

The Influence of Customer Brand Engagement on Brand Loyalty Through Brand Trust

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Abstract

In an era of increasingly fierce business competition, brand loyalty is a crucial factor for the sustainability and success of the company. Brand loyalty can strengthen market position due to consumer trust and engagement. This study aims to analyze the effect of customer brand engagement on brand loyalty through the role of brand trust as a mediating and moderating variable. This research uses a quantitative approach with descriptive causality method. The population in this study are consumers who already know and have bought Cimory milk products who live in Jabodetabek. The sampling method uses non-probability sampling with purposive sampling technique. The sample criteria for this study are age ranging from 17 years - 50 years with the number of samples processed as many as 149 respondents who are consumers of Cimory products in the Jabodetabek area. Data were collected through online questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Model Partial Least Square. The results showed that customer brand engagement has an influence on brand trust and brand loyalty. However, although there is a relationship between customer brand engagement and brand trust, brand trust does not support the moderation of the relationship between customer brand engagement and brand loyalty. This suggests that brand trust is not always the key factor in linking brand loyalty with customer brand engagement, and there may be other factors that are more influential in the process. Therefore, marketing strategies should include a more holistic approach that not only relies on brand trust, but also includes other elements such as customer experience, product quality, and innovation. This research provides insights for companies to focus more on strategies to increase customer engagement to strengthen brand loyalty, and highlights the importance of nurturing customer trust to strengthen the relationship between brand engagement and long-term loyalty.

Keywords: *customer brand involvement, brand trust, brand loyalty.*

INTRODUCTION

In an era of increasingly fierce business competition, brand loyalty has become a crucial factor for a company's sustainability and success. Brand loyalty is defined as a customer's desire to purchase and use a particular brand's goods or services even after competitors' marketing efforts or changing circumstances (Pedeliento et al., 2020). Loyal consumers tend to make repeat purchases, recommend the brand to others, and are more resilient to competitors' marketing tactics, making this phenomenon crucial. In the highly competitive milk and yogurt industry, building and maintaining brand loyalty is no easy feat. In Indonesia, consumption of milk and yogurt for health has increased significantly, with an average annual growth of 5.1% since 2015 (Euromonitor International, 2021). As

this occurs, brands like Cimory, Ultra Milk, and Greenfields compete fiercely to build customer brand engagement to increase brand loyalty.

Customer brand engagement occurs in the active interaction between customers and brands and is crucial for building strong emotional and cognitive connections (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Furthermore, customer brand engagement is closely related to brand trust, where positive customer engagement with a brand increases customer loyalty (Rather & Hollebeek, 2021). Complex factors influence consumer trust in a brand, such as product quality, consumer experience, and brand reputation. Brand trust itself serves as a crucial bridge between customer brand engagement and brand loyalty. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how customer brand engagement and brand trust influence brand loyalty, particularly in the milk and yogurt industry in Indonesia (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

The concept of customer brand engagement refers to a customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with a brand during their interactions with the brand. Customer brand engagement occurs when customers have a positive and meaningful experience with the brand, which encourages them to interact and share their experiences with others, and even become brand advocates (Hollebeek et al., 2019). Customer brand engagement is increasingly important for consumers in the digital age, where they have more opportunities to interact with brands and influence their perceptions of them. Furthermore, customer brand engagement is closely related to brand trust, meaning that consumers can increase brand trust through customer brand engagement (Rather, 2019). To build long-term relationships between brands and customers, brand trust plays a crucial role, especially in competitive industries like milk and yogurt. Brand trust refers to consumers' confidence that a brand will deliver on its promises and act in their best interests (Kim & Tang, 2020). In addition to product quality, this trust is based on the brand's consistency in meeting consumer expectations and its shared values. Given the sensitivity of food products and intense market competition, building and maintaining brand trust is crucial for Cimory and the Indonesian dairy industry.

This research is crucial for building and maintaining brand strength in a competitive market. Customer brand engagement reflects the extent to which customers are emotionally and interactively engaged with a brand, which can enhance brand loyalty. High brand loyalty, in turn, contributes to a company's long-term stability and growth because loyal customers are more likely to repurchase and recommend the brand to others. Therefore, building and maintaining brand trust is a top priority. For Cimory, ensuring that products and services consistently meet customer expectations is a key to building strong brand trust, which ultimately strengthens the influence of customer brand engagement and brand loyalty on brand success in the market. Research related to variables such as customer brand engagement, brand trust, and brand loyalty has been conducted previously. Several previous studies have shown that customer brand engagement has a positive effect on brand trust (Afifah et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2019; Rather et al., 2018). Furthermore, brand trust has a positive effect on the brand (Adam et al., 2018; Chinomona, 2016; Huang, 2017). Brand trust has a positive mediating effect on customer brand engagement and brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011; Gligor et al., 2019; Kosiba et al., 2018). Brand trust also has a positive moderating effect on customer brand engagement and loyalty (e.g., Bae & Kim, 2023; Khan et al., 2019; Zaidun et al., 2020).

