The Determinant of Automotive Brand Loyalty: A Case of Local Brands

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ABSTRACT: This study purposes to discover the important factors that impact loyalty to local brands by investigating the bond between brand experience (BE), brand satisfaction, brand trust (BT), and brand image (BI), on brand loyalty (BL) of local automotive brands in Malaysia. Partial Least Squares and Smart PLS 3 was used in the data analysis. finding indicated a positive and significant influence between BE and BS, BE and BT, BI and BS, BI and BT, BS and BL, BT and BL. In contrast, no significant influence found between BE and BL, and BI and BL. The findings also contribute to our understanding of the local brand loyalty marketing phenomenon and inspire practice in the design of meaningful brand experiences in automotive brands.

Key words: brand satisfaction, brand trust, brand image, brand loyalty, brand experience
1- Introduction
The main concern of companies is gaining a higher market share, regardless of their nature of business (Ahmad, Rehman, Hunjra, & Naqvi, 2011). Also, the competition has risen tremendously with many brands and products coming into the market. Because of fierce competition in the markets, volatile economies and constant changes in the market segment, businesses have adopted various strategies to meet client satisfaction and raise consumer loyalty and have therefore tried to improve business growth and profitability (Imandoust, Honameh, & Fahimifard, 2011). Brands are relevant to marketing success as strong brands tend to generate the highest revenue (David, 1991). Branding gives companies a chance to capture and attract loyal consumers (Keller, 2005), which could provide some degree of protection from competitions (Wang, 2016). Furthermore, a strong brand represents a type of insurance during periods of recession when loyal customers are more likely to stay with the brand (Miller and Muir, 2005).

BL bears important advantages for scholars and marketers because it signifies the strength of businesses (Sohail, Hasan, & Sohail, 2020). Although BL has been a fundamental research concern amidst marketing scholars for decades, it still draws a lot of attention as a consequence of relationship marketing (Phong, Nga, Hanh, & Minh, 2020). The cost of gaining new consumer is much higher than the value of holding current customer (Ruzeviciute and Kamleitner, 2017). Moreover, the most significant prospect of advertising a brand or company is said to be loyal customers who suggest it to family, acquaintances and other potential customers (Schultz, 2005). Researchers claim that the best approach local firms can take is to adjust their local brands to acknowledge the national market’s specific desires (Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011). This indicates that local brands must be more flexible than imported brands to potentially meet the needs of local consumers by offering them unique experiences and satisfaction. Manufacturing must improve the quality of cars made and create a unique physical picture of the automobile to attract prospective customers. Previous research has shown that many buyers are attracted to the originator product when it can satisfy their needs and wants (Berger, Ratchford, & Haines Jr, 1994). In the meantime, in the marketing perspective, in order to focus on customers’ needs an understanding of customer behaviour is required (Berkman, Lindquist, & Sirgy, 1997).

local companies have attempted their best to create a favourite and popular brand for their respective products, Malaysian consumers still value foreign brands more, hinting at the lack of success of local firms in offering a delightful and greatly satisfying experience to the consumers. Which is why in marketing literature, experience of brand has attracted much attention (Kuehn, 2017). According to Al-shami, Izaidin, Nurulizwa, and Rashid (2012), Malaysian automotive industries face major challenges, and rapid change, the core of these challenges lies in customer behaviour, foreign competition, and the increasingly saturated market. Such industries are therefore willing to gain new technology and knowledge in order to advance their capacity and maintain profitability while improving their role in the global marketplace. Nasir and Azura (2004) recommended that Malaysian automobile industries need to focus on image because it’s important in influencing satisfaction of the customer. The important starting point for companies to develop strong brands is by remembering that every customer contact is an opportunity to build a connection because the decision to buy a car is made both emotionally and rationally (Hanna and Kuhnert, 2014).

In view of the intensified market competition in the Malaysian automotive industries due to the
Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA), the automotive firms in Malaysia have greatly focused on customer value to growth the level of satisfaction among customers in the formation of BL. Based on past literature, a gap can be established between satisfaction/trust and BL since building brand satisfaction and brand trust alone does not fully explain BL towards local automotive brands. However, other known BL precedents i.e. BI (Sornsaruht and Sawmong, 2017; Sze and Hamid, 2012), and BE, are required to be integrated with satisfaction, and trust to develop a BL model. This study addresses this gap in the context of Malaysian automotive local industries. Although local companies have attempted their best to create a favourite and popular brand for their respective products, Malaysian consumers still value foreign brands more, hinting at the lack of success of local firms in offering delightful and greatly satisfying experience to the consumers. This is why in marketing literature, experience of brand has attracted much attention (Das, Agarwal, Malhotra, & Varshneya, 2019; Iglesias, Markovic, & Rialp, 2019). It is essential for marketing professionals to recognize how BE has an impact on marketing strategies for their products and services (Adeola, Hinson, & Evans, 2020; Mathew and Thomas, 2018). Hence, this research tries to consider BE in the research model to achieve better explanatory power.

