

ASSESSING BRAND HEALTH DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FMCGS BRAND LOYALTY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Today's businesses have been bombarded with numerous shocking situations. For instance, The Fourth Industrial Revolution has tremendously changed the way we live today. Recent pandemic of COVID-19 in early 2020 that affect over 200 countries further drag businesses into totally 'new normal' phenomena. Healthy brand will survive while other will vanish. Therefore, this study attempts to assess FMCGs brand health by examining the relationship between brand preference and perceived brand scarcity on consumers' brand loyalty during COVID-19 pandemic. This study is quantitative in nature and based on cross-sectional study. A total of 203 Malaysian consumers involved in this online survey which was conducted in April 2020. The result reveals that brand preference and perceived brand scarcity have positive significant relationship on consumers' brand loyalty towards FMCGs brand. This study provides both theoretical and practical contribution specifically in brand management during pandemic. Limitation and future research direction also discussed at the end of the article.

Keywords-- Brand health, brand loyalty, brand preference, brand switching, scarcity, FMCG, COVID-19 pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic had changed every aspects of life drastically. Businesses are among the most affected sector, being at micro level or multinationals companies. For instance, the study of Jung, Park, Hong & Hyun (2016) during MERS outbreak in Korea revealed that customer had altered their consumption behavior on various product categories and their preference on distribution channel also changed tremendously. It is expected that life after pandemic would be tougher to certain businesses and consumers especially in adapting 'new normal' phenomena and worldwide economic crisis. During pandemic, brand health become a major topic of interest to various stakeholders. Brand had a broad option either to 'make' or 'break'. Brand health is strong when their customers are loyal and had a good reputation meanwhile brand is weak when customer's preference, attitude and behavior start fading (Berg, Matthews & O'Hare, 2007; Sadi & AlMallah, 2018). However, highly innovative brand could survive this challenging new normal landscape. Brand becomes more visible during pandemic if they show empathy and initiate strategies to prolong customer relationship (Waldron & Wetherbe, 2020). For instance, BYD, the Chinese electric car maker became one of the world's largest face mask producer during COVID-19 (Sonnemaker, 2020). Proton, General Motor & Ford also reported had produced several other medical supplies (mask, clothing, PPE, ventilator) for the usage of frontliners (Proton, 2020, April 9; Ulrich, 2020). These brands manage to show their concern and responsibility in fighting the pandemic at both local and international level and had gained favorable brand reputation.

During a period of extreme economic hardship and the changing landscape of consumer preferences and priorities, how consumer perceived their brand performance? Does customer still loyal to certain brand? Considering more people engaged in online shopping and changing spending pattern, is there any significant changes in customer brand loyalty? A survey conducted by Valassis among 1000 adult consumers in United States indicated that about 48% of the consumer bought the same brand they used before pandemic, 21% considered mix brands, 13% explore new brand and 19% were less loyal and will consider whatever

brand available (Berthiaume, 2020). Meanwhile Devenyns (2020) reported that 69% of the respondents were shifted to other brand if their preferred brands were not available and only 14% of the respondents were loyal to their preferred brand during pandemic. In the another survey by Alix Partner as mentioned by Devenyns (2020) stated that 30 to 45% of the respondents had tried new national brand and intended to stick with the brand even after the pandemic, meanwhile 25-30% who had tried private label brand name during pandemic would prefer to continue to buy after the pandemic. Goldberg (2020) in Forbes.com noted that few consumer behavior during pandemic would become permanent such as transition to digital channel, changing of brand loyalty and 'in-homing' behavior. Based on the statistic, it is shows that few brands will losing their loyalty during and post-pandemic. Hence, it is important to understand the current phenomena and what influence them.

