

Dimensions of Relationship Quality: The sense of strength between consumer and brand

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Abstract

This academic article aims to (1) define the meaning of relationship quality to the brand (2) confirm the elements of relationship quality to the brand and (3) summarize the dimensions of relationship quality with the brand. The content in this academic article presents concepts and theories including the previous researches to find conclusions regarding to the above objectives. Consequently, the conclusion finds that (1) the relationship quality to the brand means the overall evaluation of strength, which is the occurring feeling within the consumers' minds towards the brand (2) considering that strength is through the level of senses towards all 13 elements (3) and summarizing these elements into 5 dimensions, including the dimensions of (1) love (2) satisfaction (3) trust (4) self-connection and (5) interdependence. This conclusion is useful to the academic sector because of gaining the new knowledge in terms of dimensions and elements of relationship quality and for the business sector, being an indicator to measure the level of brand success.

Keywords: relationship quality, brand

1. Introduction

When going back in the past to study the brand origin, we could be found that the brand was born because of what is called "marketing". By returning to the marketing origin, we would find that marketing was generated from the barter system in the era of majority of people as agriculturists for livelihood. The surplus products from consumption would be exchanged for what they wanted with others. Later when the mentioned product was over exchange for household consumption, the form of product exchange was developed into a selling system by a buyer, also known as a consumer and a manufacturer, who at that time acted as a seller as well with money as an intermediary in exchange. Subsequently, when consumers demanded increasing products and also manufacturers required to sell more products. These caused the society entering into the starting era of industrialization. After those products were delivered to the market from many sellers, the sellers need to use some techniques for allowing consumers to distinguish the products by an individual seller, for example naming brands, creating logos which were in the beginning of what was called "brand" on this planet.

Over time, various environmental contexts have changed, resulting in a continuous evolution of the brand. From the brand in the beginning, it served as an indicator that allowed consumers to distinguish the products by each individual seller. Presently, the brands act differently from previous, as well as marketing that is entering the era of Marketing 4.0 and the brands also enter to Branding 4.0 era as well. The brands in this era act as a center for organization management which is returning to consumption. When the service provider recognizes and believes in the brand value, this leads to value added in brand. Additionally, consumers are not only the brands' customers but they also become the good friends or have a strong relationship with the brand (Isarapakdee, 2016)

The information regarding to the capacity of above brands is consistent with the previous marketing research results that found that many questions ask about the reasons of the customers' decision in purchasing products. The result indicates that the first factor in the customers' decision for purchasing products is the relevance and relationship with the product brand. (Puriwat, 2012) From the foregoing, it showed the importance as related with the relationship between consumers and brand. In term of that important relationship, what can they make those relationships? This is a pondering thing for businesses that have to look back for searching the cause. If we realize the cause, we will know how to manage or plan strategies to these causes. A business is able to deal with the relationship as if the relationship between family members as the strongest relationship, such as mother and child. Therefore, customers in any business will be stable and loyal to the brand and ready to be a brand sponsor forever.

2. Definition of relationship quality to the brand

There are many definitions of the relationship quality. The meaning varies according to the context of the study. The researchers present the definition examples as follows. Relationship quality means a strong relationship between customers and organizations considered by satisfaction, trust which can be further developed into loyalty. (Mario, Zoran & Sandra, 2013)

Relationship quality means the focus on relationships and overall method of assessing the relationship strength between organizations and customers. (Yee, Yeung & Cheng, 2008) Relationship quality means the actions that customers show trust and have confidence in the future operation of the service provider because the past performance has been consistently satisfied. (Heshan, Ping & Xue, 2007)

Relationship quality refers to the overall evaluation of the relationship strength between both parties, which consists of customers and connected organizations. (Palmatier et.al., 2006).

Relationship quality refers to the customers' participation that influence on their satisfaction, loyalty and trust. (Wetsch, 2005)

Relationship quality refers to the relationship between the history of successful meetings and events or unsuccessful which is an important part of increasing the relationship quality in the same period. (Gronroos, 2000)

Based on the above concepts, the author defined the meaning of relationship quality to the brand as follows: Relationship quality to the brand means the overall evaluation of strength, which is the arise feeling within the consumers' minds towards the brand by considering of the strength through the feeling level in the consumers' minds.

