Does Experience Guide People to Rebuy? Brand Loyalty at Ice Cream Shops in Yogyakarta

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Abstract

Food tourism is a major attraction for tourists because it provides an unforgettable experience. Yogyakarta is a tourist destination that is increasingly in demand because of its contemporary culinary concept. This research aims to determine the phenomenon of the experience of visitors to ice cream shops in Yogyakarta in enjoying ice cream in a shop with a unique concept in a tropical atmosphere. The brand experience felt by the ice cream shop customers was tested for its influence on brand loyalty. The concept of brand trust is also tested as a mediator of the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty based on the commitment-trust theory. The formation of brand loyalty through the concepts of experience and trust is closely related to long-term brand-customer relationship management. A total of 179 data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM method. The research results show that brand experience has a positive significant effect on brand loyalty. In an indirect relationship, brand trust partially mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty; Brand Experience; Brand Trust, Ice Cream Shop

INTRODUCTION

Ice cream is consumed by people in various countries, especially tropical countries. In this modern era, people's consumption patterns for ice cream have developed into visitors from ice cream shops. They are looking for a double benefit, such as getting the product benefits and experiencing the atmosphere of an ice cream shop. Experience is something that is sought after and has a huge influence on consumer behavior today (Vanharanta, Kantola, & Seikola, 2015; Hwang & Lee, 2018; Hwang et al., 2021). The more unique of ice cream shop concept, the more consumers are.

Yogyakarta is a tourist destination with popular culinary tourism. In this tropical city, there are many interesting ice cream shops to visit. Many franchise businesses open new stores because of the low barriers to entering the market (Lee et al., 2018; Hwang et al., 2021). Consumers will choose outlets according to their preferences. Preference is a consumer's liking, choice, or something they like (Assael, 2007) and one of the consumer psychological factors that underlie purchase decisions. After purchasing and using a

product, consumers have an experience. Thus, the brand experience encompasses all moments during a customer's consumption behavior, such as how individuals perceive the brand design and identity, service landscape, packaging, and so on. Therefore, sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual aspects are the underlying dimensions of brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009).

Through experience, firms develop higher customer loyalty, thereby building a competitive advantage (Bapat, 2017). The business core has evolved to experience-centered (Hwang et al., 2021). Brand loyalty is very beneficial for companies, such as creating barriers for competitors, generating higher revenue streams, offering significant cost savings, offering brand extension opportunities, and generating word of mouth (WOM) (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2005, Liang, 2022). Accordingly, brand loyalty is a long-term concept and a successful key in a highly competitive market (Hwang et al., 2021). Given the importance of brand loyalty, it is interesting to examine the critical antecedents of brand loyalty in different settings (Ko & Chiu, 2008; Hwang & Lee, 2018; Rizvi, Memon, & Dahri, 2020; Hwang et al., 2021). Today, an ice cream shop has a variety of offerings to meet the needs of visitors. Entrepreneurs in the ice cream shop industry are constantly creating new ways of providing services to strengthen brand-customer relationships. Thus, the ice cream shop becomes the current research context for finding new colors in brand loyalty research and brand experience is a crucial antecedent for assessing brand loyalty.

This research fulfills the gap of prior studies by modeling both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions of brand loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Jones & Taylor, 2007; Kabiraj & Shanmugan, 2010). There are dual concepts in brand loyalty, such as behavioral and attitudinal. Behavioral loyalty is customers' continuous purchases of a brand and their rebuy intention in the future (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Since attitudinal loyalty is customers' attitude toward the brand and their degree of commitment, it hence has an emotional element (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

In consumer purchasing decisions, brand experience is closely related to brand trust. Brand trust is a positive belief in a brand (Park & Kim, 2016) that develops over time, through direct experience, and occurs in a relationship (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Portal, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2018).

However, brand experience and brand trust are still rarely studied together. As research develops, the relationship between them becomes closer. Based on a systematic literature review, initially, brand trust was not included as a consequence of brand experience (Khan & Rahman, 2015); then began to be researched as an outcome of brand experience, although it is still rare (Amoroso, 2019); and finally includes the important consequences for brand experience and recommended for further research (Rosa et al., 2021). That is signaling the need for empirical testing, thus underlying the examination of the relationship between brand experience and brand trust in this research.

