Brand Experience, Trust Components, and Customer Loyalty: Sustainable Malaysian SME Brands Study

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Abstract

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have been competing for survival in the business arena among established organizations. Competitive foodservice business today requires a unique and lasting brand experience to capture customer loyalty. Despite that, earning customer trust is vital to ensure ongoing revenue and profit for business sustainability. Due to the significance contribution from SMEs in the service sector to the nation economy, this study will examine the relationship between brand experience, trust dimensions (i.e. intentions and reliability), and customer loyalty on sustainable SME brands in Malaysia. Data were collected from 220 customers through intercept survey method. The result from SmartPLS 2.0 analysis provides significant support for every direct path between brand experience, intentions, reliability, and brand loyalty. Meaningful insights from the result are provided for SME owner-managers at the discussion section.

Keywords: brand loyalty, brand experience, brand trust, SME brands, foodservice industry

1. Introduction

Malaysia alongside with neighboring countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam have been recognized as the driving force in the Southeast Asia foodservice industry with contribution of US$110 billion in 2011 (Euromonitor, 2012). In Malaysia, almost all of the business are Small and medium enterprises (SMEs). According to SME Corp. (2012), 99% of companies in Malaysia are SMEs which had played significance role in contributing toward the nation economy development. In particularly, most of the SMEs are concentrated in the services sector with more than 140,000 SMEs in the foodservices sector. The number signifies SMEs need to be competitive enough over their larger counterparts in order to sustain in the foodservice industry for over the years. Besides, SMEs usually depend on domestic market for survival (SME Corp., 2012). Therefore, it is important to investigate factors contributing toward SME brands sustainability.

A business without branding is just another company operating in the industry. Branding turns a company into a living entity with a better competitive edge. Several studies had shown that branding could enhance the performance of SMEs (Merrilees, Rundle-Thiele, & Lye, 2011; Reijnen, Laukkanen, Komppula, & Tuominen, 2012). Scholars such as Han and Jeong (2013) as well as Kim, Magnini, and Singal (2011) had argued that emotional benefits such as brand experience are more appealing for customers in the foodservice industry. However, the success of a brand to sustain in the industry does not only depend on branding strategy such as brand experience but also to gain customer trust. Brand trust has been argued as one of the important predictor of customer loyalty in the marketing literature (Belaid & Behi, 2011; Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; De Chernatony, 1999; Lau & Lee, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Nguyen et al., 2013; Sahin et al., 2011; Sung & Kim, 2010). According to reliable foodservice industry report, gaining customer loyalty is the main success factor for a business to sustain over time (FCSI, 2012). Therefore, this study would like to understand the role of trust in retaining customer loyalty.

The role of trust dimensions on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty has not been investigated in any empirical research from the perspective of SME brands in foodservice industry. In addition, there has been conflicting findings on their influence on customer loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias et al., 2011; Kim, Magnini, & Singal, 2011; Lin, 2010; Mohamed & Musa, 2012; Sahin, Zehir, & Kitapci, 2011; Ueacharoenkit & Cohen, 2013). This study posits that a deeper investigation on trust dimensions will provide a better insight on the experience and loyalty relationships. Moreover, it is important to examine these

relationships on SME brands because it may contribute different result as compared to global/ big brands (Berthon et al., 2008; Caloghirou et al., 2014; Upadhyay, Jahanyan, & Dan, 2011). Besides, there has been lack of studies on SME brand loyalty (Asamoah, 2014; Centeno et al., 2013; Krake, 2005; Reijonen, Laukkanen, Komppula, & Tuominen, 2012). Therefore, this study will fill this gap by developing a conceptual framework to investigate the relationships between brand experience, brand trust, and customer loyalty from the perspective of SME brands. The model builds upon the study of Delgado-Ballester and Munuera Aleman (2005) as well as Kantsperger and Kunz (2010) which studied role of trust from the perspective of its dimensions namely intentions and reliability toward customer loyalty. The finding of this study will provide a better understanding for managers of SME in creating and retaining loyal customers for their business, particularly in the foodservice sector.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty helps SME brand to sustain in the market with positive performance through cost reduction and higher profits. Loyal customer usually tends to pay more as well as spreading positive word of mouth among friends and family (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ismail & Spinelli, 2000; Lau & Lee, 1999; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). This is beneficial for business performance of SME given they highly rely on customer recommendations to get new customers (Hogarth-Scott, Watson, & Wilson, 1996). Besides, loyal customer needs little influencing effort to make purchase decision too (Blatberg & Deighton, 1996). In other word, the effectiveness of positive word of mouth will help reduce cost of SME business strategy from investment in advertisement in order to gain awareness until the purchase is made. Furthermore, such advertising investment has high risk of no success guarantee Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Apart from that, SME brands with already limited financial resources will face higher probability of being eliminated out of the market when customers did not return to make repeated purchase given the high number of SMEs business establishment in the foodservice industry mentioned above. Therefore, it is vital for SME brands to capture loyal customers to ensure ongoing revenues and profits (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Lau & Lee, 1999; Rauyruen, Miller, & Groth, 2009; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008).