3. Elements of relationship quality to the brand

Previous research results that study the subject of "Relationship Quality" found that the relationship quality had different and related elements, such as Dwyer & Oh (1987) explained the good relationship quality must have a high level of satisfaction and trust and not take advantage by the sellers. Williams , Han & Qualls (1998) studied the relationship by using the factor of satisfaction, trust, and commitment. The research of Crosby et al. (1990) studied the relationship quality in 2 dimensions, including trust and satisfaction. A study by Morgan & Hunt (1994) found that trust and commitment were important factors in the marketing success with creation of loyalty. Kim, Lee & Lee (2005) developed a quality relationship gauge to brand by presenting the measure in 5 dimensions, including satisfaction, trust, commitment, intimacy and representation, indicating themselves. Additionally, there were many other researches that identify the relationship quality. The author synthesizes researches which related to the elements of relationship quality and could present in the following table 1;

Table 1: Dimension of relationship quality

citation	dimension			
	Satisfaction	Trust	Commitment	Other
Dwyer et al. (1987)	•		•	
Crosby et al. (1990)	•	•		
Lagace et al. (1991)	•	•		
Fournier (1994)			•	- love/passion - self connection - interdependence - intimacy - brand partner quality
Blackson (1992)	•	•		
Williams (1998)	•	•	•	
Hennig, Gwinner & Gremler (2002)	•	•	•	
Park, Kim & Kim (2012)		•	•	- love and passion - self connection - intimacy - brand partner quality - nostalgic

Kim, Lee & Lee (2005)	•	•	•	- self connective attachment - Intimacy
Kotler (2003)	•	•	•	
Ulaga & Eggert (2006)	•	•	•	
Ivens & Pardo (2007)	•	•	•	
Hsieh & Li (2008)	•	•	•	
Grogoire, Tripp & Legoux (2009)		•	•	- social benefit
Dimitriadis & Papista (2011)		•	•	- passion - self connection - interdependence - intimacy
Nguyen & Nguyen (2011)		•	•	- passion - Self connection - Interdependence - Intimacy
Pentina et al. (2013)		•	•	- passion - self connection - interdependence - intimacy
Dwivepi (2014)		•	•	- social Benefit
Morgan & Hunt (1994)		•	•	- social Benefit
Tho, Trang & Olsen (2016)		•	•	- passion - self connection - interdependence - intimacy
Hashim & Yasin (2017)			•	- passion - liking
Hui & Ye (2017)		•	•	- self brand connection

From Table 1, it found that the example of 22 researches was identified in all 12 dimensions of relationship quality, including

- (1) satisfaction
- (2) trust
- (3) commitment
- (4) love and passion
- (5) self-connection
- (6) interdependence
- (7) intimacy
- (8) brand partner quality
- (9) nostalgic
- (10) liking
- (11) passion
- (12) social benefit

When getting the dimension of relationship quality, the author could review the concepts and theories which related to the above 12 dimensions in the next step for analyzing the identity, similarity, differences and dimension summaries, including elements.

3.1 Satisfaction concept

The literature reviewing found that there were many people who offered the meanings of satisfaction. The author would like to present the definitions of satisfaction from the various scholars as follows;

Satisfaction means the comparison between various expectations and experiences that were in the action. When such experiences had a negative difference from expectations to cause the dissatisfaction. (Cadott, Woodruff & Jenkins, 1987)

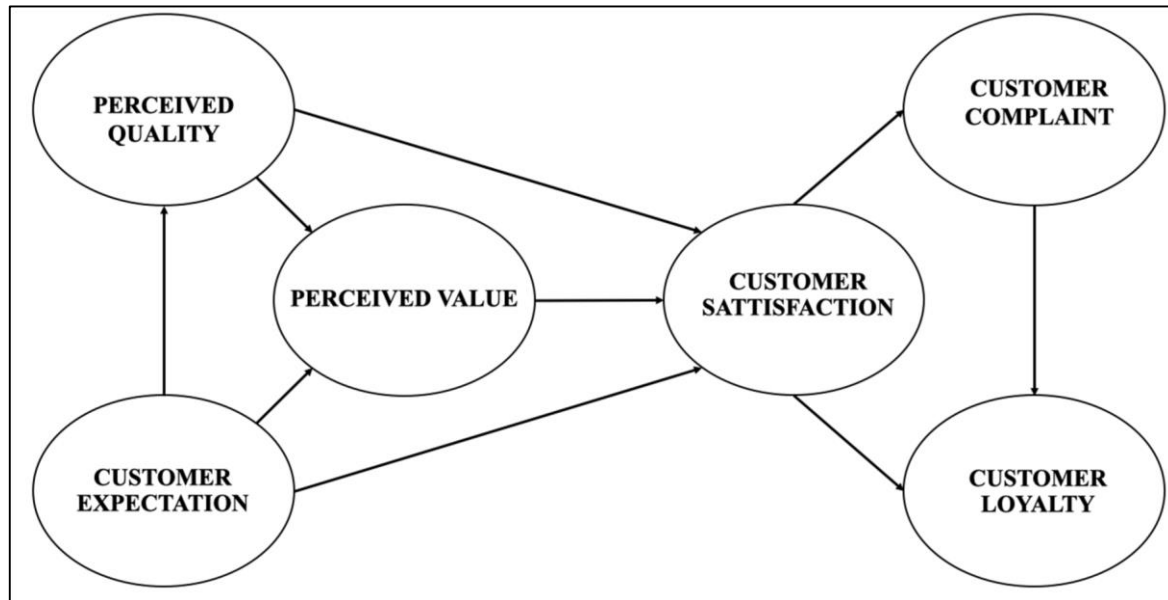
Satisfaction means the responsiveness represented customer's knowledge or the customer's judgment on products and services. Satisfaction had a different perspective depending on each person's perspective (Oliver, 1997).