Since the late 1980s, trust has become an important construct in branding. Trust is a crucial element in any positive human interaction or exchange (Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Liang, 2022), a key construct in relationship marketing (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002; Palmatier et al., 2006; Liang, 2022), and the main determinant of brand loyalty (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001;

Menidjel et al., 2017). Brand trust leads to brand loyalty (Choi, Ok, & Hyun, 2017). Among the factors in branding literature, brand trust is the most important driver of brand loyalty (Menidjel et al., 2017; Liang, 2022) and can be investigated (Khan et al., 2020). Brand trust has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty (Hanzaee & Andervazh, 2012; Mabkhot, Shaari, & Salleh, 2017; Atulkar, 2020; Ang & Kenny, 2021; Hokky & Bernarto, 2021; Sumarmi & Wjayanti, 2023; Mahardika & Setyawan, 2024).

Although the study of branding is growing rapidly, there are major weaknesses in the previous literature. Some studies are limited to investigating the direct effects of antecedents on brand loyalty, then ignoring their interrelationships and possible mediation effects (Evanschitzky et al., 2012; Pan et al., 2012; Almost & Sharma, 2016; Rialti et al., 2017; Li et al., 2020; Trivedi & Yadav, 2020). Based on research by Saeed et al. (2021), brand trust is the second most widely used relational consequence after brand loyalty. According to the development of studies, the influence of brand experience and brand trust on brand loyalty has been studied widely, but how they jointly influence brand loyalty is still ambiguous, including in terms of their mediating effect, it is still unknown whether the effect of brand experience on brand loyalty is fully or partially mediated by brand trust (Liang, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brands are very important to consider in strengthening relationships between company and customer for long-term business success (Rather et al., 2018). Understanding how consumers perceive brands is very important for developing marketing strategies for goods and services (Brakus et al., 2009), so consumers' experiences in using brands need to be highlighted. Brand experience includes a learning process that is acquiring knowledge and assessing the buying experience that underlies future-related behavior (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). Brand experience is conceptualized as the sensations, feelings, cognitions, and consumer responses that arise as a result of the stimulation of a brand, which is part of the brand identity, brand design, packaging, communication, as well as the people and environment in which the brand marketed (Brakus et al., 2009: 60).

Loyal customers are willing to pay higher prices for brands with superior brand experiences, and companies are interested in connecting with loyal customers (Bapat, 2017). High loyalty to a brand encourages customers to always think positively about the brand and recommend the brand voluntarily. The increasing level of loyalty is influenced by customer-brand interaction. The more positive the brand experience it has, the more customers who continue using the brand. Khan & Rahman (2016), Mathew & Thomas (2018), Santos & Schlesinger (2021), Akoglu & Ozbek (2022), and Bae & Kim (2023) stated that brand experience had a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty.

Brand experience begins when consumers search for products, receive services, buy, and consume products (Brakus et al., 2009). The brand experience obtained by consumers underlies subsequent purchasing decisions. The brand experience obtained by consumers underlies subsequent purchasing decisions. A positive brand experience is created if customers find a capable brand that fulfills their needs (Fournier, 1998;

Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Ramaseshan & Stein, 2014; Khan et al., 2019). According to Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001), brand trust is "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function." This includes the brand's ability to deal with situations of uncertainty, information asymmetry, and fear of opportunism; thus, trust plays a role in reducing uncertainty and information asymmetry, also making customers feel comfortable with the brand (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Pavlou, Liang, & Xue, 2007; Chiu, Huang, & Yen, 2010; Chinomona, 2013). Therefore, the higher of brand experience degree that customers realize, the more they are satisfied and tend to trust that brand. The research from Chinomona (2013), Khan & Rahman (2016), Khan et al. (2019), and Akoglu & Ozbek (2022) view that higher levels of brand experience will lead to higher levels of brand trust.

However, brand trust is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust leads to brand loyalty or commitment because trust creates exchange relationships that are highly valued (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust has a positive influence on brand loyalty and encourages customers to show their trust in the brand and maintain long-term relationships (Lin et al., 2017; Atulkar, 2020). Brand trust is also the central construct in relationship marketing (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Palmatier et al., 2006; Lien et al., 2015) and a major determinant of brand loyalty (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Menidjel, Benhabib, & Bilgihan, 2017; Liang, 2022). Brand trust is a strong predictor of brand loyalty. According to prior research, brand trust had a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty, such as Nguyen, Barrett, & Miller (2011), Chinomona (2013), Khan & Rahman (2016); Shin et al. (2019); Atulkar (2020), Maduretno & Junaedi (2022). The higher levels of brand trust will lead to higher levels of brand loyalty.