Provided with the literature above, this study is interested to investigate the link between brand experience, brand trust, and brand loyalty. The following section discusses on the relationships between the constructs of the proposed model (Figure 1) and derivation of research hypotheses.
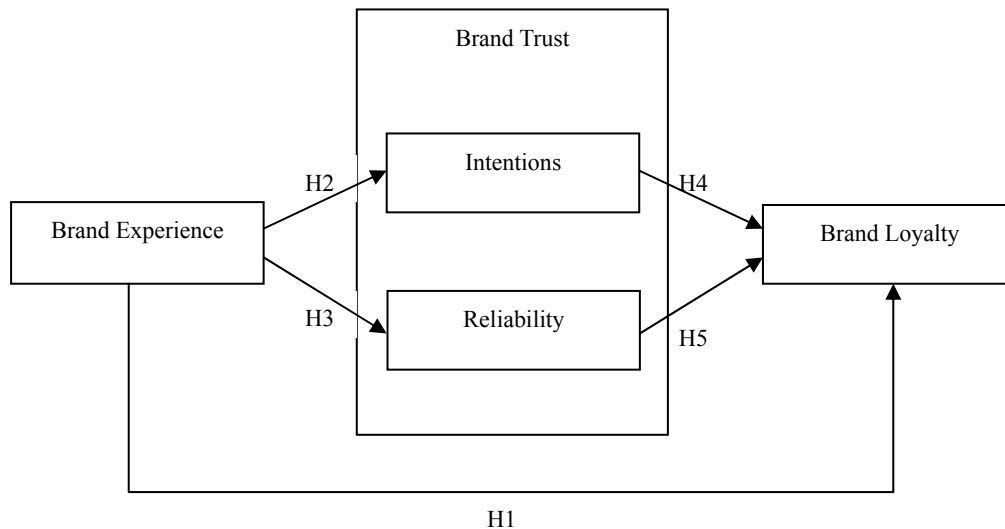

Figure 1. Proposed model

2.2 Brand Experience

Brand Experience is defined as subjective, inner responses of a consumer that can be categorized into sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral response evoked by restaurant brand related stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). In the foodservice sector, customer experience with the particular food brand outlet is crucial to determine whether they will return for future visit (Mohamed & Musa, 2012). In fact, businesses should acknowledge that customers today are looking for benefits from both utility and emotional perspective (Walter, Cleff, & Chu,

2013). Therefore, brand experience is an important success factor in order to create differentiation for a particular brand in competitive industry (e.g. foodservice industry) to retain loyal diners (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011). However, literature has reported mixed findings on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. Han and Li (2012) reported positive relationships between brand experience and brand loyalty in their study focusing on dairy products in China. Similarly, the positive relationship is further supported by Nysveen, Pedersen, and Skard (2013) in the studies focusing on telecommunication sector. Conversely, the positive notion was not supported in the studies of Iglesisas, Singh, and Batista-Foguet (2011) with varieties of consumer products in Spain. Despite the importance of brand experience has been acknowledged in the marketing literature, the current study hope to examine the relationship from the context of SME brands in the foodservice sector because the result might be different. Following past empirical studies, the same factors will exhibit different significance when tested between large organization and SMEs (Berthon et al., 2008; Caloghirou et al., 2014; Upadhyay, Jahanyan, & Dan, 2011). Hence, this study posits the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand experience directly and positively influence brand loyalty.

