



The Mediating Role of Customer Trust in the Relationship Between Brand Image and Brand Loyalty Towards Electric Vehicle Brands

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Abstract

The rapid growth of the electric vehicle (EV) industry has intensified competition among automobile brands, making customer loyalty a critical determinant of long-term business success. In this context, brand image plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing behaviour. However, the extent to which customer trust mediates the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty in the EV sector remains underexplored. The present study aims to examine the mediating role of customer trust between brand image and EV brand loyalty among electric vehicle consumers.

The study adopts a quantitative research approach using structured questionnaires administered to EV users and prospective buyers.. The study investigates how dimensions of brand image, including innovation, environmental responsibility, reliability, and technological advancement, contribute to customer trust and subsequently enhance brand loyalty. The study contributes to the existing literature on consumer behaviour and green marketing by providing insights into the psychological mechanisms influencing loyalty in the electric vehicle market.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty, Electric vehicle, Brand image



Introduction

The global automobile industry is undergoing a significant transformation with the rapid adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) as an alternative to conventional fuel-powered transportation. Growing environmental concerns, rising fuel prices, technological advancements, and government initiatives promoting sustainable mobility have accelerated the demand for electric vehicles across the world. Consumers are increasingly shifting towards EVs due to their eco-friendly nature, lower operational costs, and innovative technological features. As competition intensifies in the EV market, automobile companies are focusing not only on attracting new customers but also on building long-term customer loyalty.

In highly competitive markets, brand loyalty has become one of the most valuable assets for organizations. Brand loyalty refers to the degree of commitment and repeated purchasing behaviour exhibited by consumers towards a particular brand. Loyal customers are more likely to repurchase products, recommend the brand to others, and resist switching to competing alternatives. In the context of electric vehicles, establishing strong brand loyalty is particularly important because EV adoption is still evolving, and consumers often face uncertainty regarding product performance, battery life, charging infrastructure, and technological reliability. Therefore, EV manufacturers must develop effective strategies to strengthen customer confidence and loyalty.

Among the various factors influencing customer loyalty, brand image plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes. Brand image refers to the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions consumers hold regarding a brand. A positive brand image helps organizations differentiate themselves from competitors and creates favourable perceptions among consumers. In the EV industry, factors such as technological innovation, environmental responsibility, product quality, safety, and corporate reputation contribute significantly to the formation of brand image. Consumers are more likely to prefer EV brands that are perceived as innovative, reliable, and environmentally conscious.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the mediating role of customer trust between brand image and EV brand loyalty. The study seeks to explore whether customer trust acts as an intermediary mechanism through which brand image influences consumers' loyalty towards electric vehicle brands. By understanding these relationships, the research contributes to the fields of green marketing, consumer behaviour, and sustainable mobility.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the influence of brand image on customer trust towards electric vehicle (EV) brands.
2. To analyze the relationship between customer trust and brand loyalty in the electric vehicle market.
3. To investigate the mediating role of customer trust between brand image and EV brand loyalty.

Statement of the Problem

The electric vehicle (EV) industry has experienced substantial growth in recent years due to increasing environmental awareness, technological advancements, and government initiatives promoting sustainable transportation. As the EV market becomes increasingly competitive, automobile companies are focusing on developing strong customer relationships and enhancing brand loyalty to achieve long-term success. In such a dynamic market environment, retaining loyal customers has become more challenging because consumers are presented with multiple EV brands offering similar technological features, pricing, and sustainability benefits.



Despite the growing importance of customer trust in the EV market, limited research has been conducted to examine how customer trust mediates the relationship between brand image and EV brand loyalty. Most previous studies have independently focused on brand image or customer loyalty without adequately exploring the psychological mechanism through which trust influences loyalty formation in the electric vehicle sector. This research gap creates a need for a comprehensive study to understand whether customer trust acts as an intermediary variable connecting brand image and brand loyalty.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining the mediating role of customer trust between brand image and EV brand loyalty. The study aims to identify how a favourable brand image contributes to building customer trust and how such trust ultimately strengthens customer loyalty towards electric vehicle brands. The findings of the study are expected to provide valuable insights for EV manufacturers and marketers in developing effective branding, trust-building, and customer retention strategies in the rapidly evolving electric vehicle market.