In controlling the spread of COVID-19, Malaysian government had enforced "Movement Control Order (MCO)" for several phases. At the time this article was written, Malaysia is now in the fourth phase (two months in total). During the MCO period, only essential businesses such as bank, petrol station, health related business, convenience store, supermarket and hypermarket were allowed to operate with strict standard operation procedures (such as social distancing, limited time of operation and contactless transaction). Convenience goods among the most consumed product during MCO and/or COVID-19 pandemic. The study by Department of Statistic Malaysia as reported by Kong (2020), there was a significant increased trend in consumer spending during pandemic in certain product categories. Consumers spent more on FMCGs such as product with longer shelf-life (33%), canned food (18%), household cleaner (13%) and toilet paper (2%). Besides, the report also concluded that during pandemic, Malaysian consumers prefer more essential items rather than 'luxury' items whereby few demand of the items were in negative growth (chocolate and sweets - minus 17%, alcohol - minus 17%, and personal & beauty products - minus 12%). Hence, with the limited number of business operated and the changing spending pattern, this study attempts to examine how consumer react, behave and loyal

towards fast moving consumer goods' (FMCGs) brand during pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies outlined several predictors for brand loyalty. The following Table 1 summarized selected previous studies on brand loyalty from various context. Among others, the most prominent predictors were brand awareness, brand experience, brand preference, brand image, perceived quality, brand trust and brand satisfaction. However, such factors were relevant during the normal situation. During pandemic, several scholars and practitioners highlighted that predictors could be different considering the new business cape and environment.

Table 1. Selected previous studies on brand loyalty

No.	Scholar(s)	Predictors	Context of study
1.	Banerjee & Dasgupta (2020)	Corporate social responsibility image	Cooking oil brand, India
2.	De Carvalho, Azar & Machado (2020)	brand gender, consumer engagement, perceived quality, brand love	Social media, Portugal
3.	Kataria & Saini (2020)	Perceived quality, perceived value of cost, brand identification, trust, lifestyle congruence, customer satisfaction	Oral care product, India
4.	Bisschoff, C.A. & Schmulian, M. (2019)	Brand trust, brand affect, brand commitment, switching cost, customer satisfaction, culture, perceived value, involvement, brand relevant	Chicken brand, South Africa
5.	Sampaothong, S. (2018)	Brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, customer satisfaction	FMCG, Thailand
6.	Semadi & Ariyanti (2018)	Brand experience, brand trust, brand image	Electronic money, Indonesia
7.	Kosiba et al. (2018)	Trustworthiness, customer engagement	Retail banking, Ghana
8.	Ossama Fazal, O. & Kanwal, S. (2017)	Perceived value, trust, customer satisfaction, price of the product	Mobile phone, Pakistan
9.	Mabkhot, Shaari & Md. Salleh (2017)	Brand image, brand personality, brand trust	Automobile, Malaysia
10.	Alkhalwaldeh, Halim (2016)	Party brand awareness, party brand image, party brand equity, party brand trust	Political brand
11.	Verja & Trujillo (2017)	consumer involvement, perceived brand value, customer satisfaction	Six product categories, Mexico
12.	Sivarajah & Sritharan	Brant trust, attachment	FMCG

13.	Upamannu et al. (2014)	Brant trust, Brand image, age, gender, qualification, income	FMCG, Indian
14.	Nezakati, Chua & Akhoundi (2013)	Corporate service customer satisfaction, perceived value	image, quality, Cosmetic, Malaysia
15.	Omoregbe, O. & Ogbeide, D.O. (2013)	Perceived quality, brand price, brand trust and brand name	FMCG, Nigeria

Jacoby and Kyner (1973) conceptualized brand loyalty that goes beyond repeat purchase. The scholars conceptualized brand loyalty into six necessary conditions which include 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 decision-making and evaluative processes. Oliver (1999) further defines brand loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior”. The conception of brand loyalty is not simply based on behavioral such as repeat purchase. Dick and Basu (1994) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) suggest that brand loyalty can be explained by attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Besides, few other scholars suggest positive word-of-mouth and brand recommendation as a part of behavioral brand loyalty (Ferguson, Paulin & Leiriao, 2006; Lam et. al., 2004; Ladhari, Souiden & Ladhari, 2011). Scholars such as Schiffman and Kanuk (1991) outline attitudinal loyalty concepts assume that consumers involve in extensive problem-solving behavior pertaining brand and attribute comparisons, which lead to strong brand preferences. Attitudinal loyalty include preference, commitment, advocacy, and ignore competing brand (Saini & Singh, 2020). Considering the context of the study namely during COVID-19 pandemic, hence, brand loyalty conception by Oliver (1991) found relevant. As stated by many business news and blog, among the main reasons why consumer switched to other brand was due to brand availability and preference (Devenyns, 2020; Deloitte, 2020; Food Business News, 2020; Nielson.com, 2020). Hence, this study attempts to empirically examine the relationship between brand preference and perceived brand scarcity on consumer fast moving goods' brand loyalty among Malaysian consumers.

