

The role of self-congruity and functional congruity on brand personality-hotel brand loyalty relationship

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Abstract

Not only testing the direct relationship, but this research also intends to examine the indirect relationship of brand personality (BP) on hotel brand loyalty (BL) through self-congruity (SC) and functional congruity (FC). In addition, functional congruity, a topic that is infrequently researched in the tourism literature, is explored in this study. Using WarpPLS 8.0, this study tests the sample of 227 visitors to a hotel in Yogyakarta. The findings show that brand personality, self-congruity and functional congruity are the antecedents of hotel brand loyalty. This study recommends that hotels strengthen brand personality as an intangible asset to gain loyalty.

Keywords: Brand personality; self-congruity; functional congruity; hotel brand loyalty; tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors with the fastest growth (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2018). This sector has also experienced significant growth in Indonesia in recent years (BPS – Statistics of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Province, 2018). One of the indicators is an increase in the number of hotels and other accommodations in regions in Indonesia (BPS – Statistics of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Province, 2018). According to data from BPS Indonesia, in 2018, the number of star hotels in Indonesia reached 3,314 hotels. It had increased from 2016 when there were 2,387-star hotels (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2016). The increase in the number of hotels will impact competition increasingly stringent in the hospitality industry. Hotels need to differentiate from competitors to create customer loyalty and win the match because of this intense competition (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003; Sop & Kozak, 2019). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic, which had paralyzed the tourism sector, also forced hotels to reorganize their strategies to seize post-pandemic opportunities (Gössling et al., 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

Maintaining customer loyalty is crucial (Rather & Hollebeek, 2019; Sop & Kozak, 2019). Previous marketing literature has tested the brand loyalty model. Several studies in hospitality have been conducted to reveal the driving factors for hotel brand loyalty. Research by Khan et al. (2020) shows that hotel brand loyalty is influenced by brand experience. Rather (2018), using a social identity perspective, found that customer brand identification is not only a driving factor for hotel brand loyalty but also commitment, satisfaction, and trust. Rather et al. (2018) examined the effect of consumer brand attachment, value conformity, and customer brand identification on hotel brand loyalty. Although there are many studies on loyalty in various fields, including tourism and hospitality, understanding the driving factors of loyalty is still being debated and needs to be explored further (Tasci, 2017). More research is needed to uncover the different antecedents of customer loyalty in the hospitality sector (Kandampully et al., 2016).

Recent research on the drivers of hotel brand loyalty was conducted by Sop and Kozak (2019), who found the impact of brand personality and image congruity (self-congruity and functional-congruity). When in the recent literature, self-congruity is more often researched concerning hotel brand loyalty (Rather & Camilleri, 2019; Wang et al., 2021), the opposite happens with brand personality and functional congruity. Regarding the literature review that the author conducted, there is one recent study regarding brand personality and hotel brand loyalty (Li et al., 2020). While only a small number of recent studies have investigated functional-congruity in both tourism and hospitality contexts, these studies have not associated it with hotel brand loyalty (Ahn et al., 2013; Bosnjak et al., 2011; Su & Reynolds, 2017). Applying Sop and Kozak's (2019) framework, this study will fill the gap in hotel brand loyalty literature. This study also expands the generability of previous research results by examining the effects of brand personality, self-congruence, and functional appropriateness on brand loyalty in the hospitality context in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This research will also investigate the mediating role of self-congruity and functional congruity on the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty, considering that mediating role has been studied very little in tourism research (Sop & Kozak, 2019). The Special Region of Yogyakarta was chosen as the research location because it is an area that is a barometer of national tourism activities besides Bali and Jakarta, so it is a target for investors to build hotels (BPS – Statistics of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Province, 2018).

