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**BRAND IMAGE AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY AMONG GEN-Y**

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***Abstract***

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a robust competition in business environment. The organization need to differentiate and positioning their brand image to attract more customer. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between brand image in the form of product uniqueness, product favorability and product strength towards customer loyalty among Gen Y in food and beverages industry. The study used a quantitative approach with 5 point Likert scaled questionnaire directed to 400 participant and managed to secure 346 which 86 percent useable data. The descriptive and correlation analysis was used to identify the relation between brand image and customer loyalty. The result of this study identify there is a positive significant relationship between brand image and customer loyalty among Gen Y. These three factors are considered have strong relationship with customer loyalty. From the result, it can conclude that the strong brand image can build customer loyalty. Hence, in order to gain mutual profitability and build a long term relationship in food and beverage industry, firms should focus on brand image.

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**Keywords:** Brand image, customer loyalty, food beverage industry, Gen Y.



## 1. Introduction

The past decade has seen many company are trying to promote their brand or product just to wins their loyalty toward the brand. The generally agreed upon definition on loyalty is by Kheng et. al. (2010), who describe loyalty as the biased, behavioral response, expressed over time, by some decision making unit, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of psychological processes. A service provider rely upon its quality relationship with customers as its success factor (Malik et. al, 2012). Customer can often find the same product if the brand can give the great satisfaction to the customer itself. With the influence of the brand image that can bring awareness to the customer mind they also can increase the sales profit of that brand (Naimi & Safoura, 2014). Otherwise, customer loyalty can show the way on how the company can gain more profit if they can get the trust from customers towards the company brands and product. They are some researcher agree that it still lack of research toward customer loyalty (Mohsan, 2011). Loyalty is also known as the repetition of purchasing the same brand and product. The discernment of loyalty as true loyalty instead of repeat purchasing behavior is explained by actual buying of a brand, without consideration of commitment (Tu et. al, 2013).

This study choose food & beverage industry. This industry defined that all companies activities encompasses of processing, packaging and distributing raw materials, consisting of fresh prepared foods, packaged foods, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. According to Thakur (2012), globalization of industrial market and technological advancement has caused a very stiff rivalry in food industry. Hence, it is crucial for organizations to determine new mechanisms to remain competitive and sustainable in the market.

### 1.1. Brand Image

Brand image can be defined as the impression in the consumers' mind of a brand's total personality. Brand image developed over time through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme, and confirmed through direct experience of the user.

Branding and brand image have two separate meaning for creating and sustaining competitive advantages in the business world (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Freling and Forbes (2012), suggest that while brands are alike from competitors, brand personality builds competitive advantage in the mind of consumers as it could differentiate. According to Parment (2013), the brand image is the continuously need to be updating from time to time in order to follow the current trend of the brand image itself. Thus far, scholars haven't come to an agreement on the definition of brand image although theoretically, brand image is established from the functional, symbolic or experimental elements of all products and services.

Previous research about brand image stated that brand image is the overall impact in the customer minds that is develop through different sources (Nazir et. al. 2016). According to Malik et. al. (2012), brand image is a circumlocutory tool which can positively modify the purchasing behavior of the consumers and it also plays a significant role to improve any business performance. According to Saeed et. al., (2013) winning brand image can make the consumer to recognize the requirements it offers to satisfy them and then can compare it with another available alternative and then differentiate it from them and indirectly can increases the likelihood of its purchase by consumer. A brand is a logo or symbol or a sign where it will help the consumer to identify one product that the company has produce and so that the product will have

better publicity, certainly will has better position in market and also positioning in consumer mind as well as it can maintain their competitive advantage and also increase the value of their market share (Naimi et. al., 2013).

What differentiate one company's product to another is its brand, which by definition is a term, design, name, symbol or any other features (Keller, 2008). Elements of a successful brand is innovative, focused, passionate, consistent, flexible, competitive, leadership and distinction. For great brands, innovation becomes a focus as it prevents complacency and being idle (Neupane, 2015). What brand image can offer is customer perceived quality, increase customer satisfaction, loyalty and commitment towards market offering (Ogba et. al. 2009).

