



## THE LOYALTY EQUATION: LEADERSHIP, WORKLOAD, AND EMPLOYER BRANDING FOR MILLENNIALS

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**Abstract: The Loyalty Equation: Leadership, Workload, and Employer Branding for Millennials.** Millennial employee loyalty has become an important issue in contemporary human resource management due to the increasing tendency of millennials to change jobs and seek better career opportunities. Previous studies have commonly treated employee loyalty as a single construct, despite the possibility that loyalty may consist of distinct attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. Therefore, this study examines the influence of authoritarian leadership, workload, and employer branding on millennial employees' attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. This study employed an explanatory quantitative design using a survey method. Data were collected from 108 millennial lecturers at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and analyzed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that authoritarian leadership and workload negatively affect both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, while employer branding positively influences both dimensions of loyalty. The results suggest that millennial employees are more likely to develop emotional attachment and organizational commitment when they perceive supportive leadership, balanced workload, and positive organizational treatment. The study contributes to the employee loyalty literature by distinguishing between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, which are often treated as a single construct in previous studies. The distinction provides a more comprehensive understanding of employee loyalty dynamics and extends the application of social exchange theory in explaining millennial workplace behavior. Practically, the findings offer insights for organizations in developing strategies to improve millennial employee retention and commitment.

Keyword: Millennial; Loyalty; Leadership; Workload; Employer Branding

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## INTRODUCTION

Employee loyalty has become an important issue in contemporary human resource management, particularly in relation to the millennial's workforce. Millennials currently dominate a large portion of the global labor market and are expected to become key organizational actors in the future (Islam et al., 2024). This generation is generally characterized as adaptive, technologically literate, achievement-oriented, and highly motivated to pursue self-development (Aydogmus, 2019; Tan et al., 2024). However, millennials also tend to change jobs more frequently and are less likely to remain in one organization for a long period compared to previous generations (Tan et al., 2024). Previous research revealed that 86% of millennials would consider leaving their jobs when organizational value does not align with their personal values (Porter et al., 2023), while Yang et al. (2024) found that 66% of millennials are considering leaving their current jobs. These conditions indicate that employee loyalty among millennials has become an increasingly urgent issue for organizations.

Several previous studies have attempted to explain employee loyalty through factors such as leadership, workload, and employer branding (Aboobaker et al., 2020; Book et al., 2019; Salameh et al., 2023). Leadership style, particularly authoritarian leadership, has frequently been associated with lower employee motivation, reduced creativity, and weaker organizational commitment because employees are not sufficiently involved in decision-making process (Chan et al., 2013; Gu et al., 2018). Similarly, excessive workload has been linked to work stress, turnover intention, organization cynicism, and reduced job satisfaction (Bowling et al., 2015; van Ruysseveldt et al., 2023). In contrast, employer branding has been identified as an important organizational strategy for attracting and retaining employees through positive workplace reputation, work-life balance, and career development opportunities (Backhaus, 2016; Schlechter et al., 2015).

Despite the growing number of studies discussing employee loyalty, previous research still tends to conceptualize loyalty as a single variable without distinguishing between attitudinal and behavioral dimensions (Guillon & Cezanne, 2014). This limitation creates a research gap because positive employee attitudes toward organizations do not always translate into actual loyal behaviors. Employees may continue working in an organization because of



situational demands rather than genuine emotional attachment or commitment. Consequently, loyalty measured solely as a single construct may not fully capture the complexity of employee loyalty dynamics.

This study addresses this gap by adopting the perspective that employees can be viewed as (Yao et al., 2019). In marketing literature, loyalty is commonly divided into attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty reflects emotional attachment, positive feelings, and psychological commitment toward an organization, while behavioral loyalty refers to actual actions that demonstrate commitment, such as maintaining performance, contributing actively, and remaining in the organization. By applying this distinction to human resource management, this study offers novelty through the separation of employee loyalty into attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. This perspective provides a more holistic understanding of millennial employee loyalty and explains how organizational factors influence both psychological attachment and actual employee behavior.