Satisfaction means a good feeling when successful or receiving what you required to be a pleasant feeling. (Hornby, 2000)

Satisfaction means evaluating the overall feeling from using of consumers on service and experience gained from using the service. The satisfaction evaluated comparison with the experience of using the service and the expectation from using the service. If person doesn't receive enough or below expectations, it will mean that the person is not satisfied. If it has been achieved according to expectations, it refers that person is satisfied. (Forenell, 1992; Giese & Cote, 2000; Zhang et. Al., 2011)

The consumer satisfaction could occur before using the service which effected to the use of real services and satisfaction after using the service. It might be willing to reuse the service and the most importance was reducing conflicts from using the service. The conflicts were due to be unfriendly, frustration and the antagonistic feelings towards the other party. (Roberts et al., 2003) These were the impede elements to create the relationship quality. Therefore, the good relationship can occur if there is less conflict of service users.

picture 1: American Customer Satisfaction Index Model (ACSI)



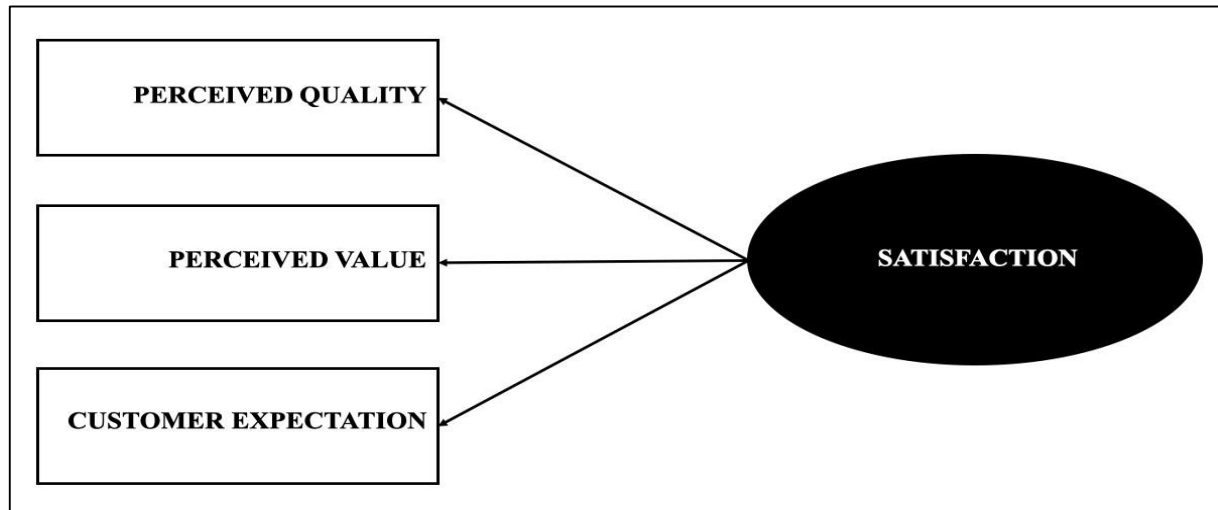
Source: Fornell, Johnson and Anderson (1996)

