



The Influence of Website Design, Subjective Norms and Ease of Use on Brand Trust Mediated by Perceived Usability: Conceptual Review

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Abstract. This study aims to explore the conceptual framework of the mediating role of perceived usefulness in the relationship between website design, subjective norms, ease of use, and brand trust, adopting Self-Determination Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory. The methodology uses a structured conceptual framework, synthesizing literature from various relevant previous studies for the development and analysis of the conceptual model. The analysis results indicate that although website design, subjective norms, and ease of use directly influence brand trust, empirical inconsistencies suggest the presence of unidentified mediating variables. It is hoped that the presence of perceived usefulness will bridge the gaps in previous research. The originality of this research lies in its emphasis on the role of perceived usefulness as a mediator, which has not been comprehensively explored in this context before. The practical implication of this research is the importance of optimizing website design, aligning with positive subjective norms, and enhancing ease of use to increase perceived usefulness, ultimately improving brand trust.

Keywords: Website Design, Subjective Norms, Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Brand Trust, Conceptual Analysis

1 Introduction

Trust in a brand is very essential to establish a long-term bond between the company and customers. This trust can be affected by different items like site design, subjective norms and ease of use adopted by the consumer [1]. For example, user experience in interacting with the company online platform also indirectly affects brand trust. It is, therefore, necessary to investigate these influences in the construction of brand trust specifically through the mediator perceived ease [1], [2]

Website design As one of the first elements users encounter, website design plays a significant part in making a good or bad first impression about your brand. A pleasing and easy-to-use design can enhance the user experience, consequently enhancing trust in the brand [3]. A Website that is easy to use, nice looking and with

readable text sizes will provide a professional sensation and will increase trust for another user's important topic address – a poor web site (very small fonts) might decrease user trust [3]. A well-designed website should also be concerned with speed and functionality, as these are significant for promoting brand trust through user-perceived usability [4], [5].

Furthermore, subjective norms do also affect people's judgements when trying to develop their trust on the brand [3]. Individuals are likely to have a favourable attitude towards the brand, if they perceive that their referents or social circle favor or approve the use of a service. These subjective norms of reference are extra-personal cues that may reinforce or undermine the user's belief in the brand, depending on the social support they receive [3].

Ease of use is another significant factor in determining how users rate a brand. An easy-to-use system or platform tends to be more appreciated by users, which in turn increases their trust in the company [6]. For those users who find navigation the digital platforms complicated, negative effects on brand assessments (in that case low levels of brand trust) are likely to develop. As a result, ease of use should be optimized to develop positive experiences that can impact brand trust [6].

One of the variables that can bridge the relationship between website design, subjective norms, ease of use, and brand trust is perceived usability. Perceived usability refers to the extent to which users feel that the platform or service they are using provides benefits to them. If users feel that the website they use is not only accessible but also provides significant benefits to their lives, their trust in the brand will increase even more [1], [7]. The perceived usability can be mediated by a good user experience with an attractive website design and adequate ease of use. This concept is in line with the Theory of Use and Satisfaction, which emphasizes that individuals are active in choosing a medium or platform that can meet their needs [2], [8].

This study adopts an approach from Social Cognitive Theory and Value Perception Theory to explain that brand trust is formed when users feel that a website not only meets their expectations, but also provides more value that is relevant and useful in their lives [1]. Thus, perceived usability not only serves as a link, but also as a catalyst that strengthens the relationship between website design, subjective norms, and ease of use to brand trust [3], [8], [9].

Thus, this study aims to explain how website design, subjective norms, and ease of use contribute to brand trust mediated by perceived usability. This research is expected to provide practical insights for companies in designing digital platforms that are not only functional but can also increase user loyalty and trust in their brands.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Self-Determination Theory dan Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

This research adopts two main theories, namely Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. These two theories are relevant to explain the relationship between website design, subjective norms, ease of use, and brand trust mediated by perceived usability. According to the well-known self-determination theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan, an individual's psychological

well-being is based on the satisfaction of three fundamental needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness [10]. Supportive environment can work in favour of the need for autonomy and competence, whereas subjective norms cater to social relationships. When companies can meet these three requirements, people will trust the company more." Hobfoll has proposed the COR theory, which posits that people strive to obtain, maintain and protect a wide range of resources (e.g., physical, psychological, social and material) for well-being and stress prevention [11]. In the present study website design, usability and ease of use are considered useful external factors for users, helping to consolidate brand trust by making fun in an easy way [12].