Loyal customers are characterized by buying more goods, bringing in new customers, creating a positive image, spreading profitable word-of-mouth advertising, and not being easily tempted by offers from competitors (Han et al., 2019; Hwang et al., 2021). The level of customer loyalty is based on their experience while interacting with a brand. The concept of brand experience is an important construct of branding literature that builds consumer-brand relationships (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Schembri, 2009; Han et al., 2019), especially long-term relationships. Consumers can have positive, neutral, or negative experiences, then may have stronger or more intense experiences with certain brands compared to others (Liang, 2022) and these experiences form the basis of post-purchase decisions. It is also known that by achieving a holistic brand experience, companies can ultimately provide emotional satisfaction for customers, which is achieved by developing a special bond and trust with the brand as a whole as well (Gobe, 2001; Han et al., 2019).

Brand experience and brand trust are closely related and greatly contribute to long-term relationships, which are marked by brand loyalty. Depending on prior research, the most important antecedent of brand loyalty is trust (Aydin & Özer 2005; Dehdashti, Kenari & Bakhshizadeh, 2012; Mabkhot, Shaari, & Salleh, 2017). The existence of brand trust strengthens consumers who previously had positive brand experiences to express loyalty and continue to interact with the brand because they feel

safe. Brand trust partially mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty (Sahin, Zehir, & Kitapci, 2011; Akoglu & Ozbek, 2022; Maduretno & Junaedi, 2022). Thus, this research examines the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, which is mediated by brand trust.

Finally, this study aims to examine the role of brand trust as a mediator in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty among ice cream shop visitors in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Based on this, the study proposes these hypotheses as follows.

H1: Brand experience has a positive effect on brand loyalty.
H2: Brand experience has a positive effect on brand trust.
H3: Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty.
H4: Brand trust partially mediates the relationship of brand experience and brand loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses quantitative methods, and because of that, we conducted empirical tests on all variables. We examine the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty with brand trust as a mediator variable. The population of this study is all the customers of ice cream shops in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. To determine the research sample, we used purposive sampling to get appropriate respondents. The research sample criteria were customers of an ice cream shop in Yogyakarta, who had visited an ice cream shop in person and made purchases at least twice a month (Choi, Ok, Hyun, 2017).

The data was collected from an online survey with an e-questionnaire using Google Forms. The questionnaire consists of three parts, namely confirmatory questions, questions regarding respondent profile, and questionnaire questions related to research variables. In filling out the online questionnaire, respondents choose the ice cream shop they visit most often, namely at least twice a month, then fill in all the questionnaire questions based on the brand of ice cream shop chosen. The questionnaire in this study was adapted from relevant prior research. In this case, the items of brand experience adapted from Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello (2009), brand trust adapted from Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001), and brand loyalty also adapted from Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001). The five-point Likert scale (1-5) is used, which indicates one (1) being strongly disagree and five (5) being strongly agree.

All of the data that has been collected will be analyzed using the partial least square (PLS) method to test the relationship between a variable and the others. In this step, we use SmartPLS 3.0 software to test the hypothesis. Before testing the hypothesis, we first test the validity and reliability of the data.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile
The first part of this questionnaire is the respondent profile. In this study, a total of 179 responses were collected. Based on the data from Table 1, the majority of respondents were female (87.71%), and the remaining 12.29% were male. Ice cream enthusiasts also come from various age groups, starting from 20-25 years (77.65%), 26-30 years (19.55%), 31-35 years (1.12%), 36-40 years (1.12%), up to the age of more than 50 years (0.56%). Thus, most ice cream shop customers come from a young age but are still in demand by various age groups.

Regarding the ice cream shop brand chosen, the majority of respondents were Mixue customers (63.69%), followed by Tempo Gelato (19.55%), Momoyo (5.59%), Kon Ice Cream (3.91%), My Gelato (1.67%), Ciao Gelato and We Drink (1.18%). The rest are customers of Mou Gelato, Roemi, Aicha, Malio Gelato, Milk by Artemi, and McD (0.56% each). Most of the respondents visited the ice cream shop around 1-2 times a month (54.75%). Meanwhile, the others visited 3-5 times (37.99%) and more than five times (7.26%).