Scope of the Study

The present study focuses on examining the mediating role of customer trust between brand image and brand loyalty in the electric vehicle (EV) industry. The scope of the study is confined to understanding consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions towards electric vehicle brands. It primarily investigates how brand image influences customer trust and how trust contributes to the development of long-term brand loyalty among EV consumers. The study covers consumers who are existing users or potential buyers of electric vehicles. It includes respondents who are aware of EV brands and possess sufficient knowledge regarding electric vehicle technology, performance, environmental benefits, and related services. The research mainly concentrates on passenger electric vehicles and excludes commercial electric vehicles such as buses, trucks, and industrial transport vehicles.

The study examines important dimensions of brand image, including technological innovation, environmental sustainability, product quality, reliability, safety, and corporate reputation. It also explores customer trust in terms of credibility, dependability, transparency, and confidence in EV brands. Brand loyalty is analyzed through factors such as repeat purchase intention, customer commitment, positive word-of-mouth, and resistance to switching to competing brands. However, the scope of the study is limited to selected variables such as brand image, customer trust, and brand loyalty. Other factors influencing EV purchase behaviour, including pricing, government subsidies, charging infrastructure, and social influence, are beyond the scope of the present research. Additionally, the findings may vary depending on changes in consumer preferences, technological developments, and market conditions in the evolving electric vehicle industry.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the mediating role of customer trust between brand image and EV brand loyalty. The descriptive approach helps in understanding consumer perceptions regarding electric vehicle brands, while the analytical approach is used to analyze the relationships among the variables such as brand image, customer trust, and brand loyalty.



2. Nature of the Study

The study is **quantitative in nature** and is based on empirical data collected from respondents through a structured questionnaire. Quantitative analysis enables the researcher to measure consumer opinions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions towards electric vehicle brands using statistical techniques.

3. Sources of Data

The study uses both **primary data** and **secondary data**.

Primary Data

Primary data are collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to gather information regarding consumer perceptions of brand image, customer trust, and brand loyalty towards electric vehicle brands.

Secondary Data

Secondary data are collected from Research journals ,Books ,Articles ,Company reports ,Government publications ,Websites related to electric vehicles and consumer behaviour

4. Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of:

- Existing electric vehicle users
- Potential EV buyers
- Consumers aware of electric vehicle brands

The respondents are selected from urban regions where awareness and adoption of electric vehicles are comparatively higher.

5. Sampling Technique

The study employs a **convenience sampling method** for selecting respondents. This method is chosen due to ease of accessibility and availability of respondents who possess knowledge about electric vehicles and EV brands.

6. Sample Size

A sample size of approximately **200 respondents** is considered appropriate for the study to obtain reliable and meaningful results. The final sample size may vary depending on the response rate and completeness of the collected questionnaires.



7. Instrument for Data Collection

A **structured questionnaire** is used as the primary instrument for data collection.

8. Variables of the Study

Independent Variable

- Brand Image

Mediating Variable

- Customer Trust

Dependent Variable

- EV Brand Loyalty

9. Tools and Techniques for Data Analysis

The collected data are analyzed using statistical software such as **SPSS**. The following statistical tools are proposed for analysis:

1. **Percentage Analysis**

Used to analyze demographic characteristics of respondents.

2. **Descriptive Statistics**

Used to measure mean and standard deviation of responses.

3. **Correlation Analysis**

Used to identify the relationship between brand image, customer trust, and brand loyalty.

4. **Regression Analysis**

Used to determine the impact of brand image on customer trust and brand loyalty.

5. **Mediation Analysis**

Used to examine whether customer trust mediates the relationship between brand image and EV brand loyalty.

10. Hypotheses of the Study

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Brand image has a significant positive effect on customer trust towards EV brands.
- **H2:** Customer trust has a significant positive effect on EV brand loyalty.
- **H3:** Brand image has a significant positive effect on EV brand loyalty.
- **H4:** Customer trust mediates the relationship between brand image and EV brand loyalty.