2.2 Brand Trust

Brand trust refers to consumers' confidence in a brand's ability to deliver the promised quality, benefits, and experience. This trust is heavily influenced by the user's experience when interacting with brand elements, such as website design, subjective norms that exist in organizational culture, and user-perceived ease of use. In this study, brand trust is examined as a broad concept, involving the psychological, social, and emotional aspects that shape the user's relationship with the brand [13]. Brand trust can grow as users perceive usability to increase through seamless interaction and fun website design [14]. High brand trust contributes to greater customer loyalty and satisfaction, as well as increases the intention to continue using the service [15].

2.3. Website Design

Website design includes the visual and functional aspects of the online platform used by companies to interact with their users. As an integral part of the user experience, website design plays a big role in creating a positive or negative first impression of a brand. A well-designed website is not only aesthetically appealing, but it also offers ease of access, intuitive navigation, and high responsiveness. This research shows that functional and aesthetic website design can increase perceived usability, which ultimately increases brand trust [16]. Poor design, on the other hand, can lead to user frustration and reduce their trust in the brand.

2.4 Subjective Norms

Subjective norms refer to the social influence felt by individuals regarding the use or unusability of a product or service. Subjective norms can arise through the influence of friends, family, or social groups that support the use of the platform. Positive subjective norms can strengthen users' intention to continue using the services offered by the company, strengthening their trust in the brand. Conversely, negative norms can lower interest and trust in the brand, despite the website's high design and ease of use [15].

2.5 Ease of Use

Ease of use refers to the extent to which users feel that the use of a system or platform can be done easily without difficulty. A smooth user experience and minimal

friction can reinforce perceived usability, which serves as a mediator that connects website design and subjective norms to brand trust. The easy-to-use platform provides a positive experience, which increases user satisfaction and trust in the brand [14]. Conversely, difficulties in using the platform can lower the level of trust and interest in continuing to use the service [17].

2.6 Perceived Uses

Perceived usefulness is the user's perception of the benefits they get from using a product or service. In this study, perceived usability functions as a mediating variable between website design, subjective norms, and ease of use for brand trust. When users feel that the platform they are using is very beneficial to them, they are more likely to trust the brand [13]. Perceived usability can be influenced by a variety of factors, including intuitive website design, ease of use, and social norms that support the use of the platform [12].

3 Methodology

This study uses a conceptual approach to clarify theoretical constructs and develop new interpretations based on existing literature [18]. According to [19], a conceptual review helps identify research gaps and formulate frameworks for future empirical studies. Relevant literature is integrated to align with the research objectives, thus allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between key concepts. The result of this approach is a conceptual framework that can be empirically tested in subsequent research.

This framework aims to answer several key questions related to the influence of factors that affect brand trust: (1) Does website design affect perceived usability? (2) Do subjective norms affect perceived usefulness? (3) Does ease of use affect perceived usability? (4) Does website design affect brand trust? (5) Do subjective norms affect brand trust? (6) Does ease of use affect brand trust? (7) Does perceived usability affect brand trust?

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Website design for perceived usability

Website design refers to the visual and functional elements of a site that aim to create a good user experience [20]. Website design includes various aspects, such as layout, typography, color, navigation, and interactivity that affect how users interact with the site [21]. Perceived usability, on the other hand, describes the extent to which users find the site easy to use and provide benefits according to their needs. Logically, a good website design can increase the usability felt by users because an intuitive design and clear navigation will make it easier for users to access the desired information, increase the comfort of use, and ultimately strengthen a positive perception of the site's usability [22]. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is a positive relationship between the quality of the website design and the level of usability perceived by the user, as is

the case with PT. Campus Management, which uses website design to facilitate interaction with its users.

Previous research has shown that effective website design can improve the usability perceived by users. Design elements, such as the simplicity of the interface, the usability of navigation, and the interactive feedback, greatly influence the ease of use of the website, which in turn increases the perceived usability [23]. This is in line with the results of Huang's (2023) research which states that user-friendly website design contributes to increased usability, as it makes it easier for users to interact with the site and achieve their goals more efficiently. Moreover [24] It also emphasizes the importance of intuitive design in improving perceived usability, reducing the cognitive burden on users, and facilitating better navigation.

4.2 Subjective norms affect perceived usefulness

Subjective norms refer to an individual's perception of what others (especially those who are important to the individual) think they expect or do [25]. In the context of the use of technology, subjective norms relate to the social influences that direct a person's decision to use a system or product. If a person feels that others, especially their social group, are likely to use or support the use of a technology, then that individual is more likely to use the technology as well. Perceived usability, which illustrates how useful and easy it is for individuals, can be influenced by subjective norms because these social perceptions can reinforce the belief that the technology is indeed useful [22]. Therefore, at PT. Campus Management, subjective norms derived from the recommendations of friends, colleagues, or the surrounding community can increase the perception of perceived usefulness, because users feel compelled to follow the norms that apply in their environment.

