

# The Role of Brand Experience, Attachment and Trust towards Brand Loyalty among Malaysian Automobile Users

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**Abstract**— Branding is extremely important in the auto industry and brought fortunes to Malaysian automobile companies. Popular Malaysian local-made automobile such as PROTON recently faces tough competition as other international brands remains among top purchased automobile in Malaysia. Users may explore and purchase new brands of automobiles or if it is recommended to them by someone they trust, or experience before or partake emotional attachment of the said brands. Therefore, this research attempts to answer the questions whether brand trust, experience and attachment influences brand loyalty among the Malaysian local automobile brands. Malaysian automobile users will be the unit of analysis. A quantitative research design will be performed while descriptive analysis will be employed to obtain the findings of this study. All related constructs are presented in the proposed research conceptual framework where research hypotheses are developed. Finally, this paper also acknowledged some suggestions for future research directions.

**Index Terms**—Brand Attachment, Brand Experience, Brand Loyalty, Brand Trust

## I. INTRODUCTION

Malaysian automobile industry brought fortunes to the country's economy [1]. PROTON and PERODUA are precisely the two major local brands that enjoyed popular demand from majorly Malaysians and other internationals residing in the country. However, there are competing foreign brands like Toyota and Honda who are taking the larger share of the automobile market in Malaysia [1]. Mercedes Benz, Nissan, Hyundai, KIA, Mazda, Mitsubishi and others are additional foreign brands in the market. The intense competition in the Malaysian automobile market necessitated by technology and greenhouse gases effect is forcing the local to a long-time low output [2]. The pressure further pushes the

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local firms to seek for additional market and mindful of cost, quality, and global safety standards [2].

It is now trending phenomena of vast automobile customers awareness of their status and its symbolic perception in the society. The development of the consumer-brand relationship has been the focus of research, practice and theory in recent years [2]. Consumers are now proud to associate with brands they are intimated with and loyal to, which are perhaps in line with their personality [3]. Thus, customers become the center point that must be delighted at all time. The automobile brands demand driven by their environmentally friendly, convenience and class in the society. Consequently, the situation is pushing companies to build strong and reliable brands that could stand the test of time in the global automobile market.

The competition in the automobile industry had given rise to new government policies to promote and protect domestic brands from big players' dominance in the home market. However, it is undeniable that policies do not shape the trend of market demands for products, quality and value for money does. Customer's loyalty to brands is seen as a driving force in advocating for favourite brand philosophy [3]. Customer's preferences of automobile brands are often explained by persistence in the influences of market condition and policies [4].

On the other hand, branding is extremely important in the auto industry. Some users in this industry are completely brand loyal to one company. Others will explore a new brand if it has a more competitive product or if it is recommended to them by someone they trust. In the early 1980's Malaysian are deemed loyal to local automotive producer, Proton. The government of Malaysia promotes Proton as it was the first national car born in Malaysia. However, due to evolution of international automobile and its technologies, Malaysian is open to many alternatives of better designed, performed and state-of-art tech-equipped automobiles. In fact, local brands such as PROTON, PERODUA and foreign brands like Toyota and Honda were recording hundred thousand units of automobiles sales in a year as reported in the 2004 – 2008 Passenger Car Report (PCR). This development brought the question of what are the factors that determine such volume of sales in the reported period. This research, therefore, attempts to answer the question with certain assumptions to determine whether brand trust, experience and attachment influences brand loyalty among Malaysian local automobile brands.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Brand Loyalty

Every company target to get customers for their products. The strive for market share increases competition on getting loyal customers who believe in the brand attributes of a particular company [5]. Loyalty, as referred to by [6], is the habit of continuous patronage of product or services offered by a company regardless of external influence. Brand loyalty is the total submission by consumers or users to offers of any category made by a particular company. Such willingness developed by consumers to purchase a particular brand, again and again, is regarded as loyalty [6]. Any positive attitude or behaviour build over time as a response towards a specific brand by a customer is considered as brand loyalty [7] [8] [9]. It has been emphasized that behavioural display of repeated purchases or dealings amounts to brand loyalty and could be measured by observations [10] [11] [12]. Brand loyalty is not more than just measure of repeat purchase and its sustainability [13]. There is a sort of combination of phenomena to make up customer loyalty. According to [7] and [14], customer loyalty to a particular brand is the combination of commitment to the transactional relationship and evident behaviors. It could be argued that brand loyalty could mean the willingness and the positive behavioral display in patronising a brand continuously.