The ACSI model was developed in 1994 by Professor Claes Fornell, director of the National Quality Research Center, University of Michigan, United States. It was created under the marketing concept in order to be a macro level indicator that reflected on the quality of products and services. Additionally, the consumer satisfaction with products and services produced locally, including products and services from foreign countries which were sold in the United States of America. The reason of ACSI model as a highly role in the economy of the United States was that the customer satisfaction resulted in future business trend towards the sold amounts of products and services. This led to the performance and profits of the company which referred to the capability of country's competitiveness. Furthermore, ACSI model also assisted the businesses to measure the consumers' integrity on the brand and searched for the weaknesses that caused the dissatisfaction. It was used as a quality comparison material between products or services produced locally and imported from abroad. The main strength of ACSI model was to measure the customer satisfaction based on actual experience as a uniform and could be comparable. Therefore, the score that obtained from the assessment could be processed at the industrial level, production / service level and national level. At the same time, it could compare between organizations in order to reflect the competitiveness of each business unit as well. The calculating of the national satisfaction indicators was based on Multi-equation econometric model. There were important factors that determined the customer satisfaction, consisting of 3 main elements such as customer expectations, perceived quality, and perceived value. If this customer satisfaction goes in a positive direction, it will result to the customer loyalty. However, in the negative direction, it will result in the customer complaint.

The ACSI model suggested that the satisfaction was an evaluation or comparison. Therefore, this satisfaction could be covered to the brand partner quality. The author brought together 2 dimensions from the synthesis of the above researches into the 1st dimension in this study such

as satisfaction and divided into 3 elements by based on the ACSI model, consisting of (1) perceived quality, (2) perceived value, (3) perceived expectations.

picture 2: The element of satisfaction



3.2 Theories of Love

The famous psychologist, Robert Sternberg of the psychology department at Yale University developed the theory of love as three elements called “Triangle of Love” theory that created love in various ways (Sternberg, 1998) as follows.

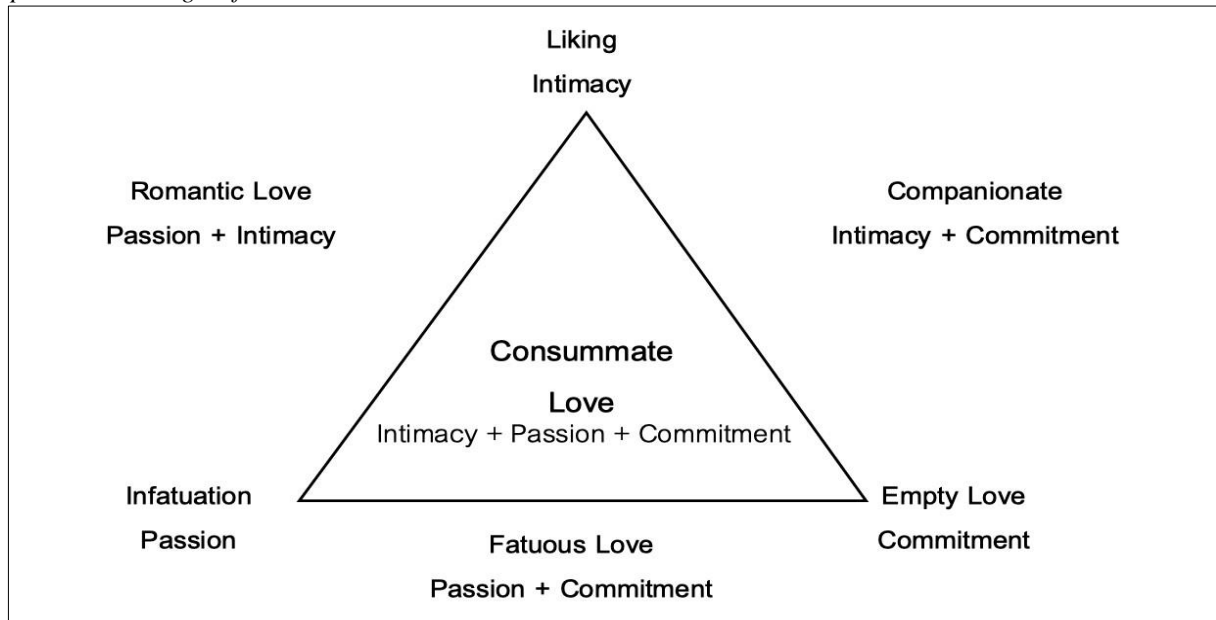
Part 1: Passion means fascination, excitement and alertness. It is in a remarkable period of sexual desire, or a physical relationship rather than the mind.