Previous research supports this hypothesis by showing that subjective norms can influence perceived usability in the context of technology use. Subjective norms have a significant impact on an individual's decision to use technology, because social influences provide a sense of belief that the technology used does have usefulness and relevance [26]. Subjective norms play a role in reinforcing perceptions of usability in new technologies, as users are more likely to follow what is considered the norm within their social group [24]. These social norms lead individuals to accept and use technology, thereby increasing perceived usefulness. Thus, previous research supports that subjective norms have a positive effect on perceived usefulness.

4.3 Ease of use over perceived use

Ease of use refers to the extent to which users feel that a technology or system is easy to learn and use without experiencing difficulties or confusion [27]. This factor is very important because if a system or website is considered easy to use, users will feel more comfortable and less burdened in operating it. Perceived usability, which includes the extent to which users feel the technology meets their needs, can increase when ease of use is high [24], [26]. Logically, if users feel that there are no obstacles or complexities in using a system, they will be more likely to experience greater benefits or usability from the system. An easy-to-use system will increase the perception of usability felt by users, as users feel that the platform makes it easier for them to meet their needs efficiently.

Previous research supports a positive relationship between ease of use and

perceived usability. Ease of use is a key factor in increasing the usability felt by users, because technology that is easily accessible and understood makes users feel the benefits faster [27]. Other research shows that ease of use directly affects how users rate the usability of the system, which in turn increases their satisfaction [27]. Users who don't feel the need to struggle to learn how to use technology or websites tend to find it more useful and relevant. This indicates that the easier a system is to use, the higher the usability perceived by the user.

4.4 Website design against brand trust

Website design not only affects perceived usability, but can also play an important role in shaping brand trust. Attractive, professional, and functional website design can increase users' positive perception of the brand, as a well-designed site reflects credibility and quality. Users tend to trust brands that have websites that are accessible, responsive, and aesthetically appealing, because they feel they are investing in a good user experience. Brand trust itself includes the belief that the brand can deliver on promises and deliver a valuable product or service. Therefore, an effective and user-friendly website design can strengthen a brand's image, increase credibility, and ultimately build users' trust in the brand. In the context of PT. Campus Management, a modern and user-friendly website design will strengthen users' trust in the platform they offer.

Previous research has shown that website design has a significant influence on brand trust. [21] Finding that an attractive, easy-to-use website design contributes to increased brand trust, as it creates the impression that the brand is credible and reliable. A study also shows that designs that prioritize user experience, such as clear layouts, good responsiveness, and consistent aesthetics, contribute to an increase in positive perceptions of brands [28]. Website design that is consistent with brand values and identity is able to strengthen an emotional connection with users, thereby increasing overall brand trust.

4.5 Subjective norms of brand trust

Subjective norms refer to an individual's beliefs regarding the social expectations of those around them, such as family, friends, co-workers, or communities that are considered important. In the context of technology adoption and interaction with a brand, subjective norms come into play when a person feels compelled to trust or use a brand due to the influence of their social environment. Brand trust is a consumer's belief that a brand is able to provide value, meet expectations, and act consistently. Logically, when the social environment gives positive judgments and shows trust in a brand, individuals tend to follow those perceptions and build their own trust. In other words, the stronger the social push or positive recommendation an individual receives, the higher their trust in the brand. If other users around them view the brand as trustworthy and relevant, it will increase brand trust for potential or new users.

Previous research supports the relationship between subjective norms and brand beliefs. Subjective norms have a significant influence on shaping brand trust, as users tend to adopt attitudes that are in line with their group perception or social environment [25]. Other research by [25] It also shows that social perception brings legitimacy to a brand, thus being able to strengthen consumer confidence and trust. In addition, the

results of the study [24] asserting that social norms can stimulate positive user evaluations of a digital service, which ultimately affects the overall level of trust in the brand.

4.6 Ease of use against brand trust

Ease of use refers to the extent to which users feel that a technology or system can be accessed and used without difficulty. In the context of a brand, ease of use relates to the positive experience that users get when interacting with the product or service offered by that brand. When users feel comfortable and unburdened in using a system or application, it increases their trust in the brand. A seamless and efficient experience contributes to the perception that the brand cares about the comfort of its users and is reliable. Therefore, if a system or platform is easy to use, users are more likely to trust the brand because they feel valued and facilitated in interacting with the products or services offered. The ease of use on their platform will increase users' positive perception and trust in the brand.