[8] posited that loyalty varies among industries and categories of business relationship (business-business or customer-business). What it means is that factors that determine brand loyalty and measurement might be different. Automobile brand loyalty stands to say buying a range of cars that share brand label whereas for other sectors a repeat purchase of similar product or service [4]. It is an apparent disparity in the constructs of brand loyalty. As a result of this kind of argument [10] developed a framework for the measurement issues, which is a product of previous works conducted in the field of brand loyalty. They are categorised into environmental characteristics, dyadic relationship and customer perceptions. The categorisation of the antecedents of researches in loyalty is broken and explored into service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, commitment, corporate image, communication and switching costs [8] [10].

On the other hand, evaluative judgement, relational outcome and industry dynamics are considered determinants of loyalty [15]. [16] and [17] recognised behavioural and attitudinal attachment to brand as the measures of brand loyalty. The attitudinal loyalty has to do with customer perception of the problem-solving ability of a brand, while the behaviour is about the count of repeat purchase [17].

There is intention switching as regards willingness to patronise a particular brand. [6] maintained that the switching behaviour in purchases affects customer loyalty to a specific brand. Thus the lower is such intention to switch the higher the tendency for the customer to become loyal to a brand. [16] sees brand loyalty as a representation of emotional attachment to a brand by the customer. Others viewed loyalty in two folds, active (word of mouth and usage intention) and

passive (unlikely to switch) [7]. Equally, [18] viewed brand loyalty into attitudinal (preferences or intentions) and behavioural (number of purchases) dimensions. [4] posited three drivers of automobile brand preference (loyalty) in the form of endogenous formation such as wistfulness, unique features learned from past experience and information shared among family and friends. These drivers are similar to some argument on brand experience formation constructs as put by [19]. It has been argued that brand loyalty is not only driven by the 4Ps of marketing (product, price, promotion and place) but is most driven by people [20]. [5] then posited that brand loyalty is economically beneficial to firms because they do not need to spend so much in marketing.

[10] found that trust, communication and customer satisfaction have a significant effect on brand loyalty. On the other hand, [6] found that brand experience and personality have an insignificant relationship with brand loyalty from a study conducted in Indonesia. [4] found that family influences their offspring's' brand loyalty in an automobile, that such a loyalty lowers prices and profits of future transactions and competition situation represent an incentive to chase for brand loyalty. [16] in a study conducted in Jordan found that brand experience, brand equity, and corporate branding have a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty. In conducted by [9] had shown that brand trust strongly influences brand loyalty of Egyptian mobile industry. He recommended that there is the need to ensure how the level of trust is measured and to understand how it evolves. [21] found that credibility of the brand (trust), trustworthiness and expertise as regards the advertised value offering as experienced by customers influence brand loyalty. Research conducted by [22] found that brand effect and brand trust have a significant and positive impact on brand loyalty. Similarly, [17] found that brand effect and trust significantly influence variance in behavioural and attitudinal brand loyalty. [15] found that brand trust had a positive and significant effect on brand loyalty. [11] found that brand experience in automobile have significant positive relationship with brand loyalty.

### B. Brand Experience

Brand experience is one of the recent focuses on marketing literature. Brand experience has attracted a lot of consideration in marketing practice [19]. Companies around the world now understood the importance of consumers experience from product or service usage in product development and marketing strategies. Brand experience is comprised of product, service and consumption or usage experiences. Product experience is the result of customer interaction with a particular product [23]. These interactions could be direct or indirect. According to [23], a direct interaction has to do with the customer having physical contact with a product. An indirect contact represents the virtual view of a product on the internet or television and during advertisement [24]. Service experience, on the other

hand, has to do with the customers' interaction with personnel (salespeople, customer care) during transaction or enquiries [25] [26]. Consumption experience occurs after customer usage of the product or service delivery [19]. The experience reflects the outcome of customer contact, interaction and usage of a particular firm's product or services, which often than not are either positive or negative.

