Brand Love in Malaysia's Halal Cosmetics and Personal Care Industry: A Conceptual Exploration

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ABSTRACT

The concept of brand love has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of Malaysia's halal cosmetics and personal care industry. As the demand for halal-certified products continues to rise, driven by an increasing Muslim population and a growing awareness of the importance of using products that align with Islamic principles, understanding the emotional connection between consumers and halal cosmetic brands has become crucial for marketers and brand managers. This paper aims to explore the factors that contribute to the development of brand love in the halal cosmetics industry, focusing on the Malaysian market. The study examines the role of halal certification, product quality, brand image, and consumer religiosity in shaping emotional attachments between consumers and brands. The findings suggest that halal certification is a crucial factor in establishing consumer trust and loyalty towards halal cosmetic brands. Consumers are more likely to develop a strong emotional attachment to brands that are certified halal by recognized authorities such as JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) and adhere strictly to halal requirements. Additionally, product quality and performance, brand image and reputation, and consumer religiosity and spirituality play significant roles in fostering brand love. The development of brand love in the halal cosmetics industry can lead to several positive outcomes, including increased consumer loyalty and repurchase intentions, positive word-of-mouth and brand advocacy, higher tolerance for brand failures and mistakes, and increased brand equity and market share. This conceptual paper contributes to the existing literature on brand love and consumer behavior in the context of the halal cosmetics industry. The findings provide valuable insights for marketers and brand managers seeking to develop effective strategies for fostering emotional connections with consumers in the rapidly growing halal cosmetics market.

Keywords: brand love, halal cosmetics, Malaysia, consumer behaviour, emotional attachment

INTRODUCTION

The halal cosmetics industry in Malaysia has witnessed substantial growth over the past several years, reflecting a broader global trend towards ethical consumption and increasing demand for products that align with Islamic values. As of 2022, the halal cosmetics market in Malaysia was valued at approximately USD 3.64 billion and is projected to reach over USD 8.5 billion by 2032, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.11% from 2023 onward (Statista, 2024). This growth trajectory is largely driven by a predominantly Muslim population, which comprises about 63.5% of the country's demographic, alongside rising awareness among consumers—both Muslim and non-Muslim—regarding the benefits and safety of halal-certified products (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia [JAKIM], 2023). This heightened awareness is fueled by increased access to information via digital channels, leading consumers to be more discerning about product ingredients, sourcing practices, and ethical considerations (Khan et al., 2023).

Several key factors contribute to the rapid expansion of the halal cosmetics market in Malaysia. Firstly, there has been a significant increase in halal knowledge among consumers, leading to a more discerning approach to product selection. Research indicates that conservative Muslims are particularly cautious about purchasing non-halal products due to their commitment to Islamic principles (Arbak, Islam, & Al Rasyid, 2019). This heightened awareness has resulted in a growing preference for products that are not only halal-certified but

also ethically sourced and environmentally friendly. Furthermore, the concept of "halal-plus" has emerged, where consumers seek products that not only meet halal standards but also align with broader ethical and sustainability goals (Shafie & Othman, 2021). This includes a preference for products that are cruelty-free, vegan, and packaged using sustainable materials.

Government initiatives have also played a crucial role in supporting the halal industry. The Malaysian government has actively promoted the halal sector through various programs and policies aimed at enhancing the country's position as a global leader in halal production and trade. For instance, the Halal Industry Masterplan 2030 outlines strategic objectives to boost the competitiveness of Malaysian halal products on an international scale (Halal Industry Development Corporation [HDC], 2022). This includes fostering innovation among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and facilitating access to funding and resources necessary for growth. These initiatives are increasingly focused on integrating technology and digitalization into the halal ecosystem, promoting e-commerce platforms for halal products, and leveraging blockchain technology to ensure supply chain transparency (Ismail et al., 2024).