According to "Malaysia Car Production" 2019) Car production in Malaysia dropped from 45748 units in July 2019 to 44363 units in August as shown in Figure 1, this means lower demand for Malaysian cars.

In addition, JD Power (2018) indicated that, among the nine brands included in the survey, international brands came first, and the local brands Perodua and Proton were below the industrial average as shown in Figure 2.
Malaysia is known as a multi-ethnic country containing of Malays, Chinese, and Indians, a difference in consumer behaviour exists, as emphasised by Wong and Mo (2013). Moreover, as a country with diverse cultures and beliefs, Malaysia provides an exceptional opportunity to conduct research on brand loyalty (Rezaei, Amin, & Khairuzzaman, 2014). An important note is that consumers in Malaysia pick imported car brands (Ahmad et al., 2017). Automotive industry in Malaysia ranked 3rd largest vehicle manufacturer in ASEAN and 23rd largest car factory in the world with a production of 513,445 units in 2016 (Lotfian, 2017). The current research therefore provides a better understanding of the link between BE, BT, BS and BL across Malaysian customers. The multicultural aspect of the Malaysian context aids in stretching the data found in this work also extends to other countries in the region. The result of the research provides an opportunity for Malaysian car makers to improve the brand's quality.

1. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Loyalty (BL)
BL means that clients have a good posture towards a particular brand more than competing brands. In addition, clienteles who are loyal to brands are more willing to pay more to get the brand because they observe the unique value of the brand that is not available in other competing brands (Oliver, 1993).

Shugan (2005) maintained that BL has a strong positive impact on company profitability. Hence, it is of the interest to both brand marketers and researchers to investigate the antecedents of BL (Hyun and Wansoo, 2011). Besides, BL refers to a situation when a buyer is averse to switching from a brand a consumer already trusts and knows. Such loyalty is reflected in repurchase or preference toward the brand or other positive conducts like word-of-mouth patronage. As loyal consumers are less susceptible to changes in prices, they are generally willing to pay more money in order to get their preferred brand (raj, choudhary, & Kalai, 2008) due to the expectancy of some distinctive value in the brand that is lacking in others (Reichheld and Teal, 2001). Previous studies concluded that the essence of brand equity is BL (David, 1991), and, hence, the success of business. BL was first suggested by Day (1969) as consisting of repurchase patronage, which is provoked by a strong internal disposition. Later, it found support from other researchers (Taehyun and Lee, 2011). BL is the intention to buy a product or brand and encourage other customers to do so (Lau and Lee, 1999).

2.2 Brand Experience (BE)
BE is a factor purported to affect BL, which is deemed in the marketing literature an important aspect for building, creating, and maintaining a relationship (Sahin, Zehir, & Kitapçi, 2011). Lately, BE has attracted a lot of attention (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). It is essential for marketing professionals to recognize how BE affects marketing strategies for their products and services. When a consumer uses a brand to seek for details about a brand, talk about a brand with others, events, and promotions, meaning that BE is created (Muk, Chung, & Kim, 2015).

BE is defined as “subjective, internal (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of brand design and identity, packaging, communications and environments” (Brakus et al., 2009). BE is considered a set of the interrelationship between a brand and a customer or the organization (Schmitt, Zarantonello, & Brakus, 2009). Brakus et al. (2009) proposed four dimensions of BE. These include affective, sensory, intellectual, and behavioural. According to Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010), a sensory dimension is “visual, gustative, auditory, olfactory, and tactile stimulations..."
provided by a brand”. The second one is affective dimension; it means that brands trigger emotions or sentiments Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) stated that affective feelings are created by the brands and their emotional connection with the customers. The third one is intellectual; it refers to the brands' ability to make customer think or feel curious. The last one is behavioural, which means that when a consumer uses a brand, it makes him or her physically active (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010).

Cai and Hobson (2004) mentioned that BE is crucial for the overall brand development and loyalty. BE is likely to affect satisfaction and consequence affect future BL. For marketers, this means encouraging consumers to introduce the brand to other people and discouraging them from buying an alternative brand (Reichheld, 1996). According to several scholars, BE is stored in a customer memory, thus, leading to satisfaction and loyalty (Cleff, Walter, & Xie, 2018).