Part 2 : Intimacy means familiarity, understanding without sexuality involved. This relationship level takes time to be a true friendly relationship, warm, sincere, no commitment or any closeness or bondedness to each other.

Part 3: Commitment means an agreement to each other or living relationship without love, for example, a couple who lived together for a long time until being aged and no more love or enchantment but only the promise to stay together forever.

These three elements are as three corners of an equilateral triangle which determines the 7 types of love, such as: (1) Nonlove is the feeling of common people in a society that is not known before without love, (2) Liking means the close feeling to another person, but without passion or commitment, (3) Infatuated Love relates to passionate feelings, but without intimacy or commitment, (4) Empty Love causes by the commitment decision without intimacy and passion. This can be found in couples who have been together for a long time until disappearing of desire feeling in the appearance, (5) Romantic Love consists of passion and intimacy without commitment, (6) Fatuous Love is a love with commitment and passion without intimacy (7) Consummate Love is a love that has all three elements: passion, commitment and intimacy.

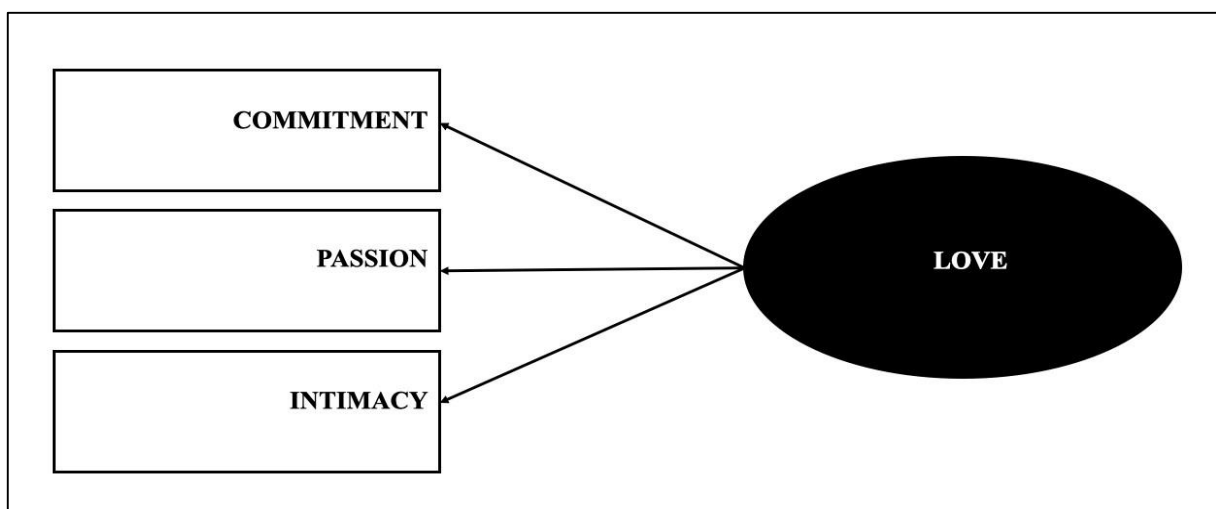
picture 3: Triangle of love



Source: Sternberg (1998)

Robert Sternberg's love theory pointed out that love originated from the inner feelings of the mind. After analyzing the consumers' love to brand and considering the love dimension in which 12 dimensions from above research synthesis, it found that the love dimension covers the commitment, love and passion, intimacy, liking and passion. The author accumulated 5 dimensions from analyzing the above researches to be the 2nd dimension in this study by naming "Love dimension" and divided into 3 elements, including (1) commitment, (2) passion, (3) intimacy.