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Characteristics	Amount	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	157	87.71
Male	22	12.29
Age		
20-25 years	139	77.65
26-30 years	35	19.55
31-35 years	2	1.12
36-40 years	2	1.12
41-45 years	0	0
46-50 years	0	0
>50 years	1	0.56
Ice Cream Shops		
Mixue	114	63.69
Tempo Gelato	35	19.55
Momoyo	10	5.59
Kon Ice Cream	7	3.91
My Gelato	3	1.67
Ciao Gelato	2	1.18

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Characteristics	Amount	Percentage (%)
Ice Cream Shops		
We Drink	2	1.18
Mou Gelato	1	0.56

Roemi Xtrardinary Ice Cream	1	0.56
Aicha	1	0.56
Malio Gelato	1	0.56
Milk by Artemi	1	0.56
McD	1	0.56
Frequency		
1 – 2 times	98	54.75
3 – 5 times	68	37.99
>5 times	13	7.26

Source: Author's data (2024)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

This section views the result of validity and reliability testing using secondary confirmatory factor analysis (dimensional level and construct level). Based on the result of convergent validity at the first level (dimensional level), there's no item deleted. In contrast, 11 items were deleted at the second level (construct level) because have an outer loading <0.7. The removal items could increase AVE. Thus, the data is valid. Based on discriminant validity testing, each dimension and variable has a Fornell-Larcker value ≥0.70. It means the constructs are not correlated with each other.

Figure 1. PLS Algorithm
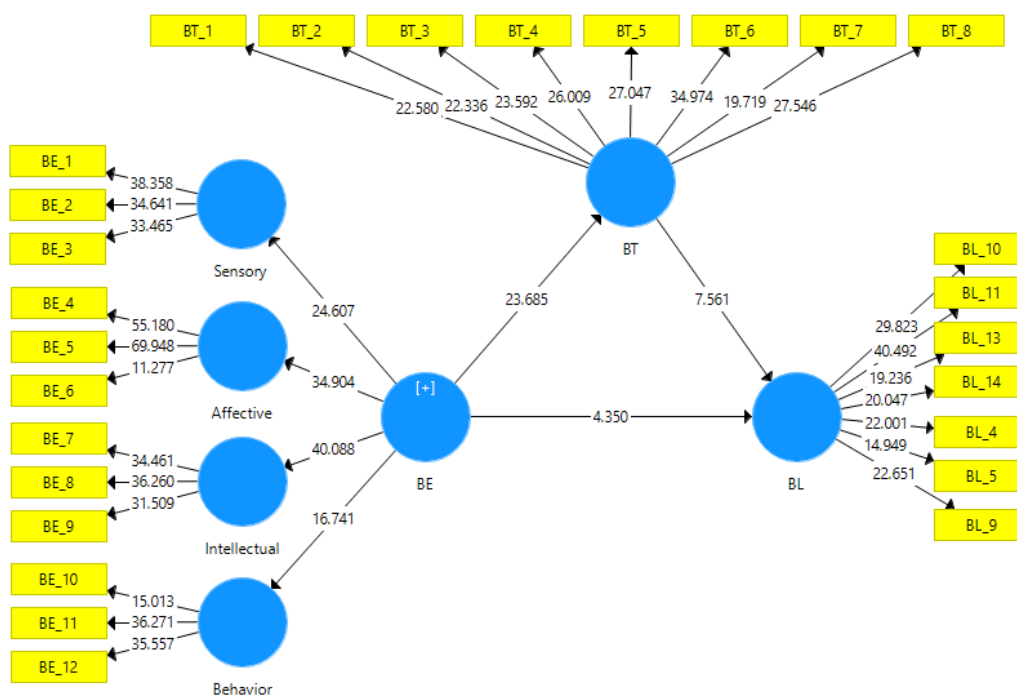
Source: SmartPLS 3.0 (2024)

CFA was also used for reliability testing. Based on the result of reliability testing at the first and second levels, each dimension and variable has a score >0.70 for Cronbach's Alpha value and composite reliability (CR), so it is considered reliable.

Hypothesis Testing

In addition, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to verify the hypothesis testing. This research examines First, we examine the direct effect in this study. Table 2 shows the results of the SEM analysis of three hypotheses of the direct effect. Based on Table 2, all the hypotheses were statistically supported because the p-value is <0.05, namely 0.000. Therefore, all hypotheses were supported. Specifically, brand experience positively affects brand loyalty (H1 supported) and brand trust (H2 supported). In addition, brand trust also positively affects brand loyalty (H3 supported).