Brand is a part of identification on how marketer differentiate their offering from others. Brand is crucial for customer buying decision. Consumers not only buy product but most of the time they buy brand. Consumers may have strong bond with certain brand (Kaynak, Salman & Tatoglu, 2008) even for inexpensive FMCGs brand (Monoe, 1976). For instance, even though certain product could fulfilled consumers' utilitarian need, some consumers may not consider re-purchase (Goh et al., 2013). This is because consumer had their own brand preference and would not consider brand randomly. One could have brands such as Darlie, Sparkle, Sensodyne and many more, but he/she would only consider Colgate because had a strong bond and preferences. Ebrahim, Ghoneim and Irani (2016) refer brand preference as consumer behavioral tendencies that explains attitude toward brand. Brand preference is derived from experience and information processing (Amir & Levav, 2008). Ebrahim et al.'s (2016) study among 325 Egyptian mobile phone users pointed out that brand preference was derived from brand experience and subsequently influence repurchase intention. Meanwhile, the study of Jalilvand, Pool, Vosta and Kazemi (2016)

among 30 consumers of restaurant revealed that brand preference had a significant positive relationship on brand loyalty element namely word-of-mouth. However, Govender and Govender (2013) concluded that during hard time (such as recession) consumer brand preference and brand switching was observed as common in the marketplace. Interestingly, Kim, Lee and Lee (2020) opined that brand interest (similar to brand preference) and brand loyalty is influenced by reference-dependent preferences (attributes and peers). Based on the recent finding, is there any possibility that brand loyalty also subject to situational-based such as pandemic or outbreak. Hence, it is proposed that the higher the brand preference, the higher brand loyalty. Based on the preceding discussion, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Brand preference has a positive relationship on FMCGs' brand loyalty during pandemic.

Numerous scholar such as Bucklin, Siddarth and Silva-Risso (2008) and Srinivasan et al. (2005) attempt to incorporate element of distribution intensity in understanding brand performance. Based on the review of literature, element of distribution intensity such as brand availability and brand scarcity is identified as an under-research construct in understanding brand loyalty (Tolba, 2011). Research in retailing domain consistently stressed that 'on-shelf availability' is crucial for overall retail success (Chuang, Oliva & Liu, 2015; Ettouzani, Yates & Mena, 2012; Moorthy, Behera & Verma, 2015). This is because, out of stock would lead to loss of sales and decreased customer behavioral brand loyalty (Kataria, Saini, Sharma, 2019; Moorthy et al., 2015). Dick and Basu (1994) also claim that situational factor such as brand availability may affect brand loyalty. Halim (2006) stated that beside hedonic, uniqueness and quality, brand availability among the main predictors for brand choice. The study by Singh (2016) among 100 consumers of footwear in India indicated that brand availability (various size and color) statistically not significantly affect brand loyalty. Review of literature further revealed that perceived product/brand scarcity had twofold effect on consumer behavior. Byun and Sternquist (2012) stated that for limited availability of the brand, consumer may encounter two conditions namely expected gains of buying and expected losses of not buying. According to the scholars, perceived product scarcity would stimulate more people to buy due to perceived uniqueness, valuable and distinctiveness. In this case, perhaps, the more customer perceived that the brand scarcity, the more their tendencies to be loyal to certain brand and may put extra effort to gain it. Meanwhile, people who unable to buy the limited availability brand during pandemic or crisis would end up with frustration and possible decide to switch to alternative brand. Hence, it is postulated that the perceived brand scarcity would influence consumer brand loyalty towards FMCGs' brand. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Perceived brand scarcity has a significant relationship on FMCGs' brand loyalty during pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on quantitative and cross-sectional study. For the purpose of the study, an online survey questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consists of three main sections, namely Section A for demographic profile, Section B for general consumer behavior information and Section C for consumer brand loyalty and its determinants. Measure for customer brand loyalty was adapted from Kocoglu, Tengilimoglu and Guzel (2015) with 8 items. Measure for perceived brand scarcity from Byun and Sternquist (2012) with 5 items and brand preference from Goh et al. (2013) with 10 items. Few items were deleted from the original measure due to irrelevant to the context of the study. Most measures were in dichotomous and 5-point Likert

scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree and 5-strongly agree. The population of this study is Malaysian consumers of consumer fast moving consumer goods. The total population is unknown. However, according to Hair et al. (2011), sample size should be 10 times greater than number of exogenous variables that intended to explain endogenous variable. In this case, two predictors were identified and 200 sample considered sufficient. This study was based on convenience sampling through snowballing technique. The questionnaires were distributed via online using Google Form. The selection of data collection method consider adequate considering the implementation of movement control order by Malaysian government during data collection was conducted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study was conducted in the last week of April 2020. At the end of the month, a total of 206 were responded. Preliminary test further deleted three responses due to outliers issue. Hence, the usable data were 203. The following Table 2 summarized the profile of the respondents and several general consumer behavior during Pandemic COVID-19.

Table 2. Profile of the respondents and general purchase behavior

No.	Characteristic		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)		
1.	Gender	Male	85	41.9		
		Female	118	58.1		
2.	Race	Malay	195	96.1		
		Chinese	6	3		
		Indian	-	-		
		Others	2	1		
3.	Employment	Public sector	123	60.6		
		Private sector	47	23.2		
		Self-employed	9	4.4		
		Pensioner	4	2		
		Student	11	5.4		
		Other	9	4.4		
4.	Monthly income	Below RM1000	19	9.4		
		RM1001 to RM2000	15	7.4		
		RM2001 to RM3000	25	12.3		
		RM3001 to RM4000	22	10.8		
		More than RM4001	122	60.1		
		5.	Region	Zone A: Northern (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak)	108	53.2
				Zone B: Central (Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Putrajaya)	38	18.7
Zone C: Southern (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka,	16			7.9		

		Johor) Zone D: East (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang)	18	8.9
		Zone E: Sabah, Sawarak & Labuan	22	10.8
6.	Difficulty to access favorable brand?	Yes	101	49.8
		No	102	50.2
7.	Brand switching	Yes	51	25.1
		No	152	74.9

Assessment of Measurement Model

This study was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 and SmartPLS-SEM Version 3.3.2. Hence, this study employed a two stages model approach which consist of measurement model and structural model as suggested by Chin (2010). Accordingly, measurement model is use to assess the relationship among indicators and the latent variable meanwhile structural model is to assess the relationship among latent variable (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler and Fassott, 2010). In details, measurement model consist of the test of composite reliability (CR) to evaluate internal consistency, individual indicator reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) to evaluate convergent validity. Beside, discriminant validity also could be assess in reflective measurement model through Fornell-Larker criterion, cross loading and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) (Hair, Hunt, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017).

Internal consistency reliability assesses whether measures consistently represent the same construct and the loadings should be greater than 0.70 to be retained. However, in certain circumstances, indicators with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 may be retained on the basis of face, content, or expert validity, but those less than 0.40 must be removed (Hair et al., 2011). Based on the analysis, two items from perceived brand scarcity were deleted namely item BS4 (0.519) and BS5 (0.427) due to low loading. The analysis then rerun and the latest loadings are presented in Figure 1 and Table 3. Based on Table 3, all the loadings ranging from 0.612 to 0.94 which consider as valid and reliable. According to Hair et al. (2017), CR value between 0.60 to 0.70 are commonly acceptable and can be considered as valid

and reliable. However, value below that 0.60 show lack of internal consistency reliability. From Table 3, CR values for brand preference, brand scarcity and brand loyalty were 0.953, 0.905 and 0.920 respectively which is consider as satisfactory (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity is refers to the extent to which all the items correlates positively with alternative measures of the same construct. Hair et al. (2017) stressed that AVE value above 0.50 indicate that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Hence, the higher the value the better. In this study AVE for each construct were exceed 0.5 ranging from 0.622 to 0.762 which consider as valid.