2.3 Brand Image (BI)
Keller (1993) described BI as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer’s memory.” As BI describes the opinions and feelings of consumers towards the brand (Faircloth, 2005), it is unique from one brand to another (Faircloth, 2005). BI represents the emphasis of a customer-based approach. As BI reflects the overall impression of a customer on a particular brand through the emotional perceptions or customer's reasoned (Aaker David, 2011). When the customers' shop, the first impression they have is towards some specific products or brands, because that brand or product may attract them or the image of that brand may enter their minds, therefore; BI is an important factor in manipulating consumers’ behaviour. Naturally, consumers look for the things that attract them. Brands that possess a good image affect consumers’ behaviour. In establishing a brand, developing a BI is the best ways to get customers to interact and communicate with companies so that the BL will begin to flourish (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008). Past research found the correlation between BI and BL was significant (Kim, Choe, & Petrick, 2018) while others did not (Roy and Chakraborti, 2015).

2.4 Brand Satisfaction
Satisfaction is portrayed as “the consumer’s reaction to the assessment of the anticipated distinction between former expectations and actual execution of the product as anticipated after its consumption” (Al-Hawary, 2013). According to numerous scholars, Huang, Lee, and Chen (2019); Youl and John (2010) BS affects the loyalty of the brand. If the consumer is happy with the brand they will possibly buy the brand in the future (Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011). Differed is that customer satisfaction after the last transaction is a general emotion of customer reaction to the overall BE. Satisfaction constricts future purchase pattern, and it increases the desire for the product or service (Han, Kim, Lee, & Song, 2018).

2.5 Brand Trust (BT)
Research has exposed that trust is significant to the progression of BL (Lee and Fenich, 2018). The assumption of loyalty is the continuous procedure of retaining and enduring a profitable and important connection that has been built by trust (Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı, & Özşahin, 2011). Numerous scholars in relationship marketing (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) accentuated that BT is one of the major elements of BL. Numerous researchers argued that trust reinforces loyalty and generally speaking loyal customers will be more loyal to that brand (Chiou and Shen, 2006). Particularly, trust is significant in forming powerful consumer brand relationships (Fournier and Mick, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

3. Research Model
This research focuses primarily on the key determinants of BL. Figure 3 indicated the study model for this study, displaying the BE, BI, and BS on BL. The social exchange theory is an important theory that explains the interaction between customers and products as well as their impact on outcomes; consumers who are satisfied with the brands or products that the company provides will feel obligated to reciprocate. For example, by increasing their loyalty to the brand (Blau, 1964; Chiu-Han and Sejin2011).

![Research model of the present study](image)

4. Method
The target population in this research was the hypermarket consumers in Kedah, Perlis, and Penang, who were within the age group of at least 18 years old and lived in Kedah, Perlis and Penang. The information was compiled at various times of the day, which were morning, noon, and after sunset. The first part was from 10 am–3 pm, while the second part was 3 pm–8 pm, on distinct days like weekdays and weekends (Sudman, 1980).

4.1 Measurements and Data Analysis
BE was assessed by utilizing 12 items adapted from Brakus et al. (2009), BI was assessed utilizing six items adapted from (Low and Lamb Jr, 2000). BS nine items adapted from (Ganesan, 1994). To assess brand loyalty, a 16 item adapted from Harris and Goode (2004). Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM), applying SmartPLS 3.0 to analyse the data (Ringle, Wende, and Becker (2015).