Literature Review

Brand Personality

Brand personality serves a symbolic or self-expressive function of the consumer, does not serve a utilitarian function or product-related attributes, and reflects the emotional influence of the brand (Keller, 1993). Brand personality is a set of human characteristics associated with a brand (J. L. Aaker, 1997). Consumers like products that are imaged as having the same personality or are consistent with them. In other words, the product reflects the consumer's self (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Belk, 1988). Furthermore, consumers interact with brands as if they were human beings, especially when brands are attached to products that have significant meaning for consumers (D. A. Aaker, 1996). Brand personality is one of the attributes that can be used to build consumer perceptions of the brand, which is a critical perception in the hospitality business (X. Li et al., 2020). There is a useful tool developed by J.L. Aaker (1997) that can be used to measure brand personality. The tool is a five-dimensional personality

that includes forty-two personality traits. The five personality dimensions are "Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Rudeness."

Many studies related to brand personality have been carried out in various contexts. In the context of clothing brands, Bairrada et al. (2019) investigated the role of brand personality on brand love and found that brand love is a consequence of brand personality. In the context of the banking industry, Garanti and Kissi (2019) prove that brand personality influences brand loyalty through the mediating role of brand equity. Several researchers have explored brand personality in the context of tourism and hospitality, such as Peco-Torres et al. (2021), who found that the use of social media is a driving force for perceptions of brand personality while brand personality influences customer brand engagement in cultural tourism. In addition, Chua et al. (2019) linked brand personality with consumer behaviour in airport sky lounge users.

Self Congruity

In some marketing literature, self-congruity is referred to as one of the factors that have an impact on brand loyalty. Many studies show that the fit between consumers and brands influences consumer behaviour in terms of loyalty to coffee shop brands (Kang et al., 2015), retail (Das, 2014), fast food restaurants (Shamah et al., 2018), and sportswear (Lu & Xu, 2015). In addition, in the field of tourism, previous studies have linked self-congruence with travel behaviour (Sirgy & Su, 2000), brand attitudes (Su et al., 2019), perceived destination value (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2019). Self-congruity can be interpreted as a comparison between product image and consumer self-concept (Kang et al., 2015). The self-congruity theory is rooted in the self-concept theory (Luna-Cortés et al., 2019). The self-congruity theory states that consumers make product and brand decisions based on the consistency between the product or brand image and their self-image (Chebat et al., 2006). The goal is to express self-identity and increase self-esteem in public (Chebat et al., 2006). Sirgy (1982) divides self-concept into four dimensions:

The actual self-concept, namely how customers see themselves;

The ideal self-concept, namely, how customers want to see themselves;

Social self-concept, namely the way customers think other people see them; and

The ideal social self-concept, namely, how customers want to be perceived by others.

Functional Congruity

Appropriateness of attribute values refers to functional congruity (Sirgy et al., 1991). The explanation, functional congruity is the consistency between the attributes associated with brand performance and the ideal attributes expected by consumers (Sirgy et al., 1991). Functional congruity is a utilitarian perspective from image congruity theory (He & Mukherjee, 2007). Srejeesh et al. (2015) stated that functional congruity is the result of comparing customer perceptions and evaluations of product or service attributes before and after purchase.

Self-congruity and functional congruity are critical drivers of brand loyalty (Sirgy et al., 1991). Even so, functional congruity predicts consumer behaviour more than self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1991; Na Su et al., 2019). Some tourism literature that explores functional congruity, among others, reveals that functional congruity predicts consumer attitudes toward hotel brands (Na Su et al., 2019; Na Su & Reynolds, 2017). Furthermore, research by Li et al., (2021) found that functional congruity affects customers' psychological ownership (CPO) in the hospitality context.

Loyalty

Loyalty is a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thus leading to the purchase of the same brand, regardless of influence situational and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behaviour (Oliver, 1999). Consumer commitment to be bound to a particular brand results from a decision-making process and positive evaluation results (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995). In this context, hotel brand loyalty needs to be further investigated because customers always have the choice to switch from one hotel brand to another (Khan et al., 2020).