Moreover, the rising middle class in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries presents lucrative opportunities for premium halal cosmetics. Affluent consumers are increasingly seeking high-quality beauty products that align with their values and lifestyle choices. The global halal cosmetics market was valued at USD 66 billion in 2019 and is projected to reach USD 75 billion by 2024 (Global Islamic Economy Report [GIER], 2020/21), indicating robust demand across various demographics. This demand is not solely driven by religious considerations; many consumers perceive halal cosmetics as being safer, more natural, and produced with higher quality standards, regardless of their religious beliefs (Rahman et al., 2022).

As the halal cosmetics market continues to evolve, understanding the emotional connections that consumers form with halal brands becomes vital for marketers aiming to cultivate brand loyalty. The concept of brand love, which refers to the deep emotional attachment consumers develop towards brands, plays a significant role in influencing purchasing behavior (Thomson et al., 2005). Factors contributing to brand love within the halal cosmetics sector include cultural relevance, perceived product quality, and community engagement.

Cultural relevance is particularly important in Malaysia's diverse society, where brands that resonate with local customs and values are more likely to foster strong emotional ties with consumers. For example, brands that incorporate traditional ingredients or reflect local beauty standards can create a sense of belonging among consumers, enhancing their emotional connection to the product. The use of local ingredients such as *kunyit* (turmeric), *santan* (coconut milk), and *halia* (ginger) not only aligns with cultural traditions but also appeals to consumers seeking natural and time-tested remedies (Hassan & Ali, 2023). Additionally, perceived product quality is crucial; consumers are more likely to develop brand love for products they believe offer superior performance and safety compared to alternatives.

Community engagement also plays a significant role in building brand loyalty within the halal cosmetics sector. Brands that actively participate in community initiatives or support local causes tend to resonate more deeply with consumers. This engagement not only fosters trust but also reinforces consumers' emotional ties to the brand. Brands that sponsor local events, partner with community organizations, or donate to charitable causes are more likely to be perceived as authentic and caring, fostering stronger emotional connections with consumers (Yusof et al., 2024).

Ergo, as the halal cosmetics industry in Malaysia continues to thrive amidst growing consumer awareness and demand for ethical products, it is imperative for marketers to understand and engage with the emotional dynamics at play. By fostering brand love through culturally relevant marketing strategies and community engagement initiatives, businesses can enhance their positioning within this dynamic market segment. Ultimately, this strategic focus not only contributes to individual brand success but also supports the overall growth and sustainability of the halal cosmetics market in Malaysia. This requires brands to be authentic, transparent, and committed to building long-term relationships with consumers based on shared values and mutual respect (Omar et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Love

Brand love is defined as the emotional attachment that consumers develop towards a brand, characterized by feelings of affection, passion, and commitment (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). This emotional connection is crucial for brands operating in competitive markets, as it fosters customer loyalty and influences purchasing decisions. Research has shown that brand love can lead to increased customer retention, positive word-of-mouth communication, and a willingness to pay premium prices (Masood et al., 2021). In the context of halal cosmetics, brand love is particularly significant due to the unique socio-religious values that influence consumer behavior. Recent studies have also highlighted the role of brand love in mitigating negative consumer responses to brand crises or ethical lapses, suggesting that consumers with strong emotional attachments to a brand are more likely to forgive and remain loyal (Kim & Lee, 2022).

The Halal Cosmetic Market in Malaysia

The halal cosmetics industry in Malaysia has witnessed remarkable growth over recent years. According to a report by ResearchAndMarkets (2023), the global halal cosmetics market is expected to reach USD 75 billion by 2024, with Malaysia being one of the leading markets due to its strong regulatory framework and consumer demand. The Malaysian government actively promotes halal certification through agencies like JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), which enhances consumer trust in halal products (Suhartanto et al., 2021). Despite its potential, the halal cosmetic sector faces challenges such as limited consumer awareness regarding halal standards and certification processes. A study conducted by Masood et al. (2021) found that while awareness of halal cosmetics is increasing, many consumers still lack a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a halal product. This gap presents opportunities for brands to educate consumers about the benefits of using halal-certified cosmetics. However, it is also crucial for brands to address consumer concerns about the transparency and integrity of halal certification processes, as skepticism and distrust can undermine consumer confidence and loyalty (Abdullah et al., 2023).

