

## The mediating effect of brand satisfaction on the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty: Evidence from Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

This study empirically investigates the mediating effect of brand satisfaction on the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty among Malaysian customers toward local automobile brands (Proton and Perodua). Four hypotheses were developed to test hypothesizing relationships between brand personality and brand satisfaction on brand loyalty. The data were collected from consumers of automobile brands in north Malaysia peninsula from three states which were Kedah, Penang, and Perlis. This study applies partial least squares to a sample of 458 customers to test hypothesized relationships. The findings indicate that brand personality and brand satisfaction appear to have a positive and significant relationship with brand loyalty. Moreover, brand satisfaction was found to be a mediator in the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty. The results are compared with earlier findings and implications for further research are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

In the marketing literature, brand loyalty has gained great interest among scholars and practitioners for more than 90 years (Copeland, 1923). Loyalty is measured and defined in terms of various marketing aspects like brand loyalty, service loyalty, and product loyalty (Olsen, 2007). Realizing that brand loyalty among current consumers can help generate revenue and increase margin of safety (Dehdashti et al., 2012; Matzler et al., 2008), gaining and sustaining brand loyalty is a key challenge in increasingly competitive markets (Brexendorf et al., 2010).

Developing brand loyalty is important; it is considered as one of the major challenges faced by businesses, especially local companies (Gocek et al., 2007). However, researchers argue that the best strategy that local companies can carry out is to design their local brand to respond to the local market's particular needs (Kapferer, 1994; Keller et al., 2011; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). This implies that the

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local brand must be more flexible than imported brands so that they could be developed to meet the needs of local consumers.

The annual brand loyalty survey conducted by Mark (2011) revealed some surprising shifts in customer loyalties. The greatest losses in loyalty to brand among the top 100 firms were: Nokia (a decline of 63%), followed by Blackberry (51%), Chanel cosmetics (23%), Eucerin skin moisturizer (23%), True Value (21%), and 3-Olives Vodka (18%). According to Rachael (2013), between 2006 and 2010, brand loyalty has been declining as customers no longer feel that owning the “best” brand is important. Certain brands have suffered loss of loyalty as customers turned to cheaper brands that have considerable meaning. Nevertheless, a brand that understands the real emotional relationship can serve as a substitute for the value-added can build a strong loyalty relationship (Passikoff, 2012).

Building loyalty to the brand has become more essential (Mohammad, 2012; Sahin et al., 2011; Schoenbachler et al., 2004; Zehir et al., 2011), as it significantly contributes to company performance, position, and market share. However, previous studies on brand loyalty among customers toward automobile brands showed a significant decline in consumers’ allegiance to their favorite brands, such as Honda motor company -4.1, Hyundai Motor company -3.9, and General Motors -3.9 (Harris, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to investigate the factors that may explain why brand loyalty is declining.

Nowadays, the automotive industry is continuously expanding, and it has been called the single largest industry sector in the world (Rosli et al., 2014). According to statistics from The International Organization of Motor Manufacturers OICA (2014), over 87.4 million vehicles were produced in 2013. In this context, it is true that the automotive industry has a significant contribution to the development of the country’s economy (Sze & Hamid, 2012). To build the brand, the important starting point of companies is developing strong brands is the companies must remember that every contact with the customer is a chance to build a relationship; for most customers, the decision to purchase an automobile is made at both an emotional and rational level (Hanna & Kuhnert, 2014).

Automobile industry is a world of constant change and improvement; at this time, automotive is becoming a necessity of life, the economic progresses of any countries are supported by automobile manufacturing industry (Ghani, 2012; Rosli et al., 2014). Local Malaysian automobile brands are considered as one of the most important industry sectors. Despite this, this industry is facing extraordinary challenges, which is global competition such as foreign brands and the changes in customer behavior (Al-shami et al., 2012). Currently, with the important challenges facing the automotive industry, in particular liberalization, globalization, and increasing competition among market share, there is probably a need to review the strategic direction and policy for the local automotive sector. This is crucial in an effort to maintain the competitiveness of participants in the automotive sector, and in order for them to be viable in the long run (Zakuan et al., 2009). Furthermore, Wad and Govindaraju (2011) argued that the Malaysian automotive industry failed in the areas of industrial upgrading and international competitiveness due to low technological and marketing capability. Malaysian automobile brands are viewed as being of inferior quality (Thanasuta et al., 2009).

Therefore, there is a need to understand what factors that might influence loyalty among Malaysian consumers toward automobile local brands. Besides, there are advantages in comparing brands that are viewed by customers to be relevant in a given consumption perspective, so it is interesting to investigate whether brand satisfaction is playing an important role in affecting the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty.