Loyalty has two approaches, namely behavioural and attitudinal (Khan et al., 2020). Previous tourism research emphasized the attitudinal approach because it was considered more capable of explaining loyalty as a whole and offering an affective view of consumers, such as providing recommendations or positive word of mouth (Khan et al., 2020; Ong et al., 2018; Shamah et al., 2018). In addition, the psychological tendency of customers towards the brand can be seen through this

approach, and attitudinal loyalty will increase if the attitude towards the brand is more potent than other brands (Evanschitzky et al., 2006).

METHOD

Measurement

Brand personality is measured using a tool compiled by J.L. Aaker (1997). There are five dimensions of brand personality: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. The five dimensions consist of 42 personality traits assessed using a 5-point Likert Scale, with 1 point being very not descriptive and 5 being very descriptive. Self-congruity was measured using five items developed by Su et al. (2015) and assessed using a 5-point Likert Scale, with 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. Functional Congruity is measured by providing four statements developed by Su (2015) in the context of hospitality regarding the congruity between attributes related to brand performance and the ideal attributes expected by consumers. The four statements were rated using a 5-point Likert Scale, 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. Brand loyalty in hospitality is measured by providing items developed by Suhartanto (2011). There are ten statements to measure brand loyalty. As with the previous variables, brand loyalty was assessed using a 5-point Likert Scale, 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree.

Samples and Data Collection

The population of this study is every individual who stays in 3 to 5-star hotels in DI Yogyakarta. Retrieval technique non-probability sample used in this study. Samples are selected based on specific criteria or targeted sampling techniques (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The requirements for this research sample include being over 18 years old and staying at one of the hotel brands listed on the form. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents online in September-November 2022. A total of 227 samples were collected in this study. There are 17 hotel brands with 3 to 5 stars in DI Yogyakarta, which is mentioned in the questionnaire. These hotels include: Hotel Tentrem, Eastparc, Favehotel Kusumanegara, The Alana, The Phoenix, Artotel Suites Bianti, Novotel Suites, Ibis Malioboro, KHAS Malioboro, Neo, INNSIDE, El Hotel Royal, Aveon Hotel, Yellow Star, Grand Ambarukmo, Grand Kangen Urip Sumoharjo, Grand Malioboro. Respondents were asked to choose a hotel brand where they had stayed. Hotel brands were selected based on the highest number of reviews on the popular travel application in Indonesia, namely Traveloka. Respondents who have never visited one of the hotel brands mentioned in the questionnaire will be directed to leave the form. The demographic profile of the respondents and descriptive statistics, processed using SPSS 21, is described in Tables 1-3.

Table 1.
Gender Profile

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	161	70.9	70.9	70.9
	Male	66	29.1	29.1	100.0
	Total	227	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.
Age Profile Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	19-24	157	69.2	69.2	69.2
	25-29	48	21.1	21.1	90.3
	30-34	16	7.0	7.0	97.4
	35-39	3	1.3	1.3	98.7
	40-44	3	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	227	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Means	Std. Deviation
Sincerity	227	2	5	4.17	.677
Excitement	227	1	5	4.20	.778
Competence	227	1	5	4.25	.760
Sophistication	227	2	5	4.09	.799
Ruggedness	227	1	5	3.82	.778
Self_Congruity	227	1	5	3.73	.974
Functional_Congruity	227	3	5	4.48	.598
Brand_Loyalty	227	2	5	3.95	.834
Valid N (listwise)	227				

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Validity and Reliability

Data analysis was performed using PLS-SEM with the help of WarpPLS 8.0 software. The first step is to do a factor loading analysis, which is to test the load indicators. According to the rule of thumb, the recommended loading factor is 0.708 or higher (Hair et al., 2018). This figure shows that the construct explains the indicator's variance of more than 50 per cent (Hair et al., 2018). Indicators with a loading of 0.40 to 0.70 can consider for elimination if the action will affect validity, while loading indicators below 0.40 must be eliminated (Hair et al., 2011). The analysis results show that all the indicators tested are acceptable (see Table 4). Next is the reliability test. Evaluation of reliability can use Cronbach's alpha or composite reliability (Hair et al., 2018). An acceptable value for showing good reliability is higher than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011). Based on these conditions, all constructs in this study can be said to have good reliability (BP=0.903, SC=0.930, FC=0.904, BL=0.962).