Brand image is the overall impact in the customer minds that is develop through different sources (Nazir et. al. 2016). Based on this statement, it can be seen that brand image is important that give impact to customer while purchasing the product. Customer will do a research when they want to buy the product. They will collect the information about the specific brand from many sources and they will compare that brand with other brand to make the decision on purchasing.

Brand image is a circumlocutory tool which can positively modify the purchasing behavior of the consumers and it also plays a significant role to improve any business performance (Miremadi et. al., 2011). Based on this statement, it can be seen that brand image can influence the customer based on the quality and the brand of the product. When the brand image gives the positive impact to the customer, it will increase the business performance.

According to Saeed et. al., (2013) winning brand image can make the consumer to recognize the requirements it offers to satisfy them and then can compare it with another available alternative and then differentiate it from them and indirectly can increases the likelihood of its purchase by consumer. This is because, when consumer know about the brand itself and experience it, it will bring to the consumer being purchase and use the product. As we know that, when a company or a product itself have good image in the wide market they have a chance to get a place in superior market and at the same time will bring to competitive edge and grater market share.

## **1.2. Product Uniqueness**

Developing and enhancing self and social image through uniqueness is the trait of creating differentness compared to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods (Schewe & Noldie, 2000).

Three behavioural dimensions explain the consumer's need for uniqueness; creative choice counter-conformity. It reveals that consumer search for social differentness from others but their selections are likely to be considered as good choices by others (Schewe & Noldie, 2000). In creative choice counter-conformity, brand names with distinguishing attributes such as unique features, exclusivity, and prestige, tend to appeal consumers who demonstrate their uniqueness in purchase. It is pointed out in research that consumers with high need for uniqueness are more likely to choose products that others do not choose, which are relatively scarce and unique such as absolute luxury products (Chung et. al., 2016). Referring to this statement, it can be see that uniqueness is played an important role to a product. The consumer will

find the product that unique than the common product. It can lead to the customer loyalty. From this, it can be said that product uniqueness is likely to have a relationship with the customer loyalty.

### **1.3. Product Favorability**

The favorability of brand we can see from brand association, which represents need towards brand and supports of marketing program and product message delivery. Previous research indicates favourability varies significantly based on individual evaluation judgement on specific brand and their importance to the overall purchase (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Keller, 1993; Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973). Other than that according to Chung et. al., (2016), for managers, clear information on the favourability of brand association is crucial to decide on the level of focus on specific association in marketing activities.

### **1.4. Product Strength**

The brand attributes and brand benefits promoted the strength of brand association. The former are also derived from personal connection of information and consistency of information. It has been argued regarding strength of brand that the more associations that a brand map contains, the stronger the brand is because it increases the number of pathways between associations and chances they will be activated/recalled (McMullan & Gilmore, 2008). The cognitive structure of a brand plays an important part in the overall strength of a brand (Bilgihan, 2016).

Brand image also known as the opinion and the source of strength on produced a quality product by their organization and the trust that given by the organizational member to produce the product for the customer need and demand (Rizan et. al., 2012). The relevant is when the organizational have produced a quality product and can fulfil the customer need and demand, so the organizational that produce the product will confident it will gain the trust of the customer for their brand image. At the same time, the approach of relationship marketing as the tool of study the brand itself can lead to various information of the brand image for the organization and can bring up their product into the market.

The explanation of product strength is related to power of attraction towards customers or the ability to attract many followers (Woodside and Walser, 2007, Wood, 2000). On the other hand, brand strength denotes consumer's degree of attachment towards a brand, while strong attachment to a brand will entails higher brand value due to potential future cash flows. Brand strength has been defined as consumer's degree of attachment towards a brand, and strong attachment to a brand will implies higher brand value as a result of potential future cash flows (Wood, 2000).