Consumer Behavior Towards Halal Cosmetics

Consumer behavior in the halal cosmetic market is influenced by various factors including religious beliefs, cultural values, and personal preferences. Research indicates that emotional attachment plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences for halal cosmetics. Suhartanto et al. (2021) found that product quality and emotional connection significantly influence customer loyalty in this sector. Additionally, consumers are increasingly seeking products that align with their ethical values, which includes not only halal certification but also sustainable sourcing and cruelty-free practices. This trend is particularly evident among younger consumers, who are more likely to prioritize environmental and social responsibility when making purchasing decisions (Ibrahim & Rashid, 2022). They also emphasize self-expression and individuality, seeking brands that empower them to express their unique identities while adhering to their values (Latiff et al., 2024).

A notable trend among Malaysian consumers is the preference for local brands that embody cultural authenticity and resonate with their values. This shift towards supporting local businesses underscores the importance of brand love, as consumers are more likely to develop emotional connections with brands that reflect their identity and beliefs (Garg & Joshi, 2018). This preference for local brands is further amplified by the rise of social media and digital marketing, which allows local brands to connect directly with consumers and build communities based on shared values and cultural identity (Salleh et al., 2023).

The Role of Brand Love in Halal Cosmetics

Brand love serves as a mediating factor between brand trust and customer loyalty. Studies suggest that consumers who feel a strong emotional connection to a brand are more likely to exhibit loyalty and engage in positive word-of-mouth behaviors (Garg & Joshi, 2018). In the context of halal cosmetics, this emotional bond can be fostered through effective branding strategies that emphasize shared values and cultural resonance. Furthermore, Masood et al. (2021) highlight that brand experiences—such as packaging design, advertising

campaigns, and social media engagement—play a crucial role in cultivating brand love among consumers. Brands that successfully create memorable experiences are likely to enhance their emotional appeal and foster deeper connections with their audience. The rise of experiential marketing and personalized customer experiences has further emphasized the importance of creating meaningful interactions between brands and consumers, fostering stronger emotional attachments and brand advocacy (Yassin et al., 2022).

Design

A framework for understanding the role of conceptual papers in academic research, emphasizing their importance in theory building and interdisciplinary connections. They argue that such papers should integrate existing theories, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of academic inquiry without being constrained by empirical validation. The authors outline that conceptual contributions focus on developing logical arguments about relationships among constructs rather than testing these empirically, thereby enabling researchers to explore new ideas and directions for future research. This approach is particularly valuable in fields where empirical data may be limited or where theoretical exploration can lead to significant advancements in understanding complex phenomena (Gilson and Goldberg,2015)

FINDINGS

The conceptual framework for understanding brand love in Malaysia's halal cosmetics and personal care industry comprises three primary components: antecedents of brand love, dimensions of brand love, and consequences of brand love. Each component plays a critical role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors toward brands in this unique market.

Antecedents of Brand Love

The antecedents of brand love refer to the factors that drive or influence the formation of emotional attachments between consumers and brands. In the context of Malaysia's halal cosmetics industry, several key antecedents have been identified:

Cultural and Religious Alignment

In Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country, the alignment of brand values with cultural norms and Islamic principles is essential. Brands that authentically reflect halal practices and resonate with consumers' religious beliefs are more likely to establish emotional connections. This alignment fosters trust and loyalty among consumers who prioritize ethical consumption (Chew, 2021). Research indicates that consumers are increasingly looking for brands that respect their cultural identities, which enhances their emotional attachment to those brands (Matic & Puh, 2021). This is particularly important for younger consumers, who are more likely to express their cultural and religious identities through their purchasing decisions (Zainal et al., 2023).