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all indicators in one construct. An acceptable AVE value is 0.50 or more, which indicates that the construct explains 50 per cent or more of the item variance (Hair et al., 2018). The test results show that the items in this study have convergent validity (BP=0.722, SC=0.782, FC=0.777, BL=0.672). Discriminant validity was evaluated using HTMT values. A high HTMT value greater than 0.9 or 0.85 indicates that discriminant validity is not met (Hair et al., 2018). The HTMT value for good discriminant validity has been fulfilled in this study. Complete validity and reliability test results can be seen in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 4.
Factor Loading

	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Shopistication	Ruggedness	SC	FC	BL
Original	(0.558)							
Down_to_earth	(0.799)							
Family_oriented	(0.720)							
Small_town	(0.684)							
Honest	(0.849)							
Sincere	(0.830)							
Real	(0.801)							
Wholesome	(0.793)							
Sentimental	(0.668)							
Friendly	(0.757)							
Cheerful	(0.581)							
Online		(0.569)						
Trendy		(0.718)						
Excited		(0.772)						
Spirits		(0.711)						
Up-to-date		(0.756)						
Cool		(0.775)						
Young		(0.802)						
imaginative		(0.800)						
Unique		(0.747)						
Independent		(0.704)						

	Sincerity	Excitement (0.688)	Competence	Shopistication	Ruggedness	SC	FC	BL
Contemporary								
Reliable			(0.783)					
Hard_working			(0.826)					
Secure			(0.799)					
Intelligent			(0.879)					
Technical			(0.788)					
Corporate			(0.805)					
Successful			(0.836)					
Leader			(0.837)					
Confident			(0.802)					
Upper_class				(0.782)				
Glamorous				(0.855)				
Good_looking				(0.854)				
Charming				(0.852)				
Feminine				(0.641)				
Smooth				(0.758)				
Masculine					(0.766)			
Outdoorsy					(0.803)			
Westerns					(0.806)			
Tough					(0.780)			
Rugged					(0.589)			
SC_1						(0.851)		
SC_2						(0.926)		
SC_3						(0.892)		
SC_4						(0.848)		
SC_5						(0.903)		
FC_1							(0.866)	
FC_2							(0.867)	
FC_3							(0.909)	
FC_4							(0.884)	
BL_1								(0.757)
BL_2								(0.825)
BL_3								(0.759)
BL_4								(0.797)
BL_5								(0.872)
BL_6								(0.874)
BL_7								(0.842)
BL_8								(0.731)
BL_9								(0.843)

	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Shopistication	Ruggedness	SC	FC	BL
BL_10								(0.815)
BL_11								(0.865)
BL_12								(0.836)
BL_14								(0.829)

Table 5.
Validity and Reliability Results

	BP	SC	FC	BL
R-squared		0.433	0.377	0.589
Adj. R-squared		0.430	0.374	0.584
Composite reliable.	0.928	0.947	0.933	0.966
Cronbach's alpha	0.903	0.930	0.904	0.962
Avg. var. extract.	0.722	0.782	0.777	0.672
Full collin. VIF	2,497	1,804	1,781	2,252
Q-squared		0.433	0.376	0.589

Tables 6.
HTMT Ratios

(good if < 0.90, best if < 0.85)				
	BP	SC	FC	BL
BP				
SC	0.702			
FC	0.664	0.447		
BL	0.734	0.607	0.657	