This study also grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which explains that workplace relationships are formed through reciprocal exchanges between employees and organizations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employee who perceives organizational treatment as fair and supportive are more likely to reciprocate through positive attitudes and loyal behavior (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). Within this perspective, authoritarian leadership and excessive workload may weaken employees' perception of reciprocity and fairness, while positive employer branding may strengthen employees' emotional attachment and commitment toward the organization.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the influence of authoritarian leadership, workload, and employer branding on millennial employees' attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. This study is expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the employee loyalty literature through the distinction between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty and by extending the application of SET in explaining millennial workplace behavior. Practically, the findings are expected to help organizations develop more effective strategies for managing and retaining millennial employees through supportive leadership, balanced workload management, and stronger employer branding.



## METHODS

This study uses an explanatory quantitative design to examine the causal relationship among authoritarian leadership, workload, and employer branding, and millennial employee loyalty. Data were collected from March to May 2023 using an online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms via email and WhatsApp.

The study was conducted at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The institution was selected because previous studies identified Yogyakarta as a region characterized by relatively high-power distance and hierarchical cultural values (Irawanto et al., 2012; Irawanto & Ramsey, 2011). The respondents were millennials lecturers born between 1980 and 1995 who had worked at the university for at least one year. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents based on these criteria. A total of 120 questionnaires were returns, and 108 valid responses were used for further analysis. The sample size was considered adequate for PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2017).

All variables were measured using previous validated instruments and five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Attitude loyalty was adapted from Allen & Meyer (1990), while behavioral loyalty was adapted from Zeithaml et al. (1996). Workload was measured using the scale developed by De Bruin and Taylor (2005), authoritarian leadership was adapted from Cheng et al. (2004), and employer branding was measured using the instrument developed by Ambler & Barrow (1996).

Data analysis was conducted using Smart-PLS 3. The analysis included outer model evaluation through validity and reliability testing, followed by inner model analysis and hypotheses testing to examine the relationships among variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Sample Characteristics

A total of 120 questionnaires were successfully returned, and 108 valid responses were retained after the data screening process. Most respondents were born between 1991 and 1995 and had 4 and 5 years of work experience. Most respondents were civil servants and unmarried. Table 1 represents the demographic characteristics of the respondents.



Table 1. The Demographic Data of The Respondents

Sample Characteristics	Percentage (%)
Year of Birth	
1990-1989	38
1991-1995	63
Year of Work Experience	
1-3 years	29
4-5 years	42
More than 5 years	29
Employment Status	
Contract Employee	4
Permanent Employee	19
Civil Servant	76
Marital Status	
Single	82
Widow/Widower	1
Married	17

### Measurement and Structural Model Evaluation

The results indicate that all constructs met the recommended validity and reliability thresholds. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded .50, while composite reliability values were above .70, indicating satisfactory convergent validity and reliability. In addition, the structural model demonstrated adequate predictive capability, with R-square values above .50 and Q-square values indicating string predictive relevance. Table 2 summarizes the measurement and structural model evaluation results.

Table 2. Measurement and Structural Model Evaluation

Variables	CR	AVE	R <sup>2</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
Attitudinal Loyalty	.93	.63	.76	-	.46
Behavioural Loyalty	.93	.62	.78	-	.47
Authoritarian Leadership	.92	.56	-	.65	-
Workload	.90	.51	-	.21	-
Employer Branding	.95	.51	-	.45	-

### Hypothesis Testing Results



The hypotheses testing results are presented in Table 6. The findings show that authoritarian leadership negatively affects both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Similarly, workload has a negative effect on both loyalty dimensions. In contrast, employer branding positively influences attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Therefore, all proposed hypotheses were supported.