Base on study by Srivastava et. al., (1991), mentioned that there are two components of brand equity which is brand strength and brand value. Brand strength refers to the brand associations developed by customers and brand value refers to financial gains based on brand strength. It is observed that product strength will attract many consumers. However, brand strength is regarded to be distinct from brand value and to play an important role in strategic brand management as a diagnostic measure there is two components of brand equity which is brand strength and also brand value (Wood, 2000).

### **1.5. Customer Loyalty**

In this world, there are variety of brand name where make an organization whether it a success or failure in the food and beverage industry. Many products have the same functionality, but with a different brand. The brands helps consumer to differentiate the product and also help recognize the use and the prudence of the product and services. Customer loyalty is defined as the tendency to continue repeat purchase of a product from a specific organization. It is thus important to pay attention on marketing and customer service to maintain current customers to be loyal customers. Loyalty programs are introduced by organizations to reward customers for repeat business. Previous research about customer loyalty has stated that customer satisfaction strongly contributes towards customer loyalty (Kashif et. al., 2016). Amin et. al. (2013) stated in their study, customer loyalty is the result of customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction is defined as customers' positive attitudinal and behavioral response to marketing stimuli in a service setting. However, there is still little consensus as to the common predictors of loyalty and their potential interrelationships although customer loyalty is a centrally important concept in marketing financial services (Baumann et. al., 2011).

Customer satisfaction strongly contributes towards customer loyalty (Kashif et. al., 2016). Based on this statement, it can be seen that customer's loyalty has a strong connection with the customer's satisfaction towards a certain product. There are many factors of customer's loyalty but this is the one of the most significant factor among of the others. When a customer is satisfied with the product, there is a good chance that he or she might purchase the same product again and again later. Hence, it leads towards the customer's loyalty for the product.

Customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty with the service provider which has been referred as the customers' positive attitudinal and behavioral response to marketing stimuli in a service setting (Amin et. al., 2013). Based on this statement, to gain the customer loyalty through satisfaction must provide the best services. When the customers have experience in a good service it can lead them to repeat in buying the product. It's better to remain the current customers rather than attract new customers. It is easier to maintain the current customer because they have the experience about the product and services compare to the new customer.

Customer loyalty is a centrally important concept in marketing financial services, there is, as yet, little consensus as to the common predictors of loyalty and their potential interrelationships (Baumann et. al., 2011). In this statement stated that some loyal customers might not be happy or satisfied but they remain faithful because of the services. If the service is good, the customer will continuously buy the product even though the product is not necessary. It will lead customer to become loyal and help to increase the marketing financial.

According to (Dawn et. al., 2013) the importance in customer loyalty is as fast moving consumer in this era globalization. Furthermore, customer loyalty will improve the brand image where it provided consumer experience which leads to the consumer repeated purchase. The marketer must make the advertising that follow the trend that can attract the customer that lead to customer loyalty.

Customer loyalty can be refers to consumer behaviors that indicate a desire to a better an ongoing relationship with a company (Duh, 2016). From this statement, we can know that when consumer like with the product, they will show their good behavior where they will recommended the product to other

consumer and always talk good thing which will increase of consumer buying the product. Other than that, customer loyalty, this is as a mindset as a customer who hold favorable attitudes toward a company.

### **1.6. Generation Y**

Nowadays, Gen-Y is tending to find the new interest for many kind things that can fulfil their needs and wants, differently from the preceded generation (Schnitka et. al., 2012). We can see that Gen-Y are more exposed to the technology such as computer, cell phone, internet itself so there are no boundaries between them to access information from all over the world with only their finger tip, they also can connect with people with only using a phone call, video chat, or message. The manager can see how the Gen-Y as a consumer doing their activity on purchasing is quite different between the Gen-X (Parment, 2011). The Gen-Y is more like to buy something that expensive, follow the current trend, new fashion because they always want to be up to date with the latest brand and product in the market instead of Gen-X they purchasing behavior is totally different. This is because the Gen-Y is the largest consumer market much more bigly than the Gen-X and baby boomers (Rizan et. al., 2014).