Next, the relationship between brand experience and trust has been empirically test and inconsistent findings have been reported. Some studies (Giantari et al., 2013; Lau & Lee, 1999; Sahin, Zehir, & Kitapci, 2011) reported positive relationships between brand experience and brand trust while other studies reported insignificant positive relationships (Lee & Kang, 2012; Ramasehan & Stein, 2014; Taleghani, Largani, & Mousavian, 2011). Despite that, the impact of brand experience on brand trust dimensions has not been investigated in any empirical research from the perspective of SME brands. Separate studies by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2005) reported that satisfaction has a positive impact on intentions and reliability. Similarly, the research finding of Kantsperger and Kunz (2010) also support the positive relationships between satisfaction on intentions and reliability. Brand experience had been reported to exert positive influence on satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009; Chinomona, 2013; Taleghani et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2013). Following this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Brand experience directly and positively influence intentions.

H3: Brand experience directly and positively influence reliability.

2.3 Brand Trust

Band trust is defined as the extent of reliability and intentions of a particular brand (Delgado et al., 2003). Reliability here refers to the consistency of the SME brand in delivering its value as promise. Meanwhile, intentions refer to the consumer belief that a particular brand will prioritize customers' welfare when uncertain situation arise (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). According to Reijonen (2010), SME rely on close relationship with customers to ensure ongoing revenues and profits. Besides, brand trust is has significance importance for SMEs in order to retain loyal customers given their small number of customers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Eggers et al., 2013; Rauyruen et al., 2009). Furthermore, researchers have made claim that loyalty stem as a result of consumer trusting a particular brand (Forgas, Moliner, Sanchez, & Palau, 2010; Lee & Back, 2010; Sahin et al., 2011; Zehir et al., 2011).

Despite the importance of brand trust on SME survival has been acknowledged in the marketing literature, this study would like investigate whether trust dimensions namely intentions and reliability exerts a positive influence on customer loyalty. Prior studies mainly investigate brand trust as a composite construct on customer loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Eggers et al., 2013; Rauyruen et al., 2009). Despite that, scholars (i.e. Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010) had argued that the dimensions of trust namely intentions and reliability exhibit different influences on customer loyalty. In addition, there is also conflicting result of trust dimensions on customer loyalty. Some studies have found positive effect of brand trust on customer loyalty (Han & Jeong, 2013; Lee & Back, 2010; Lee & Kang, 2012; Sahin et al., 2011; Ueacharoenkit, 2012). Meanwhile, other studies fail to discover significance positive influence of brand trust on customer loyalty (Anabila et al., 2012; Haghihi et al., 2012). This sparks our interest to investigate whether brand trust components namely intentions and reliability influences customer loyalty positively. In addition, both intentions and reliability had been reported to exert positive influence on customer loyalty (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). Following the argument above, the current study proposes that intentions and reliability will have positive influence on customer loyalty.

H4: Intentions directly and positively influence brand loyalty.

H5: Reliability directly and positively influence brand loyalty.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Settings and Subjects

Survey was carried out solely by the researcher himself with 214 customers who had dined in the particular local established SME brands restaurants. Two brands are chosen from the list of companies given at SME Corp. Malaysia (SME Corp., 2014) for the purpose of this study. These brand have been recognized with SMEs Bestbrand Awards in recognition for their successful branding (The BrandLaureate, 2014) for its success in branding as well as sustaining for more than 10 years in Malaysia. The selection of SME brand for this study follows the method of prior studies in selecting brand for loyalty studies where the brand are mainly established brands of at least 10 years in the industry (Brakus et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Lin, 2010; Lin & Huang, 2012; Mengxia, 2007; Nam et al., 2011; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Meanwhile, the survey was carried out in several locations during a five weeks period from early November to early December in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

The sampling procedure used in this study is multistage area probability sampling as suggested by Sudman (1980). In the first step, Peninsular Malaysia is clustered into four region namely Central, East Coast, Northern, and Southern region (Ministry of Tourism and Culture, 2014). The common goal of a research is to manually collect data that are representative of a population to be studied (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001; Cavana et al., 2001; Hau & Marsh, 2004; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Therefore, central region is chosen due to highest number of population which is 7,209,175 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). In the second step, the central region is clustered into ten districts according to its local authorities namely Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Putrajaya Corporation, Selayang Municipal Council, Ampang Jaya Municipal Council, Kajang Municipal Council, Klang Municipal Council, Petaling Jaya City Council, Subang Jaya City Council, Shah Alam City Council, and Sepang Municipal Council. These ten districts consisting majority of the population within central region and is also known as Greater Kuala Lumpur or Klang Valley. Klang Valley is the largest metropolitan in Malaysia with approximately 6 million populations and contributed RM263 billion to Gross National Incomes (GNI) in year 2010 (Economic Transformation Programme, 2012; Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). Next, each SME brands were allocated equally and randomly among the ten district areas. One restaurant branch were selected randomly on each districts based on business volume as suggested by outlet manager. This research used systematic sampling to select the respondents in which every first of fifth diners were approached upon exiting the restaurant after paying their bill. The questionnaires were distributed on random weekdays and weekends during lunch (12pm-3pm) and dinner time (6pm-9pm).