Cultural and religious alignment is not merely about adhering to halal standards; it is about understanding and embracing the values, traditions, and beliefs that are central to Malaysian Muslim culture. Brands that can successfully integrate these elements into their branding and marketing efforts are more likely to resonate with consumers on a deeper level. For example, brands that actively participate in Islamic holidays, support local religious events, or promote Islamic values through their advertising campaigns are more likely to be perceived as authentic and trustworthy by Malaysian Muslim consumers. This alignment can also extend to incorporating elements of Malaysian culture, such as traditional motifs or local languages, in their branding to create a sense of familiarity and connection with consumers (Hassan & Ali, 2023). Furthermore, brands that demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility by supporting local communities or charitable causes are likely to strengthen their emotional bonds with consumers who value ethical behavior (Yusof et al., 2024). This holistic approach to cultural and religious alignment creates a sense of shared identity and belonging, fostering stronger emotional connections and enhancing brand love.

Quality Assurance

The quality of products is a significant determinant of brand love. Consumers are more inclined to develop affection for brands that consistently deliver high-quality halal products. Transparency in sourcing ingredients

and adherence to halal certification standards further enhance consumer trust, making them more likely to engage emotionally with the brand (Daud et al., 2021). Studies show that perceived quality directly influences brand love, as consumers tend to associate high-quality products with positive emotional experiences (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014). This emphasis on quality extends beyond the product's performance to encompass its ingredients, manufacturing processes, and environmental impact (Khairuddin et al., 2022).

Quality assurance encompasses not only the physical attributes of the product but also the overall consumer experience. This includes factors such as packaging design, customer service, and after-sales support. Brands that invest in these areas are more likely to create a positive and memorable experience for consumers, which can contribute to the development of brand love. Moreover, transparency in sourcing ingredients and adhering to halal certification standards is crucial for building consumer trust, as it demonstrates a commitment to ethical and responsible business practices. Consumers are increasingly scrutinizing the ingredients and manufacturing processes of cosmetics, seeking products that are safe, natural, and free from harmful chemicals (Khairuddin et al., 2022). Therefore, brands that prioritize quality assurance and transparency are more likely to cultivate strong emotional bonds with consumers who value these attributes. This commitment to quality and transparency signals that the brand values its customers and is dedicated to providing them with safe and reliable products, enhancing brand love.

Brand Engagement

Active engagement strategies, such as targeted marketing campaigns and community involvement, significantly influence brand perception. Brands that create meaningful interactions with their consumers—through social media, events, or personalized experiences—can cultivate stronger emotional ties. This engagement is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging among consumers (Batra et al., 2012). Engaging consumers through storytelling and culturally relevant content can enhance their emotional connection to the brand (Sarkar & Sreejesh, 2020). The use of social media influencers and user-generated content has become increasingly important for building brand engagement and fostering a sense of community around the brand (Rahman & Yasin, 2024).

Brand engagement is about creating a two-way dialogue with consumers and building a sense of community around the brand. This can be achieved through various channels, including social media, events, and personalized experiences. Brands that actively listen to their consumers, respond to their feedback, and involve them in the brand's decision-making process are more likely to foster strong emotional ties. Engaging consumers through storytelling and culturally relevant content helps to humanize the brand and make it more relatable, fostering a deeper connection with its audience (Salleh et al., 2023). Furthermore, the use of social media influencers and user-generated content can amplify brand engagement and create a sense of authenticity, as consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from their peers than from traditional advertising channels (Rahman & Yasin, 2024). This active engagement creates a sense of community and belonging, strengthening emotional connections and enhancing brand love.