Structural Models

Assessment of the model to ensure there is no bias. A collinearity test using the VIF value requires for this assessment. The acceptable VIF value to prove there is no collinearity in the construct is 3.0 and below (Hair et al., 2018). The results of the analysis show that there is no collinearity in the construct of this study (see Table 5). Next is to evaluate the value of R². R² presents a measure of the model's strength because it explains the variance in each construct and illustrates the sample's ability to predict (Rigdon, 2012; Shmueli & Koppius, 2011). The acceptable value of R² is 0-1; the greater the value, the better the construct's ability to explain the model (Hair et al., 2018). The R² value in this research model is acceptable (see Fig. 1). Another assessment is to evaluate the value of Q². The reference for assessing the Q² value is if < 0, then it is small, < 0.25, then it is medium, and < 0.5, then it is large (Hair et al., 2018). The Q² value of the research meets the requirements because all are at a value greater than 0 (see Table 5).

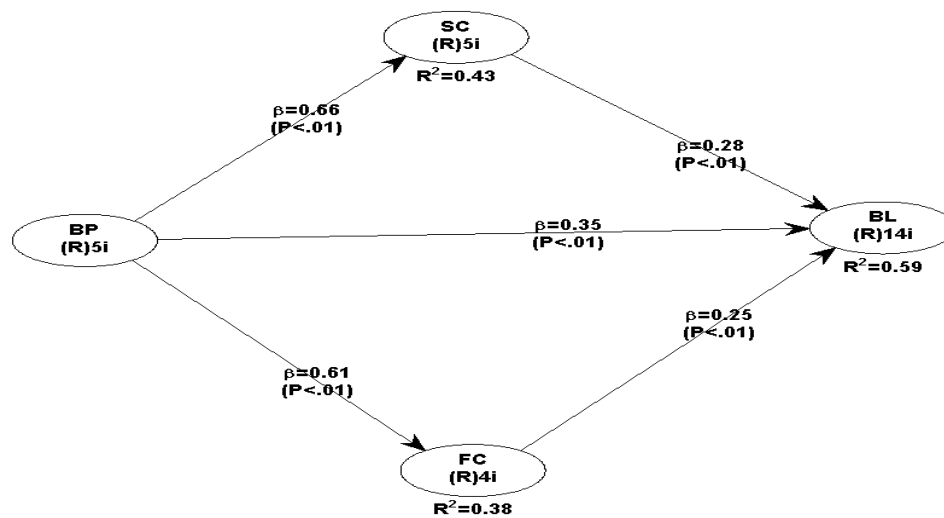


Figure 1.

SEM Model and Analysis Results. Source: WarpPLS Processed Data

Hypothesis testing

The results indicate that brand personality (BP) has a positive effect on self-congruity (SC), functional congruity (FC), and brand loyalty (BL) ($P < 0.01$) or in other words, H1, H2, and H3 are supported. SC and FC also proved to have a positive effect on BL. Therefore, H4 and H5 are also supported.

Table 7.
Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficients (β)	P Values	Results
H1. BP-SC	0.658	<0.01	Supported
H2. BP-FC	0.614	<0.01	Supported
H3. BP-BL	0.348	<0.01	Supported
H4. SC-BL	0.283	<0.01	Supported
H5. FC-BL	0.255	<0.01	Supported

Mediation Analysis

The mediating effect is tested using Variance Accounted For (VAF) (Hair et al., 2014). Using the VAF method, the indirect effect of the mediating variable can only be tested if there is a significant direct effect in the relationship between the constructs (Chauhan et al. , 2021). After that, another condition that must be met is the significance of the indirect effect. The hypothesis testing has shown that the BP-SC indirect effect; SC-BL; BP-FC; FC-BL, is significant, and the direct effect of BP-BL is also significant. Subsequent evaluation using VAF is carried out based on the path coefficients (β) with the formula:

$$(a \times b) \div (a \times b + c)$$

Referring to (Hair et al., 2014), the assumptions used in decision-making are if $VAF > 80\%$, then full mediation; if $20\% \leq VAF \leq 80\%$, then partial mediation, if $VAF < 20\%$, then no mediation.