The Gen-Y cohort, also referred to as “millennials” born between 1980 and 2000 (Keller, 2008), has been raised in an era of remarkable socio-economic, cultural and technological changes, with differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, and preferences existing between generational cohorts (Schewe & Noble, 2000) and different shopping behaviours as well (Parment, 2011, 2013). Another difference is the trend of Gen-Y where they proclaim that their young adulthood is a distinct lifecycle stage, characterized by major life-changing experiences, such as newly entering the job market, independently managing money for the first time and qualifying to obtain credit cards. Young Gen-Y are also reported to be a large and lucrative market segment (have considerable discretionary income (Norum, 2008).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Nowadays, customer loyalty being the major objective of a business can influence customer retention, and key to achieving customer loyalty is through excellence in service quality (Ye & Wu, 2016). The knowledge is needed to develop the input about the trend purchases of the customer on how they going to choose the brand of the product and how they keep their loyalty toward the product. This study must be always being update to make sure all the information about the current issue of the loyalty is still reasonable. The brand image also gives significant influence to the customer loyalty (Kashif et. al., 2016). This study more focusing to keeping a current customer rather than find a new customer. This also can save the budget from doing the promotion in order to attract a new customer. Since it is still lack of research, it will make other researcher difficulty to do a research. So that it, can help the researcher for additional information on this research.

The objective of this study is to identify the relationship between brand images towards customer loyalty by exploring the following research objective:

- 1) To identify the relationship between product uniqueness towards customer loyalty.
- 2) To identify the relationship between product favourability towards customer loyalty.
- 3) To identify the relationship between product strength towards customer loyalty.

### 3. Research Questions

Then, finding of this research project is derived from the analysis of data collected from the survey that encompasses the following questions:-

1. Is there any relationship of product uniqueness towards customer loyalty?
2. Is there any relationship of product favourability towards customer loyalty?
3. Is there any relationship of product strength towards customer loyalty?

### 4. Purpose of the Study

This study shows the relationship of brand image are all about towards customer loyalty. The outcomes of this study would assist the organization to figure out the relationship between brand images towards the customer's loyalty. It would also help in developing and improving the company's products, the brand's identity, the retail system and such where positive corporate brand image is not only help companies to increase competition but also encourage consumer to repurchases (Soudoh et. al., 2007).

This shows that this study is still lack of research toward brand image and customer loyalty (Mohsan, 2011). It gives the advantage for future researchers in context of improving the customer's loyalty towards the brand image toward other industry.

Based on the literature review, a conceptual model was constructed, consisted of the determinants of brand image as the independent variables (IV), and of customers' loyalty as the dependent variable (DV). The model focused on the factors influencing customer loyalty which comprises of the relationship of product uniqueness, product favourability and product strength with respect to customer loyalty. The model is summarized in Figure 1.



**Figure 01.** Study Framework.

From the study framework the hypotheses has been developed:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between brand image and customer loyalty.  
H1a: There is a significant relationship between product uniqueness towards customer loyalty.  
H1b: There is a significant relationship between product favourability towards customer loyalty.  
H1c: There is a significant relationship between product strength towards customer loyalty.

### 5. Research Methods

#### 5.1. Population and Sample

The Generation Y (Gen Y) is the people who born during the 1970s and early 1990s. This kind of generation usually have been exposed with the latest technology such as computer, cell phone, and others technology that been created today. Nowadays, Gen Y is tending to find the new interest for many kind

things that can fulfil their needs and wants, differently from the preceded generation (Schnitta et. al., 2012). The marketer can see how the Gen Y as a consumer doing their activity on purchasing is quite different between the Gen-x (Parment, 2011). This study focus on Gen Y is because the Gen-Y is the largest consumer market much more bigly than the Gen-x and baby boomers (Rizan at. Al., 2014). The Gen Y today is the largest consumer and they have the largest purchasing power in the world. Given the value of Generation Y to marketers, it is important to understand the psychographics and media behavior of this cohort (Mark et. al., 2003). To study what the Gen Y trend on purchasing, behavior of selecting the product is important when we want to know what exactly this generation looking for when they would like to make a purchasing toward certain brand and product.