Table 3. The Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Description
Authoritarian Leadership -> Attitude Loyalty	-0.588	5.131	.00***	H1 Supported
Authoritarian Leadership -> Behavioral Loyalty	-0.537	4.499	.00***	H2 Supported
Workload -> Attitudinal Loyalty	-0.221	2.336	.02*	H3 Supported
Workload -> Behavioral Loyalty	-0.261	2.564	.01*	H4 Supported
Employer Branding -> Attitude Loyalty	0.428	3.889	.00***	H5 Supported
Employer Branding -> Behavioral Loyalty	0.511	4.359	.00***	H6 Supported

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Discussion of Main Results

This study examined the influence of authoritarian leadership, workload, and employer branding on millennial employees' attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. The findings contribute to the employee loyalty literature by distinguishing loyalty into attitudinal and behavioral dimensions, which provides a more comprehensive understanding of employee loyalty dynamics. The results also support the relevance of Social Exchange Theory (SET) in explaining how organizational treatment shapes millennial employees' psychological attachment and behavioral commitment.

The findings show that authoritarian leadership negatively affects both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. This result is consistent with previous studies indicating that authoritarian leadership tends to reduce employee motivation, creativity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment because employees are less involved in decision-making processes (Chan et al., 2013; Gu et al., 2018). From the perspective of SET, authoritarian leadership may weaken employees' perceptions of reciprocity and fairness, particularly among millennials who generally value autonomy, participation, and open communication. As a result, employees may



experience lower emotional attachment toward the organization and reduced willingness to maintain long-term commitment.

The study also confirms that workload negatively influences both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Excessive workload may create feelings of stress, exhaustion, and imbalance between employee contributions and organizational support. In line with SET, employees who perceived workload as unfair may reduce their emotional attachment and organizational commitment. This finding supports previous studies linking workload to work stress, turnover intention, organizational cynicism, and reduced job satisfaction (Bowling et al., 2015; Omar et al., 2020; van Ruysseveldt et al., 2023). The findings also align with previous research suggesting that millennials tend to prefer organizations that support work-life balance and employee well-being (Alonso-Almeida & Llach, 2019).

In contrast, employer branding positively affects both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Positive employer branding may strengthen employees' perceptions of organizational support, appreciation, and value congruence. Employees who perceive the organization as a reputable and supportive workplace are more likely to develop emotional attachment and stronger organizational commitment. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that employer branding can enhance employee retention, commitment, and organizational attractiveness through non-financial aspects such as work-life balance, career development opportunities, and organizational culture (Bussin & Mouton, 2019; Schlechter et al., 2015).

Overall, the findings indicate that millennial employee loyalty is strongly influenced by how employee perceive organizational treatment and reciprocity. Leadership practices, workload management, and employer branding function as important organization mechanism that shape both employees' emotional attachment and behavioral commitment toward the organization.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that authoritarian leadership and excessive workload negatively affect millennial employees' attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, while employer branding has a positive influence on both loyalty dimensions. The findings indicate that millennials employee



loyalty is strongly shaped by employees' perceptions of organizational treatment, fairness and reciprocity. Organization that implements supportive leadership practices, balanced workload management, and positive employer branding are more likely to strengthen employees' emotional attachment and organizational commitment.

The study contributes to the employee loyalty literature by distinguishing between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, which are often treated as a single construct in previous studies. This distinction provides a more comprehensive understanding of employee loyalty dynamics and extends the application of social exchange theory in explaining millennial workplace behavior. Practically, the findings suggest that organizations should focus not only on improving employee performance but also on creating supportive work environments that strengthen both psychological attachment and behavioral commitment.

This study has several limitations. First, the study was limited to millennial lecturers in one faculty at a university in Indonesia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, workload perception may be subjective and may not fully capture all dimensions of academic work. Future studies recommended to involve broader institutional contexts, longitudinal designs, and qualitative approaches to obtain a deeper understanding of millennial employee loyalty dynamics.

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