This study is a continuation of Zaidun et al. (2020), but with a significant difference in developing a relationship model of brand trust as a mediating and moderating variable. Furthermore, the object of this study differs from the previous study, namely the Cimory brand of milk and yogurt products. This study aims to improve understanding of how customer brand engagement can transform their engagement with a brand into sustained loyalty through building brand trust, particularly in the Indonesian market. This research is expected to contribute to marketing management theory and scholarship and also provide research for companies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive causality approach. Descriptive research is designed to obtain data that describes the characteristics of the research topic of interest. The causality design aims to analyze the relationships between variables in a study, or to determine how one variable can influence changes in another variable (Hair et al., 2019). Chin (2000) stated that the minimum sample size used by SEM-PLS is 30-100. The research questionnaire was completed online via Google Forms for data collection. The variables observed in this study included Customer Brand Engagement, Brand Trust, and Brand Loyalty.

This study used a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The alternative responses included: strongly disagree (STS), disagree (TS), neutral (N), agree (S), and strongly agree (SS). Therefore, the data from the questionnaire survey constitutes primary data, that is, data that was first recorded and obtained directly from the original source for a specific purpose. The variables studied were measured using nine statements adapted from previous research. Customer Brand Engagement was measured using nine statements adapted from Solem & Pedersen (2016) using the Physical, Emotional, and Cognitive dimensions. Brand Trust was measured using four statements adapted from Samarah et al. (2022), using Viability and Intentionality as the brand trust dimensions. Brand Loyalty was measured using seven statements adapted from Akoglu & Özbek (2022); Samarah et al. (2022) using the Word of Mouth, Reject Another, and Repeat Purchase dimensions. A total of 20 statements were measured, which can be found in Appendix 2 (operational variables) and Appendix 3 (questionnaire).

The population in this study was consumers who were familiar with and had purchased Cimory milk products and were domiciled in Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek). Data collection, processing, and analysis were conducted over a period of one month. The sampling method will use non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling technique, selecting sample elements most likely to participate in the study and provide the necessary information. The sample criteria for this study were individuals aged between 17 and 50 years (Dzulhijjah et al., 2024) and those who had purchased Cimory products within the past month. The required sample size was determined based on the theory of Hair et al. (2019), which states that the number of required samples is obtained by multiplying the number of statements in the questionnaire by 5 to 10. Therefore, this study requires $(20 \times 5) = 100$ respondents. This study resulted in a sample size of 149 respondents.

Data analysis used SEM-PLS 4.0, with two measurement models (Hair & Brunsveld, 2020). First, the Outer Model Analysis (OUT) consisted of five parameters: Convergent Validity/factor loading (>0.70), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (>0.50), Discriminant Validity, Reliability Analysis (>0.70), and Cronbach's Alpha (>0.60).

Second, the structural model measurement evaluation (INNER MODEL ANOVA) used four parameters: path coefficients, adjusted R² (R²), Stone-Geisser Value (Q²), and partial effect size (f²).

Hypothesis testing involving structural relationships between constructs will only be reliable or valid if the measurement model explains how these constructs are measured (Hair & Brunsveld, 2020). The significance test uses a critical t value (t value) for a one-sided test of 1.65 and a p value of 5% (0.05) for significance level, meaning it is said to be significant if the p-value is less than 0.05. Therefore, to conclude that the hypothesis being tested is significant at the 5% (0.05) level, the critical t value must be greater than 1.65.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis test showed that customer brand engagement has a positive effect on brand trust in Cimory products in Greater Jakarta. This is reflected in consumer confidence that Cimory always keeps its product quality promises. This trust is likely strengthened by intense customer involvement with the brand, especially in the highest dimension of customer brand engagement, where consumers stated that when they think of dairy products, their minds immediately focus on Cimory. Furthermore, the highest average calculation of customer brand engagement indicates that consumers are committed to always choosing and consuming Cimory products in the future. These findings indicate that strong engagement with a brand not only influences customers' perceptions of trust in the brand's ability to fulfill its promises but also strengthens the desire to remain loyal to the product. Thus, increasing customer brand engagement can be an effective strategy for building and maintaining long-term brand trust. In accordance with what So et al. (2016) stated, by creating interactions between customers and companies, trust can be increased. Therefore, it can be concluded that customer brand engagement influences brand trust, consistent with previous research (Rather et al., 2018; Afifah et al., 2020). Furthermore, research by Elistia & Septiani (2023) states that customer trust can increase customer engagement.

