model of Brand Loyalty

### 3. METHODOLOGY

To test our hypotheses, we distributed 137 structured questionnaires in the city of Surabaya. The city of Surabaya was selected because it is the second largest city in Indonesia and it is known as Indonesia's most vibrant, tolerant and progressive city, with 70% of its population of working age. As this study seeks to understand brand loyalty to cosmetics, we selected brand X as our research setting. In addition, it was necessary to place some restrictions on the sampling frame. First, individuals younger than 20 were excluded from this study. Second, individuals who had never worn cosmetics were also ruled out since it was unlikely these individuals would have had enough opportunity to recognize the benefits of cosmetics. Third, individuals who had never bought brand X were also eliminated because they had never experienced the brand. Finally, to ensure that the questionnaires were filled out correctly, only people who were competent in the Indonesian language were invited to participate in the study. A total of 121 questionnaires were collected; however, only 110 questionnaires were usable. Out of the respondents, 34% were students, 44% were employed, 18% were self-employed 2% were professional and 3% were housewives.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All the scales were adopted from the published literature and modified to fit the context of this study. For example, brand experience items were borrowed from Brakus et al. (2009), brand personality scales were adopted from Aaker (1996), brand trust scales were modified from Ballester (2003) and brand loyalty scales were drawn from Zeithaml, Parasurmana and Berry (1990). These scales employed multi-item, seven-point Likert-type scales anchored at Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. As shown in Table 1, these scales showed high factor loadings (0.58-0.92) and acceptable composite reliabilities (0.77-0.80).

**Table 1:** Factor Loadings and Cronbach Alpha

Constructs	Brand Experience	Brand Loyalty	Brand Personality	Brand Trust	Cronbach Alpha
Brand Experience 1	0.840				
Brand Experience 2	0.872				0.780
Brand Experience 3	0.788				
Brand Loyalty 1		0.915			
Brand Loyalty 2		0.844			
Brand Loyalty 3		0.820			0.795
Brand Loyalty 4		0.542			
Brand Personality 1			0.767		
Brand Personality 2			0.827		
Brand Personality 3			0.813		0.802
Brand Personality 4			0.576		
Brand Personality 5			0.737		
Brand Trust 1				0.894	0.773
Brand Trust 2				0.911	

We tested our hypotheses using partial least square regression. The validity of hypotheses was further examined by the size of path-coefficient and t-value. As Samuel, Siagian and Arnus (2018) suggested, to be considered significant, the t-value should reach a minimum of 1.96. Table 2 shows the results of the path-coefficient or ( $\beta$ ) and t-value for each relationship. This table shows that except for the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty, all path-coefficients are positive and significant. As hypothesized, brand experience positively affects brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.423$ , t-value  $>1.96$ ), brand personality ( $\beta = 0.643$ , t-value  $>1.96$ ) and brand trust ( $\beta = 0.342$ , t-value  $>1.96$ ). In addition, the study found a positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.284$ , t-value  $>1.96$ ) and brand personality and brand trust ( $\beta = 0.398$ , t-value  $>1.96$ ). However, surprisingly, the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty was found to be insignificant ( $\beta = 0.067$ , t-value  $<1.96$ ).

**Table 2:** Path Coefficient and T-Statistic

Hypothesis	Relations	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic*	Results
H1	BE >BL	0.423	3,887	Supported
H2	BE >BP	0.643	11,242	Supported
H3	BE >BT	0.342	3,328	Supported
H4	BP >BT	0.398	3,671	Supported
H5	BP >BL	0.067	0,615	Not-Supported
H6	BT >BL	0.284	2,654	Supported

Notes: \*Based on a significant level of 5% or t-value of 1.96

The findings show that brand experience has a positive influence on brand loyalty. This means that consumers' positive brand experience is responsible for stronger brand loyalty. In this study, we found that product quality together with product features, such as packaging, fragrance and natural ingredients, generates a positive brand experience. As explained by Brakus et al. (2009), such product features positively manipulate customers' sensory organs and generate positive emotions,