picture 4: The element of love

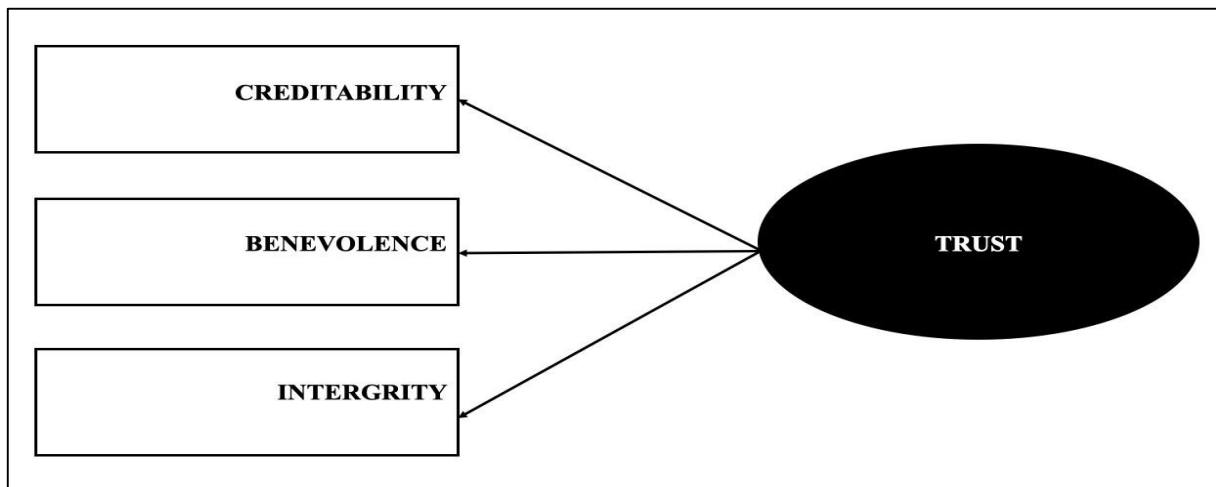


3.3 Trust concept

Trust would arise from the experience which gained from the interaction between products or services among consumers. Trust and reliability could create a positive expectation and consumers' relationships. After interaction occurs frequently, it will lead to emotional formations of Trust called "Emotional Confidence". The trust results in the consumers' repurchase of products or services. (Rousseau et al., 1998).

The element of brand confidence was divided into 3 aspects: 1) creditability was the assessment of the product ability in terms of responding to consumer expectations. (Mayer, Davis & Schooman, 1995) Trust in the brand was the consumers' feeling about the confidence in the utility and the safety that obtained from the product. When the product fulfills the expectation, therefore, trust will be occurred in the brand quality of that product. 2) Benevolence was the product that could be understood and paid attention to consumers. It made a person feeling or recognition on a good intention to action without expecting a return or profit. The benevolence might come from loyalty and beneficial practices to others. 3) Integrity was the consumers' a brand sincerity, faithfulness and attentiveness. It was an important key to confidence. The integrity actions were as keeping promises, consistency, accuracy, justice, etc. Based on trust concept, the author concluded trust as the 3rd dimension in this study and divided into 3 elements, including (1) creditability (2) benevolence) and (3) integrity.

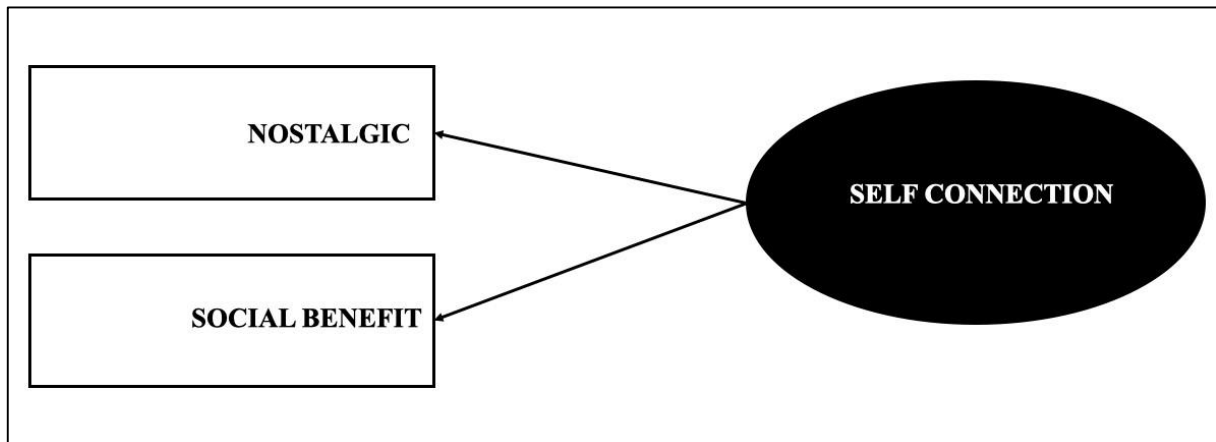
picture 5: The element of trust



3.4 Self-connection concept

It was an element that reflected the brand level in delivering meaning to represent identity or be a part of the consumer's identity to nostalgic in the past, the present day or the future as consumers' desire in self-connection. This encouraged consumers to maintain relationships with the brand through the protection mechanisms of their identity. It supported to be patience or tolerate in environment factors if they face a bad situation. (Fournier, 1998) From self-connection concept with consumers, besides the mention of nostalgic, it also demonstrated the brand useful in the consumers' presence which may be caused by the desire from society to recognize themselves. Therefore, the author summarized the self-connection dimension with the consumers as the 4th dimension in this study and divided into 2 elements, such as (1) nostalgic and (2) social benefit.