Brand experience is the combination of these classifications of experiences, which has seriously been criticised to mean utilitarian product experience [19]. The recent view on brand experience focused on the unique features of a particular company's products such as name, colour, design, and crest or logo [27] [28]. It is therefore argued that brand experience is a subjective judgement passed by consumers about their feelings, perception and behaviour about brand design, identity, communication and the physical space for interaction [19]. Its subjectivity makes it dynamic, in that what someone see and like because of some attribute's others might dislike. According to [16] brand experience has three dimensions; brand sensory, effective and cognitive experiences. The experience might as well have a different degree of outcomes that last for a longer or shorter time; these are dependent on the category of brands.

Automobile brand experience might not be the same with consumable brands or services. It is different in the sense that issues of belief, likeness, attitude and involvement plays typically out in brand experience in automobiles. There is an argument as to what measures brand experience in the automobile industry market. According to [2] brand experience in the automobile is developed when customers have a physical encounter with the brand. Others are of the view brand contact at the point of sale builds a lifetime experience [29]. Some argued that customer involvement with the brand through promotional activity helps provide brand equity [30]. Some considered brand-related stimuli also known characteristics that made it presence is known such as physical structure, name, or touch [31] [32] [33]. Storytelling convinces customers to buy into brands because it easily captures their emotions and dreams, as a result, experience is built. These are some of the positions of studies conducted in the nascent field of brand experience. In furtherance of the arguments, [29] conceptualised that event management (promotions), brand contacts, brand-related stimuli, storytelling, trust and usefulness explains the brand experience. These articulated dimensions are going to be considered for developing the survey instrument, as measures of brand experience in the current study.

[2] employed service cape, brand image and attributed in a study and the result indicated services cape was found not to be significantly related to brand experience, while image and physical feature share a significant relationship with brand experience. Their findings clarified a point that services cape does not influence the brand experience of owners of Malaysian made cars. Thus their point of attraction was the

design of the interior, performance of engine and fuel efficiency [2]. By implication, it means that local car owners often than not do service their cars in workshops within their proximities.

### *C. Brand Trust*

Trust is an essential and needed factor for the success of every human endeavour. Trust is a product of personal relationship built from a valuable social interaction of people [34]. According to [9] trust is made up of belief about a subject, its honesty and predictability in the relationship with a brand. Brand trust is considered as the post-interaction feelings developed by customer believing on the benefits derivable from the use of a brand [34]. Brand trust is the trustworthiness and reliability a brand offers that meet customers' expectations [21]. Brand trust is that readiness of a customer to have faith in the capability of a brand to offer a promised functionality [22]. Brand trust is the willingness of an average customer to bank on a brand offer of certain functional performance [17]. Brand trust is the confidence of customer expectation and willingness to rely on brand regardless of the risk of being disappointed in the future.

Brand trust is categorised into technical and intentional dimensions [35]. The skills and competencies displayed in the process of value delivery that satisfy customer's expectations is the technical dimension of trust. The intentional trust, on the other hand, means the consistency in the provision of value to the customer at every stage of the service chain [35]. In another view, [21] posited that trust is of two sides of a coin, trustworthiness or believability and expertise or capability to deliver value to the customer. [22] opined that there are two dimensions of brand trust, intention and reliability. [17] posited that the best dimensions to measure brand trust are safety, honesty and trust in the brand. It could be maintained that one of the significant sources of brand trust is the experience garnered from the interaction with the brand that brings satisfaction and reliability to the customer. It is argued that brand trust creates a long-time relationship with a brand that translates to brand loyalty [9] [17] [21].

There are factors that moderates brand trust relationship with brand loyalty. According to [36], price cognisance, customer involvement and brand awareness strongly influence how a trusted brand influences brand loyalty.