Furthermore, the second hypothesis in this study indicates that customer brand engagement has a significant positive influence on brand loyalty for Cimory products in Greater Jakarta. Brand loyalty indicates that consumers with high brand engagement are more likely to recommend Cimory products to others. Based on customer brand engagement, consumers stated that their thoughts immediately focus on Cimory whenever they think of dairy products. Furthermore, the customer brand engagement variable reveals that consumers strive to continue choosing and consuming Cimory products in the future, further strengthened by their commitment to remain loyal to this product, meaning consumers are willing to find Cimory products. These findings indicate that strong brand engagement not only fosters stable personal preferences but also drives loyal behavior, including recommendations to others and a willingness to go the extra mile to find the product. Therefore, increasing customer-brand engagement can effectively increase customer loyalty, which in turn strengthens a brand's position in a competitive market. This aligns with the statements of (Harrigan et al., 2017; Kosiba et al., 2018; Leckie et al., 2018; Ting et al., 2021) that customer-brand engagement has a direct, positive, and strong impact on brand loyalty.

Furthermore, the third hypothesis in this study indicates that brand trust has a significant positive influence on brand loyalty for Cimory milk products in Greater Jakarta. Brand loyalty indicates that consumers who have high trust in the Cimory brand are more likely to recommend others to purchase the product. This is supported by findings on the highest dimension of brand trust, where consumers strongly believe that Cimory consistently delivers on its product quality promises. Consistency in fulfilling this quality promise not only strengthens customer trust in the brand but also increases their loyalty, as evidenced by the average brand loyalty score, where consumers are willing to seek out Cimory products in other stores if they are not available at their regular store rather than switching to another brand. These findings confirm that trust built through fulfilling product quality promises is a key element in building sustainable customer loyalty. Therefore, consistently maintaining and improving product quality can be an important strategy for Cimory to maintain and increase customer loyalty. These results align with previous research by Mabkhot et al. (2017) that consumers who rely on a brand are more likely to remain loyal to that brand. Therefore, this is in line with statements from (Bernarto et al., 2020; Mabkhot et al., 2017; Samarah et al., 2022).

The fourth hypothesis test shows that brand trust plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between customer brand engagement and brand loyalty for Cimory milk products in Greater Jakarta. Brand trust is key in strengthening consumer engagement with the brand and their loyalty to the product. When consumers feel confident that Cimory consistently fulfills its promises, they are more likely to focus on this brand whenever they think of milk products, as reflected in the highest dimension of customer brand engagement. In addition, trust in the brand also increases consumers' desire to continue choosing and consuming Cimory products in the future, and encourages them to recommend the product to others. The average calculation of brand loyalty also shows that this loyalty does not only stop at personal preferences, but is also reflected in concrete actions, where consumers are willing to look for Cimory products in other stores if they are not available at their regular store. These findings confirm that trust in the brand plays a significant role in strengthening consumer engagement and loyalty, making it a critical element in marketing strategies focused on improving long-term relationships with customers. This aligns with previous research, which found that brand trust not only has a positive and significant impact on brand loyalty but also serves as a mediator in the relationship between customer brand engagement and brand loyalty, strengthening their emotional bond with the brand (Bilal et al., 2022; Dessart, 2017; Huang, 2017; Kwan Soo Shin et al., 2019; Zhang & Liu, 2017).

Finally, the fifth hypothesis test showed that brand trust, as a moderating variable, did not have a significant positive effect on the relationship between customer brand engagement and brand loyalty for Cimory milk products in Greater Jakarta. This finding suggests that consumer trust in Cimory's product quality indicates that, although consumers trust the product quality, this trust is not strong enough to moderate the relationship between consumer engagement and brand loyalty. This finding is reinforced by findings on customer brand engagement, which showed a lack of positive consumer feelings toward the Cimory brand and its products, as well as low consumer interest in actively following the latest developments and information about Cimory. In terms of brand loyalty, consumers lack enthusiasm when consuming or purchasing Cimory products, while consumers lack enthusiasm in interacting with the Cimory brand, either through products or their content. This finding indicates that although there is trust in product quality, this trust is not enough to strengthen consumer engagement and loyalty

to the Cimory brand. Thus, other, more effective strategies are needed to increase consumer engagement and loyalty. Research conducted by Elistia & Pratiwi (2023) stated that trust was not proven to be a moderating variable. This is inconsistent with previous research that stated that brand trust is very important as a moderator in the relationship between customer brand engagement and brand loyalty (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Islam et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the influence of customer brand engagement on brand loyalty by considering the role of brand trust as a mediating and moderating variable. Based on the results of data analysis, it was found that the majority of respondents were women aged 17-25 years, most of whom were students with a high preference for Cimory milk products. All constructs used in this study have met the requirements of validity and reliability, indicating that the indicators used are able to consistently and accurately measure the concepts studied. The results show that customer brand engagement has a significant positive effect on brand trust in Cimory products in Greater Jakarta, with high customer engagement strengthening their confidence in product quality. This finding is in line with previous research indicating that intense engagement can strengthen brand trust, which in turn increases brand loyalty. High engagement encourages consumers to continue choosing Cimory and recommend the product to others. Although brand trust plays a significant mediator in the relationship between customer brand engagement and brand loyalty, its role as a moderating variable does not show a significant positive effect. This indicates that consumer trust in Cimory product quality is not strong enough to moderate the relationship between their engagement and loyalty to the brand. These findings indicate the need for additional strategies to more effectively increase consumer engagement and loyalty.

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