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is used to analyze data. Meanwhile, minimum sample size for PLS-SEM depends on the desired 80 percent statistical power in social science studies (Cohen, 1988; Gefen, Rigdon, & Straub, 2011). Therefore, power analysis with G*Power software suggested by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2014) recommend that at least 68 respondents needed to achieved significance level of 0.05 and statistical power of 80 percent for hypothesis testing. Despite scholars argue that SME required large sample size, PLS-SEM work well with smaller sample size even for a complex model as compared to CB-SEM which required at least 200 observation to avoid non-convergence and improper solutions (Boomsma & Hoogland, 2001, p. 8; Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwiesier, 2014, p. 108). The final sample size is expanded to 210 respondents due to the higher non-response rate associated with intercept survey method used in this study (Gates & Solomon, 1982; p. 46; Hornik & Ellis, 1988, p. 539; Zikmund et al., 2009, p. 213).

3.2 Measurement

This study adapted existing scales for all constructs. Brand experience scales were measured using the 12 items developed by Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009). Brakus et al. (2009) identified brand experience in terms of four dimensions: sensory (3 items), affective (3 items), intellectual (3 items), and behavioral (3 items). Brand Trust scales for both intentions and reliability were adapted from items developed by (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). In particular, intentions scales were measured using the 4 items developed by (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003) while reliability scales were measured using the 4 items developed by (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Brand loyalty scales were adapted from items developed by Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001), Ismail & Spinelli (2000), Lau & Lee (1999), Zhang & Bloemer (2008). All the statements were measured with six-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree). An even number response will encourage respondent to answer based on content of the questions and reduce bias in answering the middle or neutral point (Garland, 1991). Besides, Asian respondents have higher tendency to answer the middle point than the Western (Mitchell, 1999; Si & Cullen, 1998). There is also report that even number response scale has higher validity and reliability as compared to uneven number of response scale (Birkett, 1986; Coelho & Esteves, 2007). Therefore, the use of

six-point Likert scale is justified. In order to minimize translation issues, the translation of questionnaire were conducted as recommended by Brislin (1970). The final survey questionnaire were in both English and Malay version to suit the respondent understanding. Pilot study was conducted among 30 respondents of the particular SME brand in Penang. The amount of respondents for pilot study follows the recommendation of Malhotra et al. (2002). Pilot study result suggests that the survey questionnaires are highly reliable with all the Cronbach's alpha values were greater than .90 (Nunnally, 1978).

3.3 Data Analysis Technique

This study used the Partial Least Squares (PLS) version 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005) as a technique to analyze the data for hypothesis testing. In addition, we used the bootstrapping method of 500 resamples to determine the significance level for loadings and path coefficients (Chin, 1998).

4. Analysis

4.1 Profile of Respondents

Table1. Respondent profile

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	61	29
Female	153	72
Age		
< 21	9	4
21-30	79	37
31-40	79	37
41-50	26	12
>50	21	10
Education		
Primary school	6	3
Secondary school	37	17
College (Certificate/ Diploma/ Advanced Diploma)	69	32
Bachelor degree	89	42
Postgraduate degree	13	6
Occupation		
Student	19	9
Employee	154	72
Self-employed	19	9
Unemployed/ Housewife	22	10