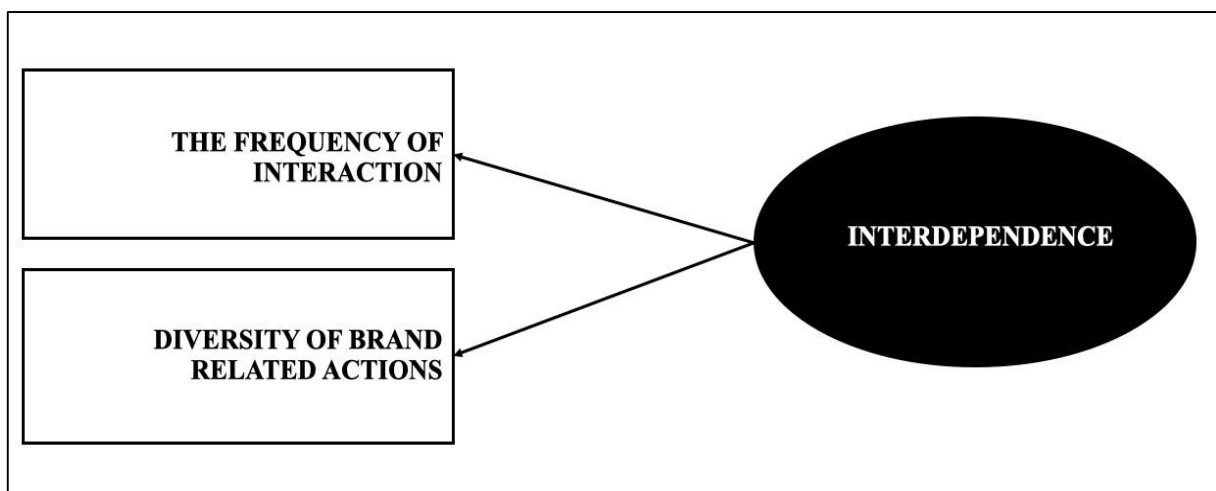
picture 6: The element of self connection



3.5 Interdependence concept

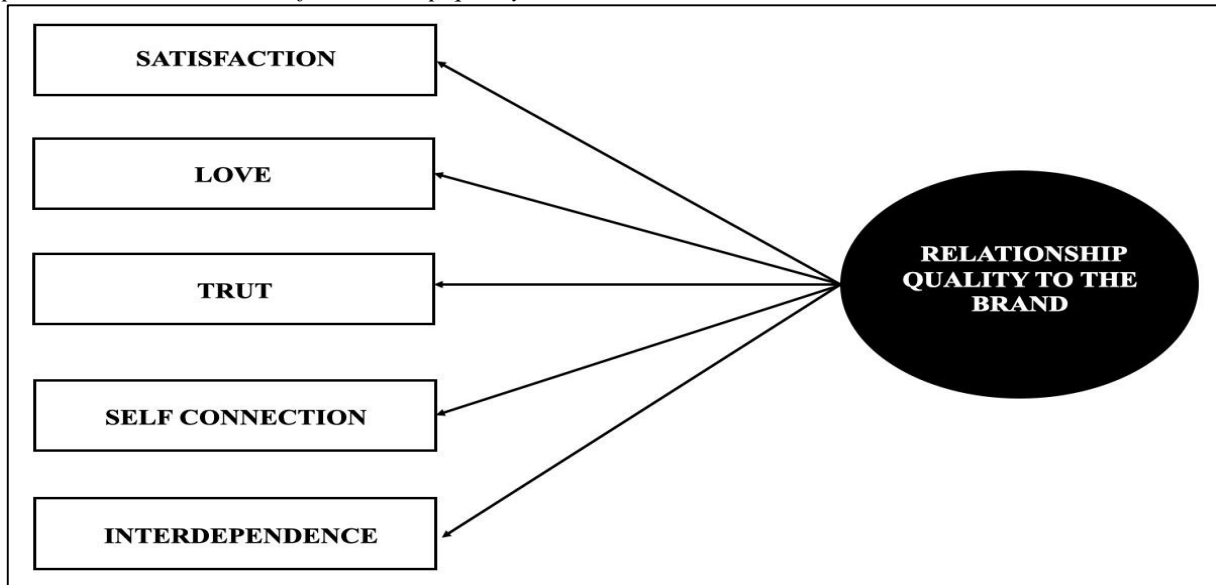
Interdependence between consumers and brands always involved frequently with the brand interaction, such as using a brand on a daily basis from morning to evening, etc. or increasing scope and diversity of brand related action, such as using other products that extend from the original brand, etc. This included the concentration of interaction activities. For example, Although they used the brand less frequently, but they associated with important consumers' activities, etc. Therefore, interdependence on relationships was a part of the daily consumers' lives that would affect the relationship strength in permanent. (Fournier, 1998) By interdependence concept, the author summarized the interdependence dimension as the 5th dimension in this study and divided into 2 elements, such as (1) the frequency of interaction (2) the diversity of brand related action.