Table 2. Direct Effect

Hypothesis	Path	P Values	Results
H1	BE → BL	0.000	Supported
H2	BE → BT	0.000	Supported
H3	BT → BL	0.000	Supported

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 (2024)

Lastly, SEM analysis was also used to examine the indirect effect. From Table 3, From Table 3, it can be seen that the p-value <0.05, so it is stated that brand experience had an indirect effect on brand loyalty because brand trust is a mediator (H4 supported).

Table 3. Indirect Effect

Hypothesis	Path	P Values	Results
H4	BE → BT → BL	0.000	Supported

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 (2024)

The most crucial challenge facing companies is to make customers loyal to the brand (Zaidun et al., 2020; Sumarmi & Hety, 2023). This study focuses on brand loyalty and examines its relationship with antecedents in the form of customer experience and trust in the brand. Based on test results, we know that brand loyalty is affected by the brand experience, both directly and indirectly. With this direct effect, brand experience has proven to have a significant positive effect. Therefore, experience underlies customer loyalty to a brand. This is in line with research by Khan & Rahman (2016), Mathew & Thomas (2018), Santos & Schlesinger (2021), Akoglu & Ozbek (2022), and Bae & Kim (2023). The more positive brand experience, the higher the level of brand loyalty.

About purchasing decisions, experience is also closely related to the trust of customers. Experience also determines customer judgments about brands. If the brand experience is positive, then the brand is good value and makes customers trust it because of the credibility of the brand. That is in line with the results of this study that the more positive the brand experience a customer has, the higher their brand trust, as stated in research by Chinomona (2013), Khan & Rahman (2016), Khan et al. (2019), and Akoglu & Ozbek (2022). Therefore, the brand's ability to meet customer needs must be considered. All of this shapes the experience and determines customer trust. According

to Sung & Kim (2010) and Portal, Abratt, & Bendixen (2018), brands that are considered honest and sincere are more likely to be trusted by customers, compared with brands that only focus on offering quality. Brand trust is a feeling of security when interacting with a brand based on the belief that the brand will remain credible and responsible for satisfying the customers.

Testing brand trust in this research contributes to filling the research gap, where brand experience and brand trust are still rarely studied simultaneously. Studies on brand trust as an outcome of brand experience are still relatively rare (Amoroso, 2019). Looking at the opportunities that exist, the results of this study contribute to increasing insight that brand trust is closely related to brand experience and even bridges the gap between brand experience and brand loyalty. In terms of indirect influence, brand experience affects brand loyalty if brand trust between them. Thus, the role of brand trust is as a partial mediator because brand experience can still influence brand loyalty directly, as stated in the research of Sahin et al. (2011), Akoglu & Ozbek (2022), Maduretno & Junaedi (2022).

According to Bapat (2017), brand experience is valuable for forming competitive advantages for companies. Based on these findings, this research strengthens that brand experience is a crucial component in building brand loyalty, with both direct and indirect effects. In terms of context, this research uses ice cream shop customers in Yogyakarta as respondents, which enriches research about brand loyalty. The results of this study help ice cream shop entrepreneurs pay attention to brand experience, which greatly affects customer loyalty to the brand. For this reason, it is recommended that these entrepreneurs improve their products and services to create a positive brand experience.

CONCLUSION

The various results above indicate that this research contributes empirically and practically. It concluded that brand experience is very crucial to brand loyalty. That is because brand experience directly influences brand loyalty. In addition, brand experience affects brand loyalty through brand trust, so brand experience can encourage customer brand trust, thus influencing their loyalty. Regarding the business world, brand experience is a crucial component that every business person needs to pay attention to achieve a competitive advantage.

This study has involved the role of a mediating variable, namely brand trust. Thus, further research must identify other mediators related to brand experience in determining brand loyalty. That shows the crucial role of brand experience. Moderating variables are also suggested in future research to deepen this study. This research only focused on the Special Region of Yogyakarta with a specific case about Yogyakarta as a popular tourist destination, so the result's generalization had to be determined by completing additional studies elsewhere. It is recommended to increase the sample size to obtain better validity because it achieves a great representation of the population.

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