A total of 214 questionnaires were received at the end of data collection process. Despite that, the number of final survey is sufficient for data analysis provided it exceeds the minimum of 68 observations to achieve significance level of 0.05 and statistical power of 80 percent for hypothesis testing. There was no missing value in all the usable questionnaires. This may be due to the effort of the researcher informing the respondent upon returning the questionnaire that a free gift will be given as a courtesy participating in this study. Meanwhile, the researcher will check whether all the questions are answered correctly before a free pen is given to the respondent. If there is any unanswered question identified, the researcher kindly asked the respondent to answer it immediately. Therefore, the number of questionnaire is sufficient to proceed for data analysis given it has achieved the minimum sample observations required for this study to achieved significance level of 0.05 and statistical power of 80 percent for hypothesis testing. The profiles of respondents are analyzed according to gender, age, education, and occupation as summarized in Table 1. All the respondents were Malaysian. From the

total of 214 respondents, a total of 153 (72 percent) were female while 61 (29 percent) were male. This result is also consistent with other restaurant survey studies (Chang, 2013; Kim et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2009). One plausible reason for female dominant responses is due to the higher likelihood of female to answer survey as compared to men (Gannon et al., 1971; Green, 1996). The age group of 21-30 (37 percent) and 31-40 (37 percent) accounted for the biggest portion for the sample meanwhile age group less than 21 years (4 percent) are the smallest portion of the sample. Only 3 percent studied until primary education. Most of the respondents are working employees (72 percent).

4.2 Non Response Bias

Non-response bias was tested with extrapolation method which assumes who answered in an unprepared condition (answering late or after several reminders) are similar to non-respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). Therefore, an independent t-test will be used to test whether mean score differ between early and late respondents. The early 50 responses were compared with the last 50 responses for mean difference. The number and equal size of responses for comparison is meet the minimum 30 responses and to avoid issues on statistical power reduction (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001). The result of shows the mean for every variable exceed the 0.05 significance level for both group indicating there is no mean difference for both groups (Pallant, 2010). Therefore, the issue of non-response bias did not occur in this study.

4.3 Measurement Model

A two-step approach was used in this study for data analysis (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Firstly, convergent validity and reliability were evaluated as shown in Table 2. In order to achieve convergent validity, loadings must be greater than 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), composite reliability must be greater than 0.7 (Gefen et al., 2000), and the average variance extracted (AVE) must be greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Lacker, 1981). As shown in Table 2, the measures achieve sufficient convergent validity and reliability because it achieves the criterion stated above.

Next, discriminant validity is evaluated as shown in Table 3. In order to achieve discriminant validity, the average variance shared between each construct and its measures should be greater than the variance shared between the construct and other constructs (Fornell & Cha, 1994; Fornell & Lacker, 1981). As shown in Table 3, the measures achieve sufficient discriminant validity because the correlation values for each constructs (included row and column) is lower than the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) by the indicators measuring that construct which is displayed on the diagonal. Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2014) suggest that the loadings of measurement items should be higher than the cross loadings to achieve sufficient discriminant validity. As shown in Table 4, the loadings of all constructs satisfy this criterion. Thus, we can conclude that discriminant validity is achieved.

Table 2. Result of measurement model

Model construct	Measurement item	Loading	CR[a]	AVE[b]
Brand experience	Brand experience 1	0.786	0.942	0.595
	Brand experience 2	0.797		
	Brand experience 3	0.817		
	Brand experience 4	0.805		
	Brand experience 5	0.765		
	Brand experience 6	0.781		
	Brand experience 7	0.751		
	Brand experience 8	0.707		
	Brand experience 9	0.748		
	Brand experience 10	0.771		
	Brand experience 12	0.749		
Brand loyalty	Brand loyalty 1	0.811	0.941	0.574
	Brand loyalty 2	0.803		
	Brand loyalty 3	0.803		
	Brand loyalty 4	0.738		
	Brand loyalty 5	0.749		
	Brand loyalty 6	0.629		

Model construct	Measurement item	Loading	CR[a]	AVE[b]
	Brand loyalty 7	0.822		
	Brand loyalty 8	0.828		
	Brand loyalty 9	0.729		
	Brand loyalty 10	0.597		
	Brand loyalty 11	0.743		
	Brand loyalty 12	0.801		
Intentions	Intentions 1	0.837	0.908	0.713
	Intentions 2	0.852		
	Intentions 3	0.788		
	Intentions 4	0.897		
Reliability	Reliability 1	0.873	0.930	0.768
	Reliability 2	0.877		
	Reliability 3	0.850		
	Reliability 4	0.903		

Note: items brand experience 11 was deleted due to loadings not greater than 0.50; [a]Composite Reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}; [b]Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}

Table 3. Discriminant validity of constructs

Constructs	Brand experience	Brand loyalty	Intentions	Reliability
Brand experience	**0.771**			
Brand loyalty	0.726	**0.758**		
Intentions	0.689	0.684	**0.844**	
Reliability	0.743	0.717	0.801	**0.876**

Note: Value on the diagonals represents square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) while the other entries represent the correlations value.