which further improves customers' willingness to repurchase a specific cosmetic brand. Next, this study also revealed that brand experience positively influences brand personality. Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen (2009) argue that each brand has a different personality, while Mulyanegara et al. (2007) argue that customers tend to buy a brand that has a similar personality to them. Our sample shows that personality similarity motivates customers to become involved in or experience a brand's initiatives in the community. For customers, having such an active experience not only provides a better feeling and higher emotional attachment but more importantly, it helps customers to express their identity. For example, The Body Shop's initiatives to preserve Orang Utan in Borneo has motivated people who have similar concerns to support this cause by buying The Body Shop products and becoming brand heroes. In this way, The Body Shop enables customers to express their own identity. Lastly, this study also discovered that brand experience improves brand trust. This finding suggests that the more positive customers' brand experiences the more trustworthy the brand. As pointed out by Ballester (2003), brand trust reduces customers' risk. To increase trust and reduce risk, customers tend to evaluate a brand based on their previous direct or indirect brand experience. Recalling their brand experience not only helps customers to recall their brand performance but also improves their decision-making comfort and confidence in a brand.

In relation to brand trust, our study revealed that brand trust has a significant effect on brand loyalty. As discussed earlier, brand trust serves as a customer confidence barometer (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) which guides customers to further continue their relationship with a brand. Our sample demonstrated that by maintaining brand reputation, consistent quality and respect for their own policy and promises, a brand can earn customer respect and improve the degree of customers' trust in the brand. Finally, the study predicted that brand personality influences brand trust. Brand personality symbolizes the human quality of the brand. For example, positive personality qualities such as sincerity and love of the community not only enhance customers' comfort in interacting with the brand but also promote a closer involvement with the brand. As noted by Louis (2010), a bold brand personality mirrors who a brand is and therefore improves its credibility and trustworthiness. In contrast to our prediction, the study found that brand personality has no effect on brand loyalty. A possible explanation for this finding may be that the personality of brand X does not fit with the personality of customers and therefore fails to receive support from its Indonesian cosmetic customers. For example, brand X characterizes its company as a leading organic and environmentally friendly cosmetics company. However, although Indonesian cosmetics customers are aware of environmental issues, according to Fauzi (2013), these issues are not of paramount importance to the general Indonesian population. Thus, this personality mismatch may create discomfort among Indonesian customers and accordingly, they have less brand loyalty toward brand X.

## **5. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on 110 samples, our study concluded that two of the brand trilogy's components – brand experience and brand trust – are responsible for brand loyalty. This finding shows that brand experience is the strongest variable to affect brand loyalty. As discussed by Brakus et al (2009), both positive and negative brand experiences activate our sensory emotions, which further effects our emotional brand attachment and brand loyalty. This finding lends support to the study of Sukoco and Hendrawan (2011), who also found a positive relationship between brand experience



and brand loyalty in handphones and snack brands in Indonesia. The study found that brand trust is the second most important component responsible for brand loyalty. Brand trust reflects the degree of customers' confidence and willingness to continue their relationship with a brand. This study also supports the study of Delgado-Bellester, and Manuera-Aleman (2001), who found that brand trust is a true reflection of customer satisfaction, which further improves customers' willingness to repurchase a specific cosmetic brand. In contrast, brand personality does not influence brand loyalty. In other words, business practitioners should be careful when building and exposing their brand personality to their customers. As Mulyanegara et al. (2007) explain, personality mismatch between brands and customers may create discomfort and anxiety. Thus, it is very important for the brand owner to target customers who have a similar personality. In sum, in order to build brand loyalty, firms should firstly create a positive customer brand experience and strengthen brand trust, and clearly express their brand personality and target customers with a similar personality.

This study contributes to the brand literature in several ways. Firstly, the study confirms the importance of the brand trilogy, especially brand experience and brand trust in strengthening brand loyalty. Earlier models have only narrowly investigate the simultaneous relationships between the brand trilogy and brand loyalty. Secondly, this study discovered the sequence of importance in the brand trilogy components in terms of creating brand loyalty. Thirdly, the results also indicate that the international brand loyalty model is not applicable to the context of Indonesian cosmetics brands.

Although the findings of this study extend our understanding, the study has several limitations. First, this study collected data from residents in the Surabaya area only. Because of this limited focus area, a generalization of the findings should be made with caution. Second, this study was carried out in the cosmetics context; therefore, the findings may not be applicable to other industries. Third, the number of samples was limited; therefore, the study may not show the full picture of the Indonesian cosmetics brand loyalty phenomenon. Future research may address this limitation by including more samples from different regions to provide a different perspective on this phenomenon. In addition, our study only investigated the direct relationships between the brand trilogy and brand loyalty, which may have resulted in an oversimplification of the concept of brand loyalty. Future research may include other variables such as country of origin and service quality as potential moderators.

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