## 5.2. Sample

Sample for this study is Gen Y from the Higher Education Institution in Malaysia. To be specific is selected private university in Klang Valley. 400 self-administrated questionnaire were distributed and managed to secure 346 useable data. The trend of purchasing among the student on how they make decision making about the brand that they will choose and what the perception towards the brand and product. Gen Y known as generation that tied so much with technology. Gen Y individuals watch less television, are not influenced by mainstream media, and are much more resistant to advertisements than previous generations. So the Gen Y is more intend to use other platform such as social media. Social media today bring the highest impact to Gen Y now days. They usually log in to their social media such as facebook, instagram, snapchat frequently than other generation.

## 5.3. Measurement of Variables

There are three section of question. In section one consists demographic question where demographic is study about a population based on factors such as gender, race, and age among others.

In section two, the question is all about the independent variables which is brand image. While in section three, the question is all about the dependent variables which are customer loyalty. In that section, five items are chosen to measuring customer loyalty and using five-point Likert where are ranging from (1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree). Lastly on statistical analysis, this study use descriptive and correlation used to analyse the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Descriptive analysis

**Table 01.** Demographic data.

Demographic data	Categories	Percentages of samples (%)	Frequency (f)
Gender	Female	56.1	194
	Male	43.9	152



<b>Race</b>	Malay	70.2	243
	Chinese	7.2	25
	Indian	21.1	73
	Others	1.4	5
<b>Nationality</b>	Malaysian	98.8	342
	Arabian	0.3	1
	African	0.6	2
	Others	0.3	1
<b>Age</b>	Below 20 year	19.9	69
	21 year to 23 year	68.8	238
	24 year to 26 year	11	38
	Above 27 year	0.3	1
<b>Courses</b>	Business/management	30.1	104
	Science Computer/IT	24	83
	Finance/Economic	11	38
	ACCT	25.1	87
	Others	9.8	34
<b>Year in university</b>	1 year	14.7	51
	2 year	31.5	109
	3 year	48	166
	4 year	4.9	17
	5 year	0.9	3

The total of questionnaire that been distributed are 400 to the Gen Y in Private University in Klang Valley. From 400 of questionnaire that already been distributed manage to get 346 back the questionnaire. The greater number of respondent were female (56.1%) and male were (43.9%). While the larger part of respondent were in the race group of Malay (70.2%), followed by Indian (21.1%), Chinese contributed (7.2%), and others (1.4%). The most respondent were in the nationality Malaysian (98.8%), followed by African (0.6%), Arabian (0.3%), and others (0.3%). Meanwhile the majority of respondent were in the age group of 21 year to 23 year (68.8%), followed by age in group below 20 year (19.9%), age in group 24 year to 26 year (11%), and above 27 year (0.3%). In matter of education al level reported most of the respondent were in Business/Management course (30.1%), followed by Accounting course (25.1%), Science Computer/IT course (24%), Finance/Economic (11%), and others courses (9.8%). The majority respondent for group year in university were in third (3) year (48%), followed by second (2) year (31.5%), first (1) year (14.7%), fourth (4) year of study (4.9%), and fifth (5) year (0.9). Demographic data were summarized in Table 1.

## 6.2. Reliability Analysis

**Table 02.** Reliability Test

Item	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Product Uniqueness	.782	3
Product Favorability	.781	4
Product Strength	.776	4
Customer Loyalty	.802	5

This table shows the reliability statistics of independent variables for product uniqueness (3 items (N=3) is 0.782), product favourability (for 4 items (N=4) is 0.781) and product strength (for 4 items (N=4) is 0.776). All three independent variables shows measures level is acceptable and has a high level of internal consistency and reliability. The reliability statistic of dependent variable, Customer loyalty which computed for 5 items (N=5) is 0.802, also shows measure level is good and indicates the instrument has a very high level of internal consistency and a good reliability.