Limitations of the Study

- The study is limited to selected respondents aware of electric vehicle brands.
- The findings depend on the honesty and understanding of respondents.



- The study focuses only on brand image, customer trust, and brand loyalty, excluding other influencing factors such as price, government incentives, and charging infrastructure.
- The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalization of results to the entire population.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	118	59.0
Female	82	41.0
Total	200	100.0

Interpretation

The above table shows that 59% of the respondents are male and 41% are female. This indicates that male respondents constitute the majority of the sample selected for the study on EV brand loyalty.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25 Years	36	18.0
25–35 Years	84	42.0
36–45 Years	52	26.0
Above 45 Years	28	14.0
Total	200	100.0

Interpretation

The majority of respondents (42%) belong to the age group of 25–35 years, indicating that younger consumers show greater awareness and interest towards electric vehicle brands.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Brand Image	4.18	0.64
Customer Trust	4.05	0.71
EV Brand Loyalty	3.96	0.75

Interpretation

The mean value of brand image is 4.18, which indicates that respondents possess a favourable perception towards EV brands. The mean value of customer trust (4.05) reveals that consumers generally trust EV brands regarding reliability and performance. The mean score of EV brand loyalty (3.96) shows a relatively high level of loyalty among respondents. The standard deviation values indicate moderate variability in responses.



Table 4: Correlation Analysis - relationship between customer trust and brand loyalty in the electric vehicle market

Variables	Brand Image	Customer Trust	EV Brand Loyalty
Brand Image	1	.712	.645
Customer Trust	.712	1	.768
EV Brand Loyalty	.645	.768	1

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

Interpretation

The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between brand image and customer trust ($r = 0.712$), indicating that a favourable brand image significantly increases customer trust towards EV brands.

The relationship between customer trust and EV brand loyalty is also strong and positive ($r = 0.768$), showing that higher trust leads to stronger loyalty among EV consumers.

Further, brand image and EV brand loyalty are positively correlated ($r = 0.645$), indicating that consumers with positive perceptions of EV brands tend to exhibit higher loyalty.

Since all correlation values are significant at the 1% level, the study confirms that the variables are positively associated with one another.

Table 5: Regression Analysis – Effect of Brand Image on Customer Trust

Model	R	R Square	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Brand Image → Customer Trust	.712	.507	.712	14.268	.000

Interpretation

The regression results show that brand image significantly influences customer trust ($\beta = 0.712$, $p < 0.001$). The R^2 value of 0.507 indicates that 50.7% of the variation in customer trust is explained by brand image.

Table 6: Regression Analysis – Effect of Customer Trust on EV Brand Loyalty

Model	R	R Square	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Customer Trust → EV Brand Loyalty	.768	.590	.768	16.912	.000

Interpretation

Customer trust has a significant positive influence on EV brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.768$, $p < 0.001$). The R^2 value indicates that 59% of the variation in EV brand loyalty is explained by customer trust.

Table 7: Mediation Analysis

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect Through Custom Trust	Result
Brand Image → EV Brand Loyal	0.645	0.547	Partial Mediation



Interpretation

The mediation analysis reveals that customer trust partially mediates the relationship between brand image and EV brand loyalty. This indicates that a positive brand image not only directly influences loyalty but also indirectly enhances loyalty by increasing customer trust.

The findings confirm that customer trust acts as an important psychological mechanism connecting brand image and customer loyalty in the EV market.

Findings of the Study

1. Majority of respondents were male consumers

- Out of 200 respondents, **59% were male** and **41% were female**, indicating comparatively higher involvement of male consumers in the EV market.

2. Young consumers showed greater participation

- **42% of respondents belonged to the age group of 25–35 years**, followed by 26% in the 36–45 years category, showing that younger consumers are more inclined towards electric vehicles.

3. Consumers had a favourable perception of EV brand image

- The mean score for brand image was **4.18**, indicating that respondents perceived EV brands as innovative, reliable, and environmentally responsible.