In order to assess the discriminant validity, this study employed HTMT criteria as suggested by Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015). Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs by empirical standard (Hair et al., 2017). HTMT is measure the ration of the between-trait correlations to the within trait correlation. It is known as more reliable measure for discriminant analysis as compared to cross-loading and Fornell & Larker approach (Hair et al., 2017). Following Hair et al. (2017) bootstrapping procedure was conducted to assess HTMT. To show adequate discriminant validity the confidence interval (CI) values in HTMT (both interval 2.5% and 97.5%) should significantly different from 1. Based on Table 3, all confidence interval values not include 1 thus indicate the measurement was valid.

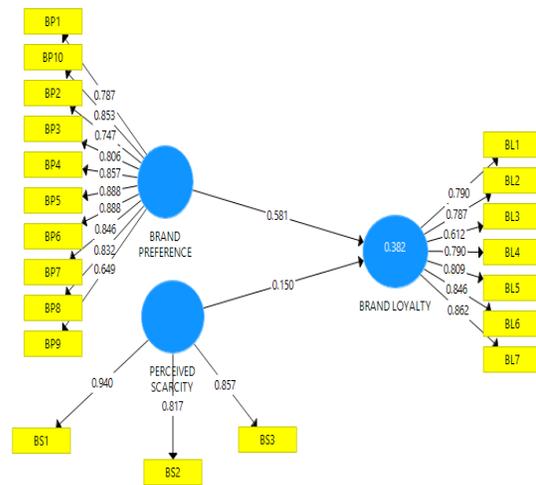


Figure 1. Measurement model

Table 3. Summary result for measurement model

Latent variable	Indicator	Convergent Validity		Internal Consistency Reliability		Discriminant validity
		Loading	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	CR	
		>0.60	>0.50	0.60-0.90	0.60-0.90	HTMT CI does not include 1?
Brand preferences	BP1	0.787	0.669	0.897	0.953	(0.510 & 0.737)
	BP2	0.747				
	BP3	0.806				
	BP4	0.857				
	BP5	0.888				
	BP6	0.888				
	BP7	0.846				
	BP8	0.832				
	BP9	0.649				
	BP10	0.853				
Brand scarcity	BS1	0.94	0.762	0.944	0.905	(0.110 & 0.357)
	BS2	0.817				

	BS3	0.857			
Brand loyalty	BL1	0.79	0.622	0.854	0.92
	BL2	0.787			
	BL3	0.612			
	BL4	0.79			
	BL5	0.809			
	BL6	0.846			
	BL7	0.862			

Assessment of Structural Model

According to Hair et al. (2017), assessment of structural model consist of several steps.

These include assessment of collinearity, structural model relationship, R², effect size (f²), and predictive relevance (Q²). To indicate no multicollinearity issue, VIF value should below 10 (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2004). The following Table 4 summarized collinearity assessment.

Table 4. Collinearity assessment

Variables	VIF value
Brand preference	1.015
Perceived Brand scarcity	1.015

Bootstrapping procedure using 5000 subsample shows that brand preference (β=0.58, p<0.01) and perceived brand scarcity (β=0.150, p<0.01) have a significant positive relationship on consumer FMCGs brand loyalty during pandemic. Thus, H1 and H2 were supported. The details of the finding is shown as in Figure 2 and Table 5.