Table 4. Cross loadings of constructs

	Brand experience	Brand loyalty	Intentions	Reliability
Brand experience 1	**0.786**	0.607	0.561	0.597
Brand experience 2	**0.797**	0.559	0.514	0.625
Brand experience 3	**0.817**	0.548	0.528	0.600
Brand experience 4	**0.805**	0.570	0.616	0.656
Brand experience 5	**0.765**	0.525	0.579	0.628
Brand experience 6	**0.781**	0.518	0.534	0.554
Brand experience 7	**0.751**	0.616	0.454	0.506
Brand experience 8	**0.707**	0.485	0.403	0.456
Brand experience 9	**0.748**	0.532	0.475	0.499
Brand experience 10	**0.771**	0.638	0.604	0.600
Brand experience 12	**0.749**	0.544	0.537	0.543
Brand loyalty 1	0.649	**0.811**	0.586	0.642
Brand loyalty 2	0.497	**0.803**	0.487	0.496
Brand loyalty 3	0.496	**0.803**	0.469	0.487
Brand loyalty 4	0.458	**0.738**	0.424	0.446
Brand loyalty 5	0.476	**0.749**	0.487	0.490
Brand loyalty 6	0.473	**0.629**	0.448	0.397

	Brand experience	Brand loyalty	Intentions	Reliability
Brand loyalty 7	0.652	**0.822**	0.604	0.639
Brand loyalty 8	0.638	**0.828**	0.610	0.635
Brand loyalty 9	0.566	**0.729**	0.559	0.572
Brand loyalty 10	0.397	**0.597**	0.379	0.369
Brand loyalty 11	0.559	**0.743**	0.505	0.567
Brand loyalty 12	0.631	**0.801**	0.576	0.651
Intentions 1	0.598	0.539	**0.837**	0.668
Intentions 2	0.578	0.585	**0.852**	0.730
Intentions 3	0.473	0.491	**0.788**	0.553
Intentions 4	0.659	0.676	**0.897**	0.736
Reliability 1	0.632	0.610	0.671	**0.873**
Reliability 2	0.637	0.617	0.682	**0.877**
Reliability 3	0.630	0.604	0.686	**0.850**
Reliability 4	0.701	0.679	0.765	**0.903**

4.4 Structural Model

Next, the structural model was tested. Table 5 and Figure 2 portrayed the results of structural model for this study. Table 5 displayed all the hypotheses tested for this study. Firstly, brand experience ($\beta = 0.388$, $p < 0.01$) is positively related to brand loyalty. Therefore, H1 is supported. Secondly, brand experience ($\beta = 0.689$, $p < 0.01$) is positively related to intentions. Therefore, H2 is supported. Next, brand experience ($\beta = 0.743$, $p < 0.01$) is a significant predictor of reliability. Hence, H3 is accepted. Intentions ($\beta = 0.205$, $p < 0.01$) is not a significant predictor of brand loyalty. Thus, H4 is accepted. Lastly, reliability ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.01$) also exerts positive influence on brand loyalty. The evidence provides sufficient support for H5.