### 6.3. Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation is use to determine the strength of relationship between one variable with other. When the readings are positive, it means that there is a positive relationship between tested variable. When the number is closer to 1, it means that there is a stronger relationship between the variables.

Table above shows moderate strong relationship between the independent variables (product uniqueness, product favorability and product strength) and dependent variable (customer loyalty).

**Table 03.** Correlation Coefficient

Correlations						
		Brand Image	Product Uniqueness	Product Favorability	Product Strength	Customer Loyalty
Brand Image	Pearson Correlation	1	.871**	.819**	.824**	.548**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	346	346	346	346	346
Product Uniqueness	Pearson Correlation	.871**	1	.590**	.560**	.493**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	346	346	346	346	346
Product Favorability	Pearson Correlation	.819**	.590**	1	.516**	.441**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	346	346	346	346	346
Product Strength	Pearson Correlation	.824**	.560**	.516**	1	.443**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	346	346	346	346	346
Customer Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.548**	.493**	.441**	.443**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	346	346	346	346	346

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the table above, it show the correlation for the general hypothesis. From the test, it shows that the Pearson correlation is 0.548\*\*, indicating a moderate positively related relationship between brand image and customer loyalty. And it shows that this hypothesis is accepted.

The table above shows the correlation for the first hypothesis. From the test, it can be seen that the Pearson correlation is 0.493\*\*, indicating a positive relationship between product uniqueness and customer loyalty. And it shows that this hypothesis is accepted.

The table above shows the correlation for the second hypothesis. From the test, it can be seen that the Pearson correlation is 0.441\*\*, indicating a positive relationship between product favorability and customer loyalty. And it shows that this hypothesis is accepted.

The table above shows the correlation for the third hypothesis. From the test, it can be seen that the Pearson correlation is 0.443\*\*, indicating a positive relationship between product strength and customer loyalty. And it shows that this hypothesis is accepted.

**Table 04.** Summary of the hypothesis

No.	Hypothesis	Finding
H1	There is significant relationship between brand image and customer loyalty. (r=0.548**, n=346, p≤0.01)	Accepted
H1 (a)	There is significant relationship between product uniqueness and customer loyalty. (r=0.493**, n=346, p≤0.01)	Accepted
H1 (b)	There is significant relationship between product favorability and customer loyalty. (r=0.441**, n=346, p≤0.01)	Accepted
H1 (c)	There is significant relationship between product strength and customer loyalty. (r=0.443**, n=346, p≤0.01)	Accepted

As a conclusion, as we can see from the table above. It is describe that all hypothesis are accepted. All variables in brand image, which are product uniqueness, product favorability, and product strength with dependent variables customer loyalty, are found all positively related to each other where product uniqueness and product strength show the positive significant relationship between customer loyalty.

## 7. Conclusion

This study is to explore the factor of brand image which relates with customer loyalty among Gen Y in the form of product uniqueness, product favorability and product strength towards customer loyalty. From many factors of brand image, three factors have been taken which are the strength, product uniqueness, and favorability of brand image. These three factors are considered have strong relationship with customer loyalty. After get the result, the correlations tested shows the results that all of independent variable leads towards the dependent variable. Therefore, the results stated that all independent variable has a positive significant toward customer loyalty.

The concept of brand image has been defined as the impression in the consumer's mind of a brand's total personality. Brand image developed over time through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme, and confirmed through direct experience of the user. Other than that, as the opinion and the source of strength on produced a quality product by their organization and the trust that given by the organizational member to produce the product for the customer need and demand (Ye & Wu, 2010).

From the discussion section can be explained that there is a significant relationship between brand image and customer loyalty with moderate positive relationship which is 0.548\*\* pearson correlation, there is significant relationship between product uniqueness customer loyalty with moderate positive which is 0.493\*\* pearson correlation, there is significant relationship between favorability and customer loyalty which is 0.441\*\* pearson correlation and there is significant relationship between strength and customer

loyalty which is 0.443\*\* pearson correlation. From the result, it can conclude that the strong brand image can build customer loyalty as stated in (Chung, 2016).

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