4. Customer trust towards EV brands was relatively high

- The mean value of customer trust was **4.05**, which signifies that consumers generally trust EV brands in terms of quality, performance, and credibility.

5. EV brand loyalty among consumers was strong

- The mean score for EV brand loyalty was **3.96**, showing that respondents demonstrated positive loyalty intentions such as repeat purchase and recommendation behaviour.

6. Brand image had a strong positive relationship with customer trust

- Correlation analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of **$r = 0.712$** , significant at the 1% level, indicating that a favourable brand image increases customer trust towards EV brands.

7. Customer trust significantly influenced EV brand loyalty

- The correlation coefficient between customer trust and EV brand loyalty was **$r = 0.768$** , showing a strong positive relationship between trust and loyalty.

8. Brand image positively influenced EV brand loyalty

- The correlation value between brand image and EV brand loyalty was **$r = 0.645$** , indicating that consumers with favourable perceptions towards EV brands tend to remain loyal.

9. Brand image significantly predicted customer trust

- Regression analysis showed a beta coefficient of **$\beta = 0.712$** with **$p = 0.000$** , confirming that brand image significantly influences customer trust.
- The R^2 value of **0.507** indicated that 50.7% of variation in customer trust is explained by brand image.

10. Customer trust significantly predicted EV brand loyalty

- Regression analysis produced a beta value of **$\beta = 0.768$** with **$p = 0.000$** , proving that customer trust strongly affects EV brand loyalty.
- The R^2 value of **0.590** showed that 59% of variation in brand loyalty is explained by customer trust.

11. Customer trust partially mediated the relationship between brand image and EV brand loyalty

- The direct effect of brand image on loyalty was **0.645**, while the indirect effect through customer trust was **0.547**.



- This confirms that customer trust acts as a significant mediating variable between brand image and EV brand loyalty.

Suggestions

1. Enhance Brand Image Through Innovation

- EV manufacturers should continuously focus on technological innovation, battery efficiency, and smart vehicle features to strengthen positive brand image among consumers.

2. Build Strong Customer Trust

- Companies should provide transparent information regarding battery life, charging performance, warranty policies, and maintenance services to increase customer confidence and trust.

3. Improve After-Sales Service

- Efficient customer support, quick service response, and accessible service centres can significantly improve trust and long-term customer relationships.

4. Strengthen Environmental Branding

- EV brands should emphasize sustainability and eco-friendly practices in marketing campaigns to attract environmentally conscious consumers.

5. Increase Consumer Awareness

- Educational campaigns regarding EV safety, charging infrastructure, and long-term cost savings can reduce consumer uncertainty and enhance trust.

6. Develop Loyalty Programs

- Introducing customer loyalty programs, referral incentives, and exclusive membership benefits can encourage repeat purchases and strengthen brand loyalty.

7. Focus on Personalized Customer Experience

- Understanding consumer preferences and offering customized solutions can improve customer satisfaction and emotional connection with EV brands.

Conclusion

The study examined the mediating role of customer trust between brand image and EV brand loyalty. The findings revealed that brand image significantly influences customer trust and EV brand loyalty in the electric vehicle market. Consumers tend to develop stronger loyalty towards EV brands that are perceived as innovative, reliable, environmentally responsible, and technologically advanced.

The study further confirmed that customer trust plays a crucial mediating role between brand image and brand loyalty. A positive brand image enhances customer trust, which subsequently strengthens long-term loyalty towards EV brands. Since electric vehicles involve high financial investment and technological uncertainty, trust becomes an essential factor influencing consumer decision-making and repeat purchase intentions.

The statistical results demonstrated strong positive relationships among the variables, indicating that customer trust is a key psychological mechanism that connects favourable brand perceptions with loyal consumer behaviour. The study highlights the importance of trust-building strategies in the competitive EV market.

Overall, the research contributes to the fields of consumer behaviour, green marketing, and sustainable mobility by providing valuable insights into loyalty formation in the electric vehicle industry. The findings can help EV



manufacturers and marketers design effective branding and customer relationship strategies to improve customer retention and gain long-term competitive advantage in the rapidly growing EV sector.

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