## **2. Brand Loyalty**

The central role of marketing strategies is the development and maintenance of customer brand loyalty, especially in markets with strong competition, great unpredictability and decrease in product differentiation (Fournier & Yao, 1997; Nawaz & Usman, 2011). Brand loyalty is a conventional marketing idea that focuses on developing a long term consumer brand relationship. It has been employed to measure brand equity and successful marketing strategies (Knox & Walker, 2003). As getting new customers can be very expensive for companies, getting loyal customers is in the companies' best interest. This is because, "brand loyalty is the only basis for enduring profitable growth" (Light, 1994, p.1). Brand loyalty is the strength of the brand acquired over time through goodwill and name recognition (Vitez, 2013), which leads to increased sales and higher profit margins against competing brands (Usman et al., 2012). Thus, companies need to devise new strategies to create brand loyalty (Doyle, 2012), and they can do it through strong advertising and marketing campaigns and provision of high quality services or products.

### 3. Brand Personality

Aaker (1997) defines brand personality "as a set of human characteristics associated with the brand". The author develops five dimensions of brand personality. They are sincerity (honest, down to earth, cheerful and wholesome), excitement (spirited, daring, up to date and imaginative), competence (successful, intelligent, and reliable), sophistication (charming, and upper class) and ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough). Brand personality assists in creating a strong brand in many ways. Brand personality can build a relationship between brand and consumers and plays a key role in self-expression to attract consumers (Aaker, 2011). Brand personality is something that can be related to a consumer, as an effective brand will increase brand equity with a consistent set of attributes. This is the added value of the brand, regardless of the functional benefits (Aaker, 1997).

Brand personality, defined as all personality traits, used to characterize a person and associated with a brand, is a concept within the field of relational marketing. It helps to better understand the development and preservation of relationships between consumers and brands. According to Keller (1998, p. 97), "brand personality reflects how people feel about a brand, rather than what they think the brand is or does". As such, brand personality explains the impact of those relationships on consumer behavior (Fournier, 1998). Brand personality is one of the most critical and consistent predictors of both behavioral brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty (Anisimova, 2007). Distinguished brand personality plays a key role for the success of a brand. Much research has been accomplished on the effects of brand personality on brand management (Johar et al., 2005; Sung & Kim, 2010). However, there is limited research on the relative importance of the dimensions of brand personality with regards to driving brand loyalty (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This is despite claims that brand personality promotes consumer preference and brand loyalty (Mengxia, 2007).

Brand personality can predict brand loyalty, according to Louis and Lombart (2010) suggest for future studies to study the effect of brand personality on other consequences such as loyalty. Furthermore, the finding by Sung and Kim (2010) is also compatible with consumer behavior scholars' assertions that brand personality can evoke brand emotions and increase the levels of brand satisfaction, which leads to building the level of brand loyalty. Hence, brand personality is included in this study. Brand personality can contribute to the prediction of brand loyalty, there are some previous research that revealed a significant relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty (Abbasi et al., 2011; Lin, 2010), while others found an insignificant relationship (Liu et al., 2012). Furthermore, previous research generally indicates a significant correlation between brand personality and brand satisfaction.

Ouwensloot and Tudorica (2001) contend that companies should consider brand personality as a means that empowers them to achieve satisfaction. Previous researches suggest a link between brand personality and satisfaction (Achouri & Bouslama, 2010; Ekinici & Dawes, 2009; Ouwensloot & Tudorica, 2001). For instance, Brakus et al. (2009) demonstrated that brand personality has a direct

significant effect on brand satisfaction. Similarly, Nelloh, et al. (2011) also found the positive effect of congruent brand personality on customer satisfaction among 150 guests in the D'season Hotel in Indonesia. Similar finding was reported by Yong-Ki, Back, and Kim (2009) who examined the influence of restaurant brand personality on satisfaction. In contrast, Nysveen et al. (2013) revealed an insignificant relationship between brand personality and brand satisfaction in a service context. In addition, Louis and Lombart (2010) suggested that it is very important to study the impact of brand personality on other consequences such as satisfaction. However, due to mixed results in the effect of brand personality on brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, the present study proposes the following:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive and significant relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive and significant relationship between brand personality and brand satisfaction.