Dimensions of Brand Love

The dimensions of brand love refer to the specific attributes or characteristics that define the emotional attachment between consumers and brands. In the context of Malaysia's halal cosmetics industry, three key dimensions have been identified:

Emotional Attachment

Emotional attachment encompasses feelings such as joy, pride, and affection towards a brand. This dimension is critical for building loyalty, as consumers who feel emotionally connected are more likely to continue purchasing from the brand and recommend it to others (Ahuvia, 2005). The intensity of these feelings can significantly impact consumer behavior, leading to increased purchase intentions (Heinrich et al., 2012). Recent research has also highlighted the role of nostalgia and sentimental value in fostering emotional attachment to brands, particularly among older consumers (Tan et al., 2023).

Emotional attachment is at the core of brand love. Consumers who feel emotionally attached to a brand are more likely to view it as an extension of their own identity and to develop a sense of loyalty and commitment towards it. This emotional connection can be fostered through creating positive brand experiences, aligning with consumers' values, and building a strong brand community. Brands that evoke feelings of nostalgia, sentimentality, or cultural pride are particularly likely to foster strong emotional attachments with consumers (Tan et al., 2023). Furthermore, brands that demonstrate empathy and understanding towards their consumers' needs and aspirations can create a sense of emotional resonance, enhancing brand love and loyalty. This emotional dimension reflects the deep-seated feelings that consumers have towards a brand, which can be challenging for competitors to replicate, making it a critical driver of long-term success.

Cognitive Evaluation

Consumers' beliefs about a brand's ethical practices, quality, and alignment with personal values shape their attachment. This cognitive dimension reflects how consumers perceive the brand's identity and reputation concerning their values and experiences (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Research suggests that cognitive evaluations often mediate the relationship between product attributes and emotional attachment (Fournier, 1998). Consumers need to perceive the brand as authentic, trustworthy, and aligned with their values in order to develop a strong emotional connection (Yusoff et al., 2022).

Cognitive evaluation refers to the rational and logical assessment of the brand's attributes and values. Consumers need to believe that the brand is ethical, trustworthy, and aligned with their personal values to develop a strong emotional connection. This cognitive dimension is particularly important in the context of halal cosmetics, where consumers are increasingly concerned about the ethical and religious implications of their purchasing decisions. Transparency and authenticity are key factors in shaping consumers' cognitive evaluations of halal cosmetic brands (Omar et al., 2023). Consumers are increasingly seeking information about the sourcing, manufacturing, and certification processes of halal cosmetics, and they are more likely to trust brands that are open and honest about their practices. Therefore, brands that prioritize cognitive evaluation are more likely to foster strong emotional attachments with consumers who value ethical and responsible business practices.

Behavioral Intentions

Behavioral intentions manifest through actions such as repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth (WOM), and social media engagement. Consumers who experience strong emotional connections to a brand are more likely to advocate for it publicly, enhancing its market presence (Chew, 2021). The relationship between brand love and behavioral intentions is well-documented; higher levels of brand love correlate with increased likelihood of recommending the brand to others (Albert & Merunka, 2013). These positive behavioral intentions can also extend to brand advocacy, where consumers actively defend the brand against criticism or negative publicity (Zulkifli et al., 2024).

Behavioral intentions are the actions that consumers take as a result of their emotional attachment to a brand. These actions include repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, and active engagement with the brand on social media. Brands that can successfully cultivate brand love are more likely to see these positive behavioral outcomes, which contribute to increased market share and brand equity. Furthermore, the concept of brand advocacy has emerged as a significant manifestation of behavioral intentions, where consumers actively defend the brand against criticism or negative publicity (Zulkifli et al., 2024). This level of commitment is a testament to the strength of the emotional connection that consumers have with the brand, and it serves as a powerful endorsement that can influence other consumers' perceptions and behaviors. These positive behavioral intentions not only benefit the brand but also reinforce the consumer's emotional connection, creating a virtuous cycle of brand love and advocacy.