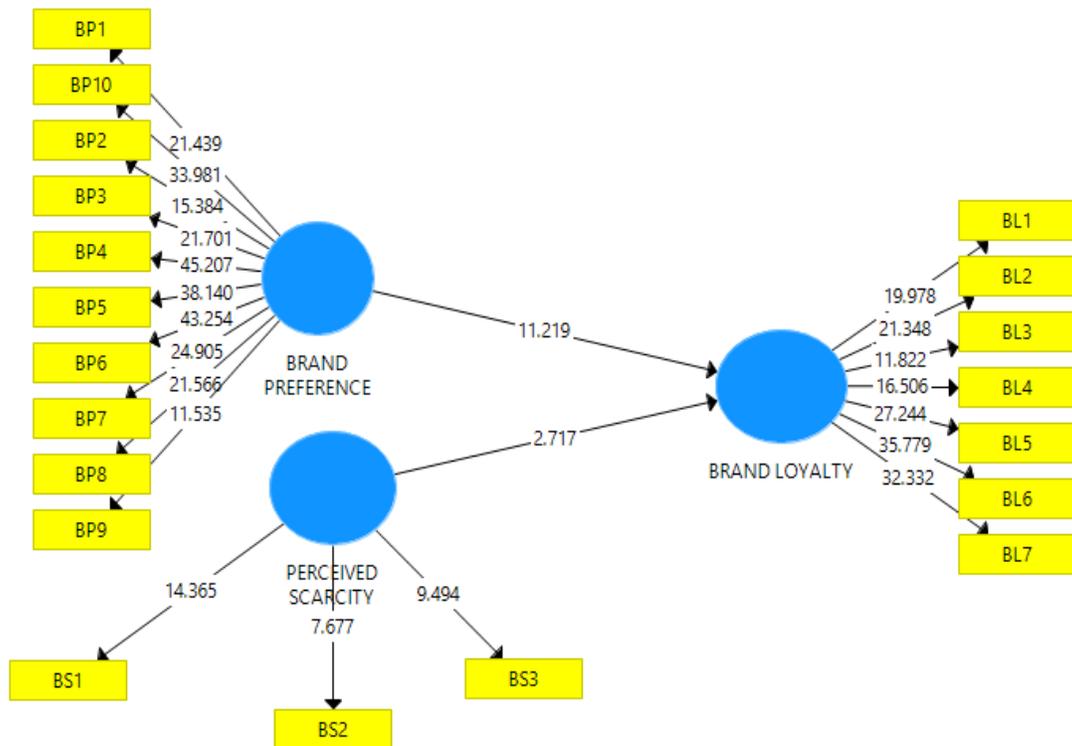


Figure 2. Structural model

Table 5. Structural model coefficients

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T Value	p Values	Significance (p<0.05)
H1: Brand Preference -> Brand Loyalty	0.581	11.219	0	Yes
H2: Perceived Brand Scarcity -> Brand Loyalty	0.15	2.717	0.007	Yes

The next step is to assess the co-efficient of determination (R²) of exogenous variables on endogenous variable in this study. The value for co-efficient of determination (R²) for brand loyalty was 0.382. This suggests that the exogenous variables in this study, namely brand preference and perceived brand scarcity explained 38.2% of variances in brand loyalty towards FMCGs during

pandemic. This indicate that another 67.8% variance could be explained by other predictors.

Next, effect size was assess through f². Effect size shows the relevance of constructs in explaining selected endogenous constructs. f² enable researcher to understand how much brand preference and perceived brand scarcity contributes to the R² value in explaining brand loyalty. According to Hair et al. (2017) the f² value of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 considered as small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. The findings shows that f² value for brand preference and perceived brand scarcity were 0.538 and 0.036 respectively. Hence, brand preference has a large effect and perceived brand scarcity considered as small effect.

Finally, the last step is to measure the predictive relevance of the model (Q²). Q² was calculated using blindfolding procedures to measure the quality of the PLS path model. According to Hair et

al. (2017), Q^2 value must be greater than zero. Based on the result, the Q^2 value was 0.227 which is greater than zero thus support the path model's predictive relevance.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of the study is to examine the relationship between brand preference and perceived brand scarcity on consumers' brand loyalty towards FMCGs during pandemic. For the purpose of the study, two hypotheses were developed namely, H1 to measure relationship between brand preference and brand loyalty and H2 to examine the relationship between perceived brand scarcity and brand loyalty. Based on the structural model assessment, both hypotheses were supported, whereby brand preference and perceived brand scarcity have significant positive relationship between brand loyalty. During pandemic, the higher consumers' brand preference, the higher brand loyalty. Using the sample also, this study conclude that the higher consumers' perceived brand limited availability, the higher their tendencies to loyal to the brand.