Previous research supports a positive relationship between ease of use and brand trust. Ease of use has a significant impact on brand trust as users are more likely to feel comfortable and trust in brands that deliver a seamless user experience[28]. Likewise with [29], which found that when users can easily access and use a system or product, they are more likely to trust the brand that provides it, as it shows that the brand is committed to providing the best possible experience for its users. Ease of use plays an important role in building a positive perception of the quality and reliability of the brand, which in turn increases the trust of the brand itself.

4.7 Perceived usefulness to brand trust

Perceived usability refers to the extent to which users feel that a technology or system provides benefits that match their expectations and needs. When users feel that the product or service they are using is truly beneficial, they are more likely to build a positive relationship with the brand. Perceived usability can affect brand trust because a user's positive experience with a product or service can strengthen their belief in the quality and credibility of the brand. If users feel that the technology or system they are using is effectively meeting their needs, they will be more likely to trust the brand that provides it.

Previous research supports a positive relationship between perceived usability and brand trust. Perceived usability has a significant impact on brand trust, as a positive experience with a product or service reinforces the perception that the brand is reliable [22]. Other research by [30] It also shows that when users feel that the technology or service they are using provides clear benefits and fits their needs, they are more likely to trust the brand that provides it. Perceived usability can strengthen a user's emotional connection with the brand, which in turn increases their trust in the brand.

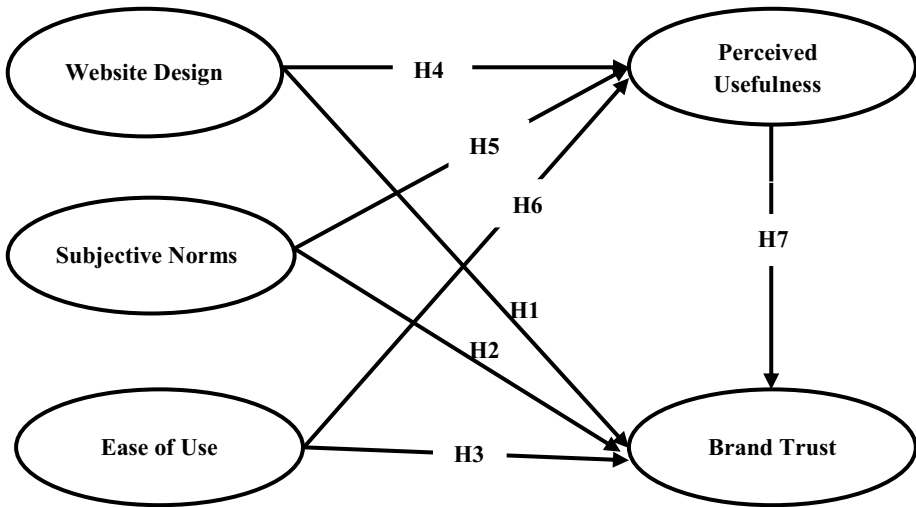


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. This conceptual framework was obtained from previous research discussions and integrations. This conceptual research proposes that website design, subjective norms, and ease of use have a positive effect on brand trust, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of perceived usability. This framework is in line with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory in meeting basic psychological needs and conserving resources. Perceived usefulness plays an important role as a mediator; A functional and attractive website design and high ease of use can drive a positive perception of the platform's usability, which in turn reinforces brand trust. Similarly, subjective norms that support and influence decisions to use digital platforms can reinforce perceptions of usability, which ultimately has an effect on brand trust. In other words, a positive user experience, created through good website design, ease of use, and supportive social norms, will strengthen the relationship between perceived usability and brand trust.

5 Conclusion

This conceptual research comprehensively outlines the relationship between website design, subjective norms, ease of use, perceived usability, and brand trust. Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, we propose a conceptual framework that highlights the important role of perceived usefulness as a mediator. Conceptual findings show that good website design, supportive subjective norms, and ease of use not only contribute directly to brand trust, but also significantly improve perceived usability. The perceived usability then becomes an important bridge that facilitates the fulfillment of basic psychological needs and the management of resources, which in turn reinforces brand trust indirectly.

This framework provides an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics that shape brand trust, placing perceived usability as a central element that brings together website design factors, social norms, and ease of use.

This research makes a theoretical contribution by expanding the understanding of brand trust through the role of perceived usability as a mediator between website design, subjective norms, ease of use, and brand trust. In practical terms, these findings provide insights for policymakers and company managers to design strategies that strengthen supporting factors such as website design, positive social norms, and ease of use to increase brand trust and support business sustainability. The next step is to test this conceptual framework empirically through quantitative studies using PLS-SEM tools on PT Kampuskos Management users.

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