Figure 2 exhibited both Q^2 values and R^2 values for the respective endogenous variables. The R^2 values are 0.475, 0.552 and 0.612 respectively which suggest that brand experience can explain 47.5 percent on intentions and 57.9 percent on reliability while the modeled variables can explain 61.2 percent on brand loyalty. Besides, the R^2 values respectively can be described as moderate (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarsedt, 2014; Henseler et al., 2009). In addition, the Q^2 values are 0.336 for intentions, 0.421 for reliability, and 0.336 for brand loyalty respectively which suggest that the model has predictive relevance on the endogenous construct (Fornell & Cha, 1994; Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwiesier, 2014).
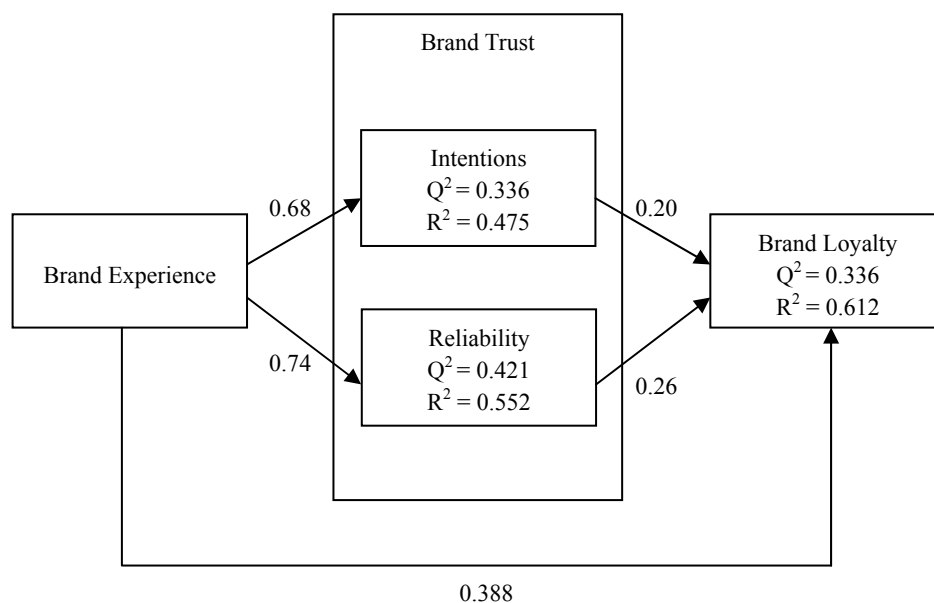

Figure 2. Results of the structural model analysis

Table 5. Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-value	Supported
H1	Brand experience → Brand Loyalty	0.388	0.075	5.168**	Yes
H2	Brand experience → Intentions	0.689	0.036	19.393**	Yes
H3	Brand experience → Reliability	0.743	0.033	22.315**	Yes
H4	Intentions → Brand loyalty	0.205	0.076	2.711**	Yes
H5	Reliability → Brand loyalty	0.265	0.080	3.304**	Yes

Note: *$p < 0.05$ (1.645); **$p < 0.01$ (2.33) one tail

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test whether positive relationship exists between brand experience, brand trust components, and brand loyalty. Result of this study found that brand experience have direct positive relationship on brand loyalty. This empirical evidence supports the findings in the literature from different research context that brand experience has positive effect on loyalty (Han & Li, 2012; Nysveen, Pedersen, & Skard, 2013). The result indicates that brand experience is one of the important factors in retaining loyal customer for the sustainable SME brand in the foodservice sector. One plausible reason is due to the difficulty for competitor to replicate the unique intangible aspect of brand experience. This is consistent with Aaker (1989) suggesting that intangible aspect of branding is a powerful competitive tool for business sustainability. Besides, customer experience with the particular food brand outlet is crucial to determine whether they will return for future visit (Mohamed & Musa, 2012).

Meanwhile, this study also found that both intentions and reliability components of trust is highly influenced by brand experience. This study is the first to examine the relationships between brand experience and trust components. Studies had reported positive influence of satisfaction on both intentions and reliability trust components (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera Aleman, 2005; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). One plausible reason to support such findings is the positive relationship found in past studies on the relationship between brand experience and satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009; Chinomona, 2013; Taleghani et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2013). Besides, such findings are also consistent with researches in other context that found positive influence of brand experience on composite trust (Giantari et al., 2013; Lau & Lee, 1999; Sahin, Zehir, and Kitapci, 2011). The findings also indicate that brand experience plays a significant role in earning consumer trust that the SME brand will prioritize their welfare and deliver consistency in their offerings. According to Delgado-Ballester and Munuera Aleman (2005), customer perception of the good intentions and reliability in a particular brand derived from their past encounters. Therefore, positive brand experience will ensure trusting relationships between the brand and customers.

Lastly, the positive relationships between intentions and reliability component of trust are supported in this study. The finding is consistent with studies of Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2005) as well as Kantsperger and Kunz (2010) which they reported both intentions and reliability exert positive influence on customer loyalty. Reliability in the foodservice industry is highly related to fulfilling the promise made via promotions advertised. A good example here is when customer received their meal in the same portion as shown in the menu or advertisement. This ethical branding strategy will earn customer trust through the good intentions of a particular brand in making promotion honestly by excluding marketing gimmicks to deceive customers into making purchase for the sake of earning profits only. Besides, customer will also perceive the brand as reliable in a way it will deliver the value as promised. Therefore, branding strategy and advertising should be utilized to strengthen the claim made by the particular brand to strengthen perception of customers regarding the intentions and reliability of the brand (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010).