The findings concurs with the past studies on the positive relationship between brand preference and perceived brand scarcity on brand loyalty (Ebrahim et al., 2016). However, this findings is unique in the sense that this study was conducted during pandemic and during lockdown implementation in Malaysia whereby consumers had a limited access to their favorite store and only allow to make grocery shopping within their residential area. As a result, consumer may encounter limited brand choices and availability of certain brands. In this study, brand preference is refers to as a behavioral tendency that reflects a consumer's attitude towards certain brand. In this study consumers were asked pertaining their like, usage, choose, inclination and expectation towards their preferred FMCGs brand during pandemic. The mean score for brand preference was 4.1527 which is skewed toward agreement of the statements given. In Malaysia, using this sample during pandemic, consumer still like, use, chose and had higher tendencies to their preferred brand. Overall, consumer perceived that their current brand of FMCGs still attractive and perform better than other brands during pandemic. Besides, Malaysian consumers also perceived that the current brand still meet their need and expectation and more importantly, they perceived that their preferred brand still conveniently available everywhere. Hence, this is evidence on why brand preference statistically significant in explaining brand loyalty. This is supported whereby the result shows that almost 75% of the respondents would prefer and loyal to their current brand during pandemic.

Perceived brand scarcity is refers to consumer perceived/experienced product shortage in terms of preferred brand. Using this sample, the higher consumers perceived that their preferred brand is scarce, the higher their brand loyalty. The findings consistent with the study of Byun and Sternquist (2012) that indicate, when certain product is perceived as limited availability, consumers tend to buy it more to reflect certain objective of ownership such as uniqueness, distinctive and valuable. Based on the survey, it was found that about half of the respondents said they facing difficulty in obtaining their preferred brand during pandemic and MCO. Besides, 75% stated that they won't consider alternative brand if their preferred brand was not available and this is consistent with the mean score for brand loyalty (3.8740) which is skewed toward agreement on the statement of loyalty. In this study, despite perceived their preferred brand almost out of stock and limited number in term of size, style and color, consumers still loyal to their preferred brand and didn't ready to switch to other brand even though other brands have similar characteristic.

Theoretically, firstly this study contributes to extend the knowledge in empirically tested the relationship between brand preference and perceived brand scarcity on brand loyalty

specifically during COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of MCO in Malaysia. The findings is contradict to most review and report from consultant groups which indicate that product scarcity will affect brand preference and loyalty during pandemic. Interestingly, this study shows that consumers are still loyal to their preferred brand of FMCGs even though they admitted the limited availability of their brand in the store. Secondly, different from survey conducted by Valassis (2020) among US consumers, this study revealed that Malaysian consumers were more loyal whereby almost 75% stated that they will not switch to competitors brand when their preferred brand was not available during pandemic. Thirdly, this study add to literature in linking the effect of perceived brand scarcity which is being neglected in most brand loyalty study as suggested by Tolba (2011).

This study also provides an implication to practitioners. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that brand health of FMCGs in Malaysia still at the acceptable level during pandemic whereby consumers still had higher brand preference and brand loyalty. However, perceived brand scarcity despite showing a positive relationship on brand loyalty, the effect is relative small as compared to brand preference. In long run, brand scarcity would tarnish overall brand reputation and will dilute brand loyalty. Malaysian consumers could be considered as hard core loyal even in hard time. However, studies in retail management persistently highlight the urgency of on-shelf availability to avoid brand switching in long run. Hence, for owner of the preferred brand, marketers should guarantee continuous supply chain of FMCGs during pandemic. Fail to meet customer expectation in long run would tarnish their brand loyalty. During pandemic, competing brands should more aggressive in their promotion and sales effort to stimulate awareness and trial especially to hard core loyal consumers. This is because awareness is recognized by many scholars as a key driver for brand preference among consumers.

This study limit in term of generalizability of the findings. Though this study covers Malaysian consumer nationwide, sampling technique that is based on convenience sampling subject to several limitation. Besides, data collection is based on snowballing technique thus reduce the control and randomization of the data. Few comparative study cannot be concluded due to limited number of several demographic profile (such as race, occupation and income). However, considering implementation of MCO that still effective during the survey was conducted, that was considered as the best option of data collection method available. Future study should consider wider sample and more rigorous data collection method to improve the generalizability of the findings. As variance explained by predictors considered as relatively low, few predictors may be considered in future study.

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