Table 8.
Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	VAF	Conclusion
H6. BP-SC-BL	$(0.66 \times 0.28) \div (0.66 \times 0.28 + 0.35) = 0.345$ $(0.61 \times 0.25) \div (0.61 \times 0.25 + 0.35) = 0.303$	Partial mediation
H7. BP-FC-BL		Partial mediation

This study explores a topic rarely researched in the hospitality literature: the direct effect of functional congruity on hotel brand loyalty. The results prove that functional congruity does have a positive influence on hotel brand loyalty. When the attributes associated with brand performance are

consistent with the ideal qualities expected by consumers, consumers are encouraged to be loyal to the hotel brand. It shows the importance for people in the hotel industry to ensure that the functional attributes that represent excellent hotel services can be adequately conveyed to customers. This study strengthens the self-congruence theory, which states that consumers make product and brand decisions based on the consistency between the product or brand image and their self-image (Chebat et al., 2006).

The results of this study also prove that brand personality influences image congruity, both self and functional congruity. As explained by Su and Reynolds (2017), consumers evaluate their congruity with the personality attached to the hotel. Consumers may perceive hotels as having 'Cool', 'Glamorous' or 'Charming' personality traits and feel that these traits match their self-image so that consumers have a positive value for the hotel. Besides influencing the symbolic function, brand personality also affects the utilitarian part of the brand. A personality such as 'Competence', for example, reflects service quality (Su & Reynolds, 2017). It explains why consumers who feel that a hotel brand has 'Competence' personality traits will appraise the hotel brand to have the functions expected of a hotel service. Furthermore, this study also found the positive influence of brand personality on brand loyalty. This finding confirms previous literature (Kaushal & Ali, 2020; Molinillo et al., 2017).

Examining the mediating role of self-congruity and functional congruity, the results of this study show the influence of both in the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty. The existence of consistency between brand personality and self-image and perceived brand personality and functional attributes will influence consumer behaviour. These results fill the gaps in the tourism literature in terms of the influence of image congruity theory.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically, the findings of this study support the results of previous research from Sop and Kozak (2019). The research found that brand personality, self-congruity, and functional congruity positively affect brand loyalty and strengthen the role of brand personality theory and image congruity theory (self-congruity and functional congruity) in tourism. The brand personality, which consists of Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness, has positively affected self-congruity, functional congruity, and brand loyalty. In addition, self-congruity and functional congruity are proven to mediate brand personality and loyalty. That is, there is consistency between consumer personality and brand personality that consumers feel is a driving force for loyalty to hotel brands. Utilitarian attributes also play an essential role as a driver of hotel brand loyalty. This research shows that brand personality dimensions such as Competence are closely associated with utilitarian values (Su & Reynolds, 2017).

Practically, this research provides insight for people in the hospitality industry to understand better the importance of strengthening intangible and unique assets, such as forming a solid brand personality. The hospitality industry is trying to rebuild its business after the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the efforts that can make to get up and return to competition is to improve their marketing strategy (Hsieh et al., 2020), for example, to gain consumer loyalty. Factors driving brand loyalty that can show distinctiveness from competitors need to be found, considering that, as a service, hotels are similar. The differentiator in question can be in the form of offering symbolic and utilitarian values from the hotel brand. Symbolic value in the form of human characteristics associated with a brand often referred to as brand personality, is one of the strengths of building brand equity (Keller, 1993). In addition to symbolic value, the brand utility value is also proven to be an essential component of the brand equity dimension, namely brand loyalty.

This study applies the research framework of Sop and Kozak (2019). Research that examines other variables in the relationship between brand personality-self congruity-functional congruity-brand loyalty is highly recommended to enrich the hotel brand loyalty literature. Future studies can consider testing moderating variables. Moderation of multi-group analysis is also recommended to see the difference in the effect of the two sample groups (for example, women vs men, Gen Y vs Gen Z, vacation stay destinations vs work stay destinations). In addition, women and gen Z dominate the respondents of this study. A more varied demographic profile of respondents is possible in future research.

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