6. Implications

The findings of this study may enhance the knowledge of SME owner-manager regarding the relationships between brand experience, brand trust components, and brand loyalty. Firstly, brand experience does exert positive influence on brand loyalty. Owner-manager of SMEs should start to see brand experience as a powerful tool to create a differentiation among competitors in the industry. Owner-manager should consider making the best out of the dining experience to increase customer satisfaction. One of the simplest ways is to start with an attractive and conducive physical environment for customer to dine in. The matching environment will enable customers to happily enjoy their visit prior, during, and after their meal. This positive emotional brand

experience will encourage customer to make a return in the future and spread positive recommendations among friends and family (Morrison & Crane, 2007).

Secondly, brand experience does exert positive influence on intentions and reliability components of trust. SME owner-manager should create an experience intended for the business to capture both component of trust among their customers. Experience can be created directly and indirectly among brand stimulus (Brakus et al., 2009). Apart of dining in experience, owner-managers of SME might consider a take-away experience. This might be something special among the customers who would like to buy home their meal. One may implement a strict take-away policy such as customers are not allowed to order for take-away food except the leftover food ordered. Such experience will influence the business negatively and positively. On the positive side, customers will feel the unique experience from the business that tried to provide them consistent quality meal of dining in upon served. On the other hand, some customers may be annoyed by such rigid policy. Besides, Walter, Cleff and Chu (2013) claimed that customers today are looking for benefits from both utility and emotional perspective. The example here shows the commitment of the particular brand outlet in delivering good intentions by prioritizing customer in their strict take-away policy; fearing that the take-away meal may have a poorer quality than the dine in meal. Besides, it also shows that customer can rely on the brand consistency in delivering quality food.

Lastly, the intentions and reliability of trust also positively influence customer loyalty. SME owner-manager should emphasize on the consistency in delivering their promise made to customers. According to Kantsperger and Kunz (2010), trust is earned from the customers after they encounter the so called moment of truth. Meanwhile, intentions in the foodservice industry are related to the good intentions of the particular brand. A good example here is the unfair treatment by the waiter or waitress which responded quickly for the food order made by a large group of family as compared to a small group of couple arriving earlier in the restaurant. Here, the particular brand employees had shown example of prioritizing their profits rather than their customers by treating all of them fairly. The intentions component of trust is derived when customer felt satisfied with the way they being treated (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). As such, customer who are satisfied and felt being valued as a result of a fair treatment will exhibit loyalty toward the particular brand.

7. Limitation and Future Research

Although the current study provides interesting findings on the relationships between brand experience, brand trust components, and brand loyalty, it has several limitations. Firstly, findings are limited to the foodservice sector among SME brands only since the result of this study is derived from data from the particular Malaysian SME brand in the foodservice sector. The result may be different if data were collected from other successful SME brand such ABX, G-Force and Infinity Logstic in the logistic industry (The BrandLaureate, 2014). Future studies should consider studying SME brand in other industry to further validate our findings. Besides, literatures had indicated there is dearth of branding studies in the context of SME brand in comparison to global/ big brand (Agostini et al., 2014; Asamoah, 2014; Reijonen, Laukkanen, Komppula, & Tuominen, 2012; Spence & Essousi, 2010). Hence, we strongly urge more researches on other SME brands to contribute on the SME branding literature. Secondly, the systematic sampling method had resulted in a skewed dominant female response over male respondents. Perhaps a quota sampling of equal number of male and female respondents might provide different outcome for the model tested in this study. Thirdly, this study chose intercepts every first of fifth respondents upon exiting the restaurant because outlet manager prohibited survey in their outlets. This method resulted in a higher non-response rate. Future studies may try to conduct the drop and collect method to gain more response in order to further validate the findings. Lastly, there is still much to discover from the trust component on other branding variables to enhancing our knowledge on branding. It would be interesting to improved the current model with inclusion of other variables such brand image and brand affect to study their relationships on both trust components and customer loyalty.

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