picture 7: The element of interdependence



From 12 dimensions derived from research synthesis in the past, the author conducted by reviewing the literature and summarized the quality dimension of the consumers' relationship to brand in order to measure the relationship quality level as follows: (1) love (2) satisfaction (3) trust (4) self-connection (5) interdependence.

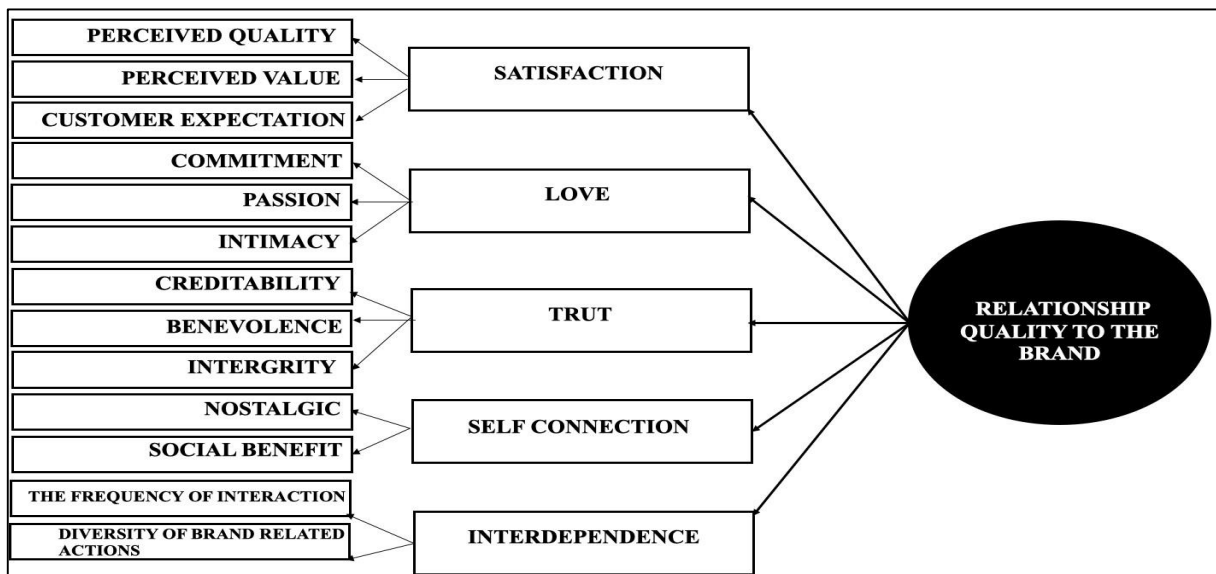
picture 8: The dimensions of relationship quality to the brand



4. Conclusion

From above literature review, the author summarized the study results by following the objective such as: 1) The definition of relationship quality to brand concluded that the relationship quality to brand means the overall evaluation of the strength, which is the arise feeling within the consumers' mind towards the brand 2) The elements of relationship quality to brand by considering that strength through the feeling level towards all 13 elements were confirmed as following: (1) perceived quality (2) perceived value (3) customer expectation (4) commitment (5) passion (6) intimacy (7) creditability (8) benevolence (9) integrity (10) nostalgic (11) social benefit (12) the frequency of interaction (13) the diversity of brand related action, and 3) the quality dimensions associated to brand summarized all these 23 elements into 5 dimensions, such as (1) love (2) satisfaction (3) trust (4) self-connection, and (5) interdependence.

picture 9: Relationship quality to the brand model



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