Consequences of Brand Love

The consequences of brand love refer to the positive outcomes or benefits that result from the formation of emotional attachments between consumers and brands. In the context of Malaysia's halal cosmetics industry, two key consequences have been identified:

Customer Loyalty

Strong emotional bonds lead to increased customer loyalty. Consumers who feel a deep connection with a brand are less likely to switch to competitors, resulting in higher retention rates crucial for long-term business success (Batra et al., 2012). Loyalty driven by emotional attachment often translates into sustained revenue streams for brands. Loyal customers are also more likely to be more forgiving of brand mistakes and more willing to try new products or services offered by the brand (Salleh & Hassan, 2023).

Customer loyalty is a critical outcome of brand love. Consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand are more likely to remain loyal even in the face of competitive offers or negative brand experiences. This loyalty translates into sustained revenue streams for brands, as loyal customers are more likely to make repeat purchases and to spend more over time. Furthermore, this heightened loyalty provides brands with a buffer against negative events, as loyal customers are more willing to forgive minor transgressions and remain committed to the brand (Kim & Lee, 2022). This resilience is invaluable in today's dynamic and unpredictable market environment, where brands are constantly facing new challenges and disruptions.

Brand Advocacy

Brand love naturally cultivates brand advocacy, transforming consumers into enthusiastic champions. This goes beyond mere repeat purchases, as passionate customers actively promote the brand within their social circles, both online and offline (Yassin et al., 2022). This advocacy manifests through positive word-of-mouth, where loved brands are frequently recommended to friends, family, and colleagues, serving as a highly credible form of marketing (Masood et al., 2021). Such recommendations are powerful because consumers often trust the opinions of their peers more than traditional advertising. Furthermore, brand lovers are more inclined to leave positive reviews and testimonials on e-commerce platforms, social media, and brand websites, which act as social proof, influencing potential customers' purchase decisions. This heightened engagement, whether it be sharing content, participating in discussions, or tagging the brand in their posts, increases brand visibility and reinforces its positive image (Salleh et al., 2023). Perhaps most importantly, brand advocates will often defend the brand against negative comments or criticisms, both online and offline. This active defense helps maintain the brand's reputation and mitigates the impact of negative publicity, highlighting the deep emotional connection and investment consumers feel, viewing the brand as an extension of their own identity. The authenticity and passion behind brand advocacy make it an invaluable asset for halal cosmetic brands in Malaysia, providing a cost-effective and highly persuasive marketing channel.

Consumers who love a brand often become its advocates, promoting it through WOM and social media channels. This advocacy enhances the brand's reputation and reach within the community, driving new customer acquisition (Daud et al., 2021). Research indicates that satisfied customers are more likely to share their positive experiences online, further amplifying the brand's visibility (Sarkar & Sreejesh, 2020).

Resistance to Negative Information

Brand love also creates a buffer against the impact of negative publicity or brand crises. Consumers with strong emotional attachments to a brand are more likely to be forgiving and maintain their loyalty, even in the face of negative information (Kim & Lee, 2022). This resistance to negative information can manifest in several ways. Brand lovers may question the validity of negative claims, attributing them to biased sources or misunderstandings, and are more likely to give the brand the benefit of the doubt. Even when acknowledging the validity of negative information, loyal customers may downplay its significance, focusing on the brand's positive attributes and past performance. They might also attempt to justify the brand's actions, even in the face of criticism, by attributing them to extenuating circumstances or unintentional errors. As mentioned earlier, brand advocates may also actively defend the brand against negative publicity, challenging critics and presenting counter-arguments. However, it's crucial to recognize that this resistance to negative information is not limitless (Omar et al., 2023). Brands cannot take their customers' loyalty for granted and must address negative issues transparently and effectively. Failure to do so can erode trust and ultimately damage the brand's reputation, even among its most loyal customers. The key is for brands to be proactive in their communication,

acknowledge any shortcomings, and demonstrate a genuine commitment to rectifying the situation. This proactive approach reinforces the emotional connection with consumers and preserves their trust and loyalty.