### 3. Brand Satisfaction

Satisfaction is defined as “the consumer’s response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption” (Tse & Wilton, 1988, p. 204). Additionally, it is defined as “an emotional response to the experiences provided by or associated with particular products or services purchased, retail outlets, or even molar patterns of behavior such as shopping and buyer behavior, as well as the overall marketplace” (Westbrook & Reilly, 1983, p. 256). According to several scholars (Bennett & Bove, 2002; Bennett et al., 2005; Giese & Cote, 2000; Jonathan et al., 2001; Jones & Suh, 2000; Youl & John, 2010), brand satisfaction is one factor that influences brand loyalty. When customers are satisfied with a brand, they are willing to use the same brand in the future. Nam et al. (2011) argue that customer satisfaction is an overall emotional of customer response to the entire brand experience after the last buy. Satisfaction determines future purchases pattern and it enhances desire for the product or service (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2002).

Satisfaction is an antecedent of brand loyalty, with increases in satisfaction leading to increases in brand loyalty (Bennett, 2001; Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2005; Bolton, 1998; Jones & Suh, 2000; Ringham et al., 1994). Even though the marketing literature admits the assumption that satisfaction is linked to loyalty, the earlier concept seems to explain consumers' purchasing habits containing all of their consistent buying behaviors (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2005). Previous studies found a significant relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty (Andreani et al., 2012; Choi et al., 2011; Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012; Tu et al., 2012); however, others revealed an insignificant relationship (Walter et al., 2013). Similar results were revealed by Kuikka and Laukkanen (2012), who investigated the effects of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty and the role of hedonic value within the brand loyalty experience in the chocolate industry in Finland. They observed that brand satisfaction is a strong influence on behavioral brand loyalty. They also showed that brand satisfaction affects attitudinal brand loyalty. Furthermore, they revealed that satisfaction is the most significant influence on behavioral brand loyalty. This means that when customers are satisfied with a brand, they will repeat buying that brand.

In contrast to the above findings, Walter et al. (2013) showed that the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty is statistically insignificant among university students in Germany and Canada toward BMW car brand. Similarly, Belaid and Behi (2011) found that the correlation between brand satisfaction and loyalty is negative and insignificant. This means that satisfaction plays a minimal role at best in developing committed and loyal customers. Bejan (2012) also revealed insignificant relationship between satisfaction and brand loyalty toward lifestyle product brands, high-tech product brands, and service brands. In the same vein, insignificant finding was reported by Hameed (2013) on the effect of customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in his study in Pakistan. Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) also revealed that customer satisfaction has no significant effect on loyalty.

Ahmed (2011) proposed that satisfaction could mediate the relationship between quality, price,

perceived value, and brand loyalty. Although the empirical evidence appears mixed, the majority of studies found a significant relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, justifying the inclusion of brand satisfaction as a mediator variable in the present study. This study considers brand satisfaction as the mediator variable between brand personality and brand loyalty. The present study proposes the following:

- H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty
- H4: Brand satisfaction has a mediating effect on brand personality and brand loyalty.

### 4. Theoretical Framework

This study primarily focuses on the major determinants of brand loyalty. Fig. 1 illustrates the research framework for this study showing the independent variable brand personality and the dependent variable (brand loyalty). And brand satisfaction as a mediator variable between brand personality and brand loyalty. In other words, there are direct and indirect relationships between brand personality, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty.

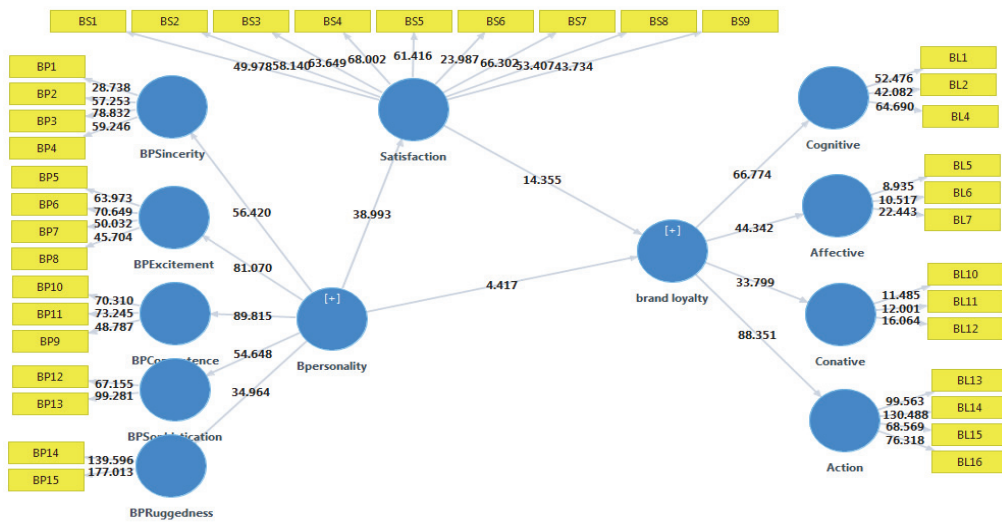


Fig. 1. The research model

### 5. Methodology and Research Design

The study was conducted among Malaysian customers toward local automobile brands. The intention is to examine the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty through brand satisfaction as mediating variable. This study is cross-sectional, whereby data is gathered once to answer the study’s research questions. However, a longitudinal design is often preferred over a cross-sectional one because it increases the quality of the data collection (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010), and this study relies on quantitative approaches. The survey was employed to obtain personal and social facts, beliefs and attitudes (Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973). The unit of analysis for this study is at the individual level, where the sample is the customers of local automobile brands in Malaysia.