5. Findings
Validity and reliability of the variables by assessment of measurement model (outer model), it is necessary to examine both convergent and discriminant validity (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014), as demonstrated Table 1.
### Table 1. Validity and reliability test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Loadings</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>CR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE-Sensory</td>
<td>BE1</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BE2</td>
<td>0.899</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BE-Affective</td>
<td>BE4</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.845</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BE6</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BE-Behavioral</td>
<td>BE7</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BE8</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE-Intellectual</td>
<td>BE10</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td>0.770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BE12</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand image</td>
<td>IMAGE1</td>
<td>0.833</td>
<td>0.636</td>
<td>0.873</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMAGE2</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMAGE3</td>
<td>0.830</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMAGE5</td>
<td>0.650</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>BL1</td>
<td>0.757</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BL2</td>
<td>0.764</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL4</td>
<td>0.815</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL7</td>
<td>0.784</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL8</td>
<td>0.828</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL9</td>
<td>0.822</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BL12</td>
<td>0.758</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL13</td>
<td>0.870</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL14</td>
<td>0.884</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL15</td>
<td>0.838</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BL16</td>
<td>0.833</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Satisfaction</td>
<td>BS1</td>
<td>0.846</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BS2</td>
<td>0.886</td>
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<td>BS3</td>
<td>0.878</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BS4</td>
<td>0.875</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BS5</td>
<td>0.871</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BS7</td>
<td>0.875</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BS8</td>
<td>0.834</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BS9</td>
<td>0.824</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Trust</td>
<td>BT1</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BT3</td>
<td>0.828</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BT6</td>
<td>0.809</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BT7</td>
<td>0.811</td>
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Note: AVE= variance accounted for, CR= Composite reliability
As displayed in Table 1, the fit indices showed the measurement model’s convergent validity is high. The convergent validity of the reflective measurement model indicators was assessed utilizing (AVE) as advised by (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity was determining by inspecting (AVE) each latent construct. Discriminant validity was also inspected by the predicted interaction between the variance extracted and the variables. The (AVE) of greater than 0.50 determines that the validity of the individual variables is significant. Each single arrangement matched this preventative test of discriminant validity, stating that every arrangement varied statistically from the others, just as shown in Table 1. Hence, just like Table 1 states; the AVE values had a range across 0.628 and 0.802, proposing decent values.

5.2 Assessment discriminant Validity
The extent of the discriminant validity suggests that a specific latent construct varies from the other (Duarte and Raposo, 2010). AVE and discriminant validity was established through a comparison between the squared engagement of the binary construct with the AVEs of every construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Using AVE with a score not less than 0.50 in order to achieve convergent validity. As indicated in Table 2 which demonstrates that the correlations among the square root of the average variances is lower than the latent constructs eliminated suggesting clearly indicates that no discriminant validity issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Discriminant validity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE-A</td>
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<tr>
<td>BE-Affective</td>
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<td>BE-Behavioral</td>
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<td>BE-Intellectual</td>
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<td>BE-Sensory</td>
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<td>Brand Image</td>
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<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
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<td>Brand Satisfaction</td>
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<td>Brand Trust</td>
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</table>

Note: The boldface values are the square roots of AVEs.

5.3 Assessment of the Structural Model
The research enforces the PLS standard bootstrapping execution having 5,000 bootstrap samples and 405 conditions to estimate the importance of the path coefficients (Hair et al., 2014). As shown Table 3, and Figure 4 demonstrate speculations for the model.
The finding indicated there is no significant link between BE and BL (β = 0.049, t = 1.562, p < 0.118), the H1 unsupported. Also, the finding illustrated a positive and significant bond between BE and BS with (β = 0.281, t = 5.751, p > 0.000), thus, this H2 was accepted. Similarly, a positive and significant link between BE and BT (β = 0.321, t= 5.934, p> 0.000), therefore, H3 was accepted. The finding also indicated no significant link between BI and BL (β = 0.065, t = 1.603, p < 0.109). Thus, the H4 was unsupported. H5, H6, H7 and H8 showed a significant and positive link between BI and BL (β = 0.488, t= 10.296, p < 0.000), BI and BS (β = 0.420, t= 7.541, p < 0.000), BS and BL (β = 0.388, t= 7.342, p < 0.000), BT and BL (β = 0.433, t= 8.600, p < 0.000). Thus, H5, H6, H7, and H8 were supported.
6. DISCUSSION
The study was made to impose the influence of BE, BI, BS, and BT on BL. Showing that the relevance between BE and BL is not very important. This conclusion proposes that as long as there are plenty of brand-related experiences given by the local companies to their clients, it just makes the client not as much interested in the brand. The feedback goes well along with the latest research that states the irrelevant relationship between BE and BL (Nysveen, Pedersen, & Skard, 2013). In this research, BE and its proportion mirrors the clients’ relative degree of knowledge with local brands. The sensitive measure of brand expertise mirrors their sense of touch. Local brands created a no visual effect on the clients that are from Malaysia. Malaysian clients are looking for brand experiences that deliver sensory enjoyment and emotional demand when buying from the global brand more than a local brand. The cognitive measure extends to the client’s creative thinking and the methods of recreating Proton and Perodua brand in a unique technique.