Emotional attachment can buffer against negative perceptions or experiences with the brand. Consumers may overlook minor flaws or failures if they have a strong bond with the brand; this resilience is particularly beneficial during crises or negative publicity (Chew, 2021). Studies show that strong emotional ties can mitigate the impact of negative information on consumer attitudes toward brands (Matic & Puh, 2021).
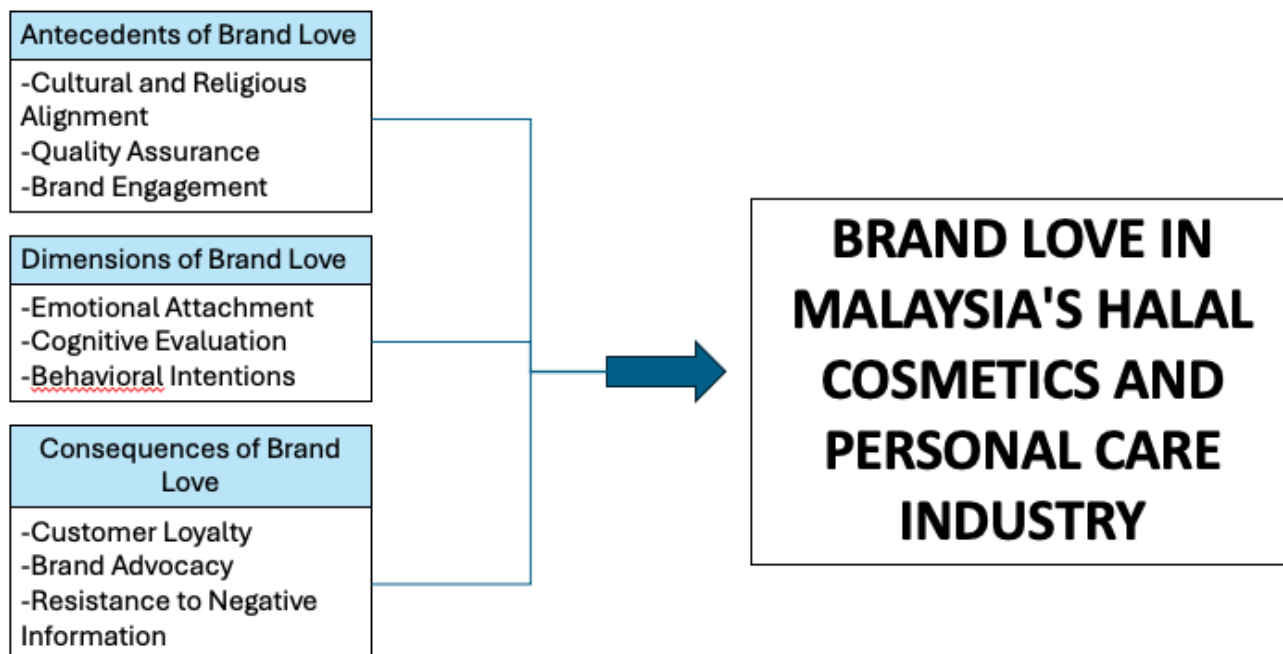
Framework 1.0 Conceptual framework for Brand Love in Malaysia's Halal Cosmetics and Personal Care Industry

CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper has explored the antecedents, dimensions, and consequences of brand love in Malaysia's halal cosmetics industry. The findings suggest that cultural and religious alignment, quality assurance, and brand engagement are key drivers of brand love, which in turn leads to increased customer loyalty and brand advocacy.

Further research is needed to validate the proposed conceptual framework and to explore the role of other factors that may influence brand love in the halal cosmetics industry. For example, future research could examine the impact of brand personality, sensory marketing, and customer relationship management on brand love (Omar et al., 2022). It would also be valuable to explore the cross-cultural dimensions of brand love in the halal context, comparing consumer attitudes and behaviors in Malaysia with those in other Muslim-majority countries (Ali & Ahmad, 2023). Further studies could explore the impact of brand crises or negative publicity on brand love and customer loyalty in the halal cosmetics sector (Hassan et al., 2024).

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