#### 5.1 Measurement

We adopted the 16-item scale of brand loyalty from Oliver (1997, 1999), and Harris and Goode’s (2004) four dimensions of customers’ brand loyalty (cognitive, affective, conative, and action): (a) Brand attribute aspects are the bases for cognitive loyalty, (b) affective loyalty focuses on a positive

attitude toward a brand, (c) conative loyalty refers to strong intentions for future exchange, and (d) action loyalty is a commitment to a specific product regardless of the marketing efforts of competitors. Each dimension was measured by four items. Therefore, this measurement is widely used and the validity is cross-culture as proven in several research (Han & Li, 2012; Harris & Goode, 2004; He, Li, & Harris, 2012). The authors adopted brand personality dimensions scale from Aaker (1997), who measured brand personality by dividing 42 features among 15 facets and five dimensions: excitement, sincerity, sophistication, ruggedness, and competence is valid, reliable, and generalizable. For brand satisfaction, we adopted the scale from several studies (Fornell et al., 1996; Ganesan, 1994; Grace & O'Cass, 2005); nine items were used to measure brand satisfaction. The sample of this study was the consumers who visit and buy from malls/hypermarkets in north Malaysia peninsula, which included three states, Kedah, Perlis, and Pulau Pinang. In this study, all predictor variables mentioned above are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (5).

### *5.2 Sampling and data collection*

The data was collected from self-reported questionnaires by the consumers of automobile brands in north peninsular Malaysia. Data was collected from the three selected states which were Kedah, Penang, and Perlis. Specifically, the data was gathered from the consumers of automobile brands based in several malls in the selected cities. We used mall-intercept technique for distributing the survey among 16 supermarkets to maximize the chance of capturing a wide socio-demographic sample, and the data was collected using systematic sampling: every tenth shopping mall customer was approached to complete the survey questionnaire to minimize sampling bias (Hair et al., 2008; Sudman, 1980). In order to find participants aged 18 years and above, data was collected at different times of the day, which are in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, the first half was from 10am to 3pm as well as second half from 3pm to 8pm, on different days on weekdays and weekends as suggested by Sudman (1980). The product category purposely chosen for this survey was automobile local brands specifically Perodua and Proton. These product categories are widely understood and valued by consumers. A total of 576 participations have been collected and finally there were 458 usable questionnaires to be included in the actual data analysis.

### *5.3 Techniques for Data Analysis*

SPSS 21 was used for data analysis for descriptive statistics and this study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) path modelling using SmartPLS 3.0 software by Ringle et al. (2014) to test the theoretical model. Missing values, outliers, and distribution of all measured variables were examined to purify the data and reduce systematic errors and the PLS path modelling is considered as the most suitable technique in this study.

## *6. Findings and Hypotheses Tests*

As indicated in Fig. 1, we tested all hypotheses by examining the significance of the respective path coefficients. Direct positive effects of brand personality on brand satisfaction and brand loyalty are in support of H1–H2. Brand personality has the greatest impact on brand satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.798$ ) and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.208$ ). Brand satisfaction mediates the effect between brand personality and brand loyalty; to verify this effect, the authors tested the model by adding a direct path between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. The indirect effect of brand personality on brand loyalty is significant ( $p < 0.000$ ), according to bootstrapping tests (Kock, 2014; Preacher & Hayes, 2008), brand satisfaction mediates the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.523$ ) as indicated in Table 3. The values for the average variance extracted of the three constructs were well above the suggested value of 0.5. These fit indices indicate that the measurement model has good convergent validity as indicated in Table 4 (see appendix A). Also, discriminant validity was examined by the estimated correlation between constructs with the variance extracted. An average variance extracted of greater than 0.50 indicates that the validity of both the construct and the individual variables is high. All the

constructs meet this conservative test of discriminant validity, meaning that each construct was statistically different from the others (Table 2). Therefore, the measurement model is reliable and meaningful to test the structural relationships among the constructs.