### *D. Brand Attachment*

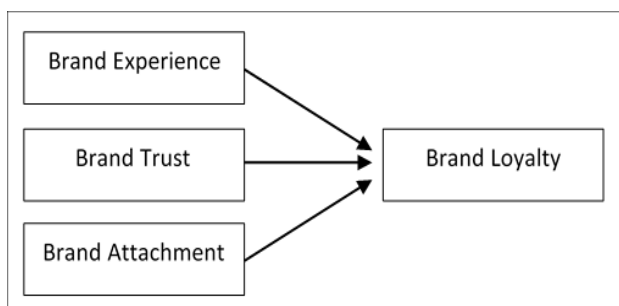
Attachment is prominent with the relationship between a person and another person, with the place, gift or object [37]. Brand attachment is the results of feelings customers have for being part of their daily lives [38]. It is that emotional linkage that bonds a customer to a particular brand. So, when a customer is left with the huge preference burden among multiple brands in the market due to intense competition, emotionally attached inclined brands must be created by firms [37]. According to [39], to achieve this firm must understand

that particular emotional connection aspect of its brand and then capitalise on it increase customer loyalty to its brand. Such emotional connections are easily and often found in cosmetics and fashion because the brands are out to change or improve the looks of their users. Thus, attachment to brand founded on emotional grounds is built over longer usage of the product that met customers' expectations. However, [37] argued that emotional attachment could exist even before customers have contact or experience with a brand and having positive behaviour towards a brand doesn't mean that the customer will not switch when a more attractive brand is introduced to him or her.

Brand attachment is mostly linked to emotional feelings customers build towards a brand over time. [40] found that brand attachment creates trust and loyalty. They argued that brand attachment is positively related to trust and brand loyalty. It is therefore pertinent for firms to try to provide offers that meet customers expectation to create an attachment to generate loyalty of their brands. The strong attachment to automobile brands by its buyers who currently owned such brands could buy more of it if prices are lowered [4]. So, lowering price even detrimental to the profit of the firm is an investment in brand loyalty for the future.

### III. PROPOSED RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The independent variables (IV) to be studied are brand experience, brand trust and brand attachment. These independent variables are hypothesized to have significant relationships on the dependent variable (DV) that is the brand loyalty. Fig.1 presents the framework of the proposed research.



**Fig. 1:** Proposed Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the previous research and proposed research conceptual framework in Fig. 1, the following hypothesis can be summarized to meet the objectives of the research:

Objective 1: To determine the significant relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty among the Malaysian automobile users.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty among the Malaysian automobile users.

Objective 2: To determine the significant relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty among the Malaysian automobile users.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between brand trust

and brand loyalty among the Malaysian automobile users.

Objective 3: To determine the significant relationship between brand attachment and brand loyalty among the Malaysian automobile users.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between brand attachment and brand loyalty among the Malaysian automobile users.

### IV. PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will carry out quantitative research design where surveys will be disseminated online to Malaysian automobile users.

According to [41], quantitative approach uses the positivist post that claim to develop knowledge, use query strategies likes trials and surveys, and collect data on prearranged instruments that produce statistical data. He added that there are three types of research designs that can be used to conduct the study which is quantitative, qualitative, mixed method or triangulation methods. The research design approaches that will used in this study is the quantitative method.

In addition, [42] agreed that quantitative data serves to test the hypotheses proposed and more significant is to deliver answers to research questions. Therefore, the quantitative data will be gathered through the questionnaires that are designed for general conclusions from the result through the evaluation of the opinion of the respondents that most frequently operated in the correlation between the variables, wherein this study are the dimensions of brand experience, brand trust and brand attachment, towards brand loyalty. Moreover, the quantitative techniques will help to find the effects of all the independent variables on the dependent variables [43].

The chosen sampling technique will be purposive sampling that focuses only on automobile users in Malaysia. Meanwhile, descriptive analysis using IBM SPSS statistics will be employed to obtain the findings of this study.

### V. CONCLUSION

This research explores on the roles of brand experience, attachment and trust towards brand loyalty among Malaysian automobile users. A proposed conceptual framework has been constructed investigating the correlation between variables specified.

The findings would highlight the most relevant branding roles that would create brand loyalty among users. Thus, giving a hindsight for automobile players to build customer's experience, trust and attachment besides enhancing brand loyalty in Malaysia.

Finally, local automobile players may be benefited most as better understanding of consumers expectation and beliefs would create further demand and sales. Further helping the industry players manage a consistent brand experience across all models.

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