The affective dimension found that Malaysian customers have a low degree of emotions and inner feelings or sentiments towards the local brands i.e. Proton and Perodua. Intellectual BE found that the local brand’s notability to make Malaysian clients think or feel curious. The behavioural of BE found that the Malaysian customers use Proton and Perodua brands because the brands are not capable of providing physical actions, behaviours and bodily experiences comparing with international brand, so the finding was unsupported.

There is evidence that BE drives BS (Walter, Cleff, & Chu, 2013). When customers are dedicated to a brand, they are more probable to have a good BE in terms of affective, sensory, behavioural and intellectual experiences. BE tends to be a stronger predictor of actual purchasing behaviour, which, in effect, better predicts satisfaction, the outcome may be linked to the very nature of the experience: if a brand stimulates the senses, makes the customer feel good, involves the body and mind; then an individual seeking stimulation may aspire to obtain that stimulation again (Brakus et al., 2009). BE is a key driver of brand trust. When customers are committed to a local brand, they are more likely to consider their experience of the specific brand before developing BT. This outcome is coherent with prior research that identify a similar finding (Khan and Fatma, 2019). The findings showed insignificant bond between BI and BL among Malaysian customers. Based on the finding that indicated there is an unclear image of local brands among Malaysian customers. the justification for the insignificant relationship of BI may be Malaysian customer have more aware of international brand.

As well as studies signalled a good and an important influence of BI on BS was found. Hsieh, Pan, and Setiono (2004). Exposed that BI can assist clients to perceive what they need and how they are satisfied with the brand. And according to this, BI has a major role in marketing and this is because clients don’t always find it easy in distinguishing items according to tangible quality facility (Mudambi, Doyle, & Wong, 1997). Essentially, Keller (1993) preserved that BI is a necessary key of satisfaction. As long as clients are enjoying the brand, they will be loyal to the brand (Silva and Alwi, 2008). BI shows all information regarding a specific item. A good brand reputation minimizes the possible risks to clients. Clients who are not familiar with a certain item become easily convinced with popular, credible brands (Xia and Lin, 2010). When there is a good trust bond between the clients and the brand, the clients will develop a better-rooted BI in their minds (Hyun and Wansoo, 2011). That is the reason behind why
Malaysian clients trust the reputation of local automobile brands. Malaysian clients look to be pretty satisfied with their local automobile brands, and that is a result of knowing that the brand is always keeping up with expectations and their needs. BS is the controlling the concept for a long-term relationship. And that is why, when clients are enjoying their preferred brands, long-term loyalty is assured. In marketing and encouraging local automobile companies, the two local automobile companies; Proton and Perodua succeeded in grabbing their clients’ attention. As BS is a fundamental factor that leads BL to local automobile brands, it is needed that managers develop their strategies to preserve their reputation in the automobile industry, specifically in making their customers satisfied. The present research found that BS had a good and strong relationship with BL. Satisfaction is pleaded to be an antecedent of BL as growing satisfaction results in growing BL (Huang et al., 2019). In the sector of the automotive industry in the various research, indicated a correlation between BS and BL (Al-Hawary, 2013; Bapat and Thanigan, 2016).

The current research creates a good and strong relation between BT and BL. The result is, therefore; coordinated earlier works (Wel, Alam, & Nor, 2011). The outcome of the present study promotes that when clients trust their car brand (i.e. either Proton or Perodua) their loyalty will increase towards the brand. Famous BT minimizes the possible risks with clients (Xia and Lin, 2010). When clients positively understand a good brand, this understanding positively impacts their judgments and create trust with the brands (Shimp, Dunn, & Klein, 2004). It is essential for promoters to create brand trust with clients in the long run to maintain consumer loyalty to the brand due to the availability of the other brands that are competing in the market (Khan and Fatma, 2019).

7. Conclusion
The outcome of this research demonstrated that BS and BT have an important role in impacting clients in becoming loyal to the local brand. As well as that it was exposed that satisfaction, trust and good experience among local brands and clients were factors that helped in promoting BL. In contrast, BE, BI has no influence on BL. In summary, the results propose that clients will be loyal when the car brand firms deliver a quality and good image meeting the needs of their clients and getting the customer’s satisfaction.

References


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The determinants of automotive brand loyalty: A case of local brands. The study aims to identify the important factors that affect local brands' loyalty. This is done through investigating the relationship between brand experience, brand satisfaction, brand trust, and brand image, on loyalty to local car brands in Malaysia. The Partial Least Squares (Smart PLS) method was used in data analysis. The results showed a positive and significant impact between independent factors and dependent factors. The results also contributed to our understanding of local brand loyalty phenomena and inspired the practice of designing meaningful brand experiences for local car brands.