**Table 2**

Latent variable correlations and square roots of average variance extracted

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Action	<b>0.910</b>									
Affective	0.561	<b>0.729</b>								
BPCompetence	0.549	0.580	<b>0.885</b>							
BPExcitement	0.532	0.492	0.768	<b>0.861</b>						
BPRuggedness	0.616	0.502	0.661	0.578	<b>0.957</b>					
BPSincerity	0.548	0.527	0.722	0.734	0.554	<b>0.845</b>				
BPSophistication	0.608	0.525	0.697	0.703	0.702	0.624	<b>0.892</b>			
Cognitive	0.770	0.592	0.584	0.516	0.599	0.535	0.607	<b>0.866</b>		
Conative	0.559	0.684	0.487	0.387	0.498	0.448	0.480	0.578	<b>0.735</b>	
Satisfaction	0.717	0.656	0.722	0.648	0.721	0.676	0.714	0.761	0.591	<b>0.838</b>

Note: Entries shown in bold face represent the square root of the average variance extracted

**Table 3**

Structural Model Assessment with Mediator

HyP	Relation	Beta	SE	T-Value	P-value	Findings
H <sub>1</sub>	BP → BS	0.798	0.020	38.993	0.000	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	BP → BL	0.208	0.047	4.417	0.000	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	BS → BL	0.655	0.046	14.355	0.000	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	BP→BT→ BL	0.523	0.039	13.407	0.000	Supported

BP= Brand Personality, BL= Brand Loyalty, and BS = Brand Satisfaction

## 7. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to examine the mediating effects of brand satisfaction on the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty toward local automobile brands in Malaysia. The findings of the hypotheses testing suggest that all beta coefficients were positive ( $\beta$  between 0.208 and 0.798) and significant at the level of  $p < 0.001$  ( $P$ -values = 0.000) In general, as expected, the relationship between brand personality and brand satisfaction is strong ( $\beta = 0.798$ ), followed by brand satisfaction and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.655$ ), mediating effect of brand satisfaction in the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.523$ ), and the last the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.208$ ).

The study was done using a theoretical framework developed based on prior researches. The findings reveal that brand personality and brand satisfaction affect brand loyalty of Malaysian consumers in local automobile brand industry. The result reflects the findings from previous literature that stress on brand personality as a critical success variable to brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. Overall, this study confirms the mediating effect of brand satisfaction on the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty among Malaysian customers toward local automobile brand. This study is consistent with prior literature that showed that brand personality and brand loyalty have a positive and significant relationship on brand loyalty such as (Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012; Kumar et al., 2006; Louis & Lombart, 2010). The study of Sahin et al. (2011) as well as Şahin et al. (2012) suggested that brand personality is a very important factor to develop a more detailed understanding of the relationship between customers and brand loyalty toward the automobile brand industry.

## 8. Conclusion

Conducting brand loyalty studies in different countries and cultures would shed light on existing brand

loyalty literature as well as act as a guide to companies acting globally. Brand satisfaction plays crucial roles as mediator in the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty. If the level of brand personality perceived by customers lead to increase brand satisfaction, then this in turn increases the level of brand loyalty. This study has contributed to extending the brand personality and brand loyalty framework in the automobile context. The findings of this study provide several managerial implications for brand personality and brand loyalty in automobile industry. The importance of these aspects to the automobile industry is because they have the ability to create rich experiences to the consumers, which play a crucial role in developing or building brand loyalty. In addition, due to the dynamics of the Malaysian automotive industry, the manufacturers must adopt a dynamic view of consumer behavior. This study revealed the important role of the influence of brand personality on brand loyalty among Malaysian customers towards automobile local brands. Hence, in order to develop brand loyalty, domestic automobile industry must gain some understanding on emotional clients regarding their personality while buying automobile brand.

Finally, future research should examine whether other customer behavioral outcomes besides brand loyalty may be affected by other factors. Potential outcome variables may include customer delight, brand trust, brand quality, and word-of-mouth. It should also examine the broader question whether price can build brand loyalty and whether different types contribute differently to brand loyalty.

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## Appendix A

**Table 4**

Average Variance Extracted and Composite Reliability

Constructs	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)
	First order	
Action	0.827	0.950
Affective	0.531	0.772
BPCompetence	0.783	0.915
BPExcitement	0.741	0.920
BPRuggedness	0.915	0.956
BPSincerity	0.714	0.909
BPSophistication	0.796	0.887
Cognitive	0.751	0.900
Conative	0.540	0.779
Brand satisfaction	0.702	0.955
	Second order	
Brand personality	0.737	0.933
Brand satisfaction	0.702	0.955
Brand loyalty	0.700	0.903



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