Malaysian Fast Food Brand Equity

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ABSTRACT

Most Malaysian research defines the brand equity dimensions. This paper addresses this gap by developing an empirical research model with better understanding of sequential relationships between the dimensions of brand equity within the Malaysian fast food context. A total of 585 self-administered questionnaires were distributed via non-probability sampling across five fast food restaurants. The results indicate perceived quality (PQ) and brand awareness (BA) are the initial stage of brand building. Brand familiarity, brand image, and brand trust serve as important role in enlightening the relationships between PQ, BA, and attitudinal brand loyalty (ABL). ABL plays as a key variable for explicating the relationships between other dimensions and overall brand equity. Future research could explore the possibility of a longitudinal study through repeated observations, and invariance test across different samples could be conducted to make certain the components of measurement model and structural model are remained equivalent.

JEL Classifications: JEL M13, M31

Keywords: Brand equity, Brand familiarity, Brand trust, Fast food, Sequential order, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

In 2009, global fast food had reached a market value of $201.1 billion, with growth rate of 3.1%, the volume reached 208.1 billion of transactions, counted as 3.9% growth rate (Datamonitor, 2010), and it was considered as an important industry due to its global trend (Van Zyl et al., 2010). However, the fast food market share in Malaysia was subjugated by foreign brands (Aseambankers, 2007), reason being lack of expertise in branding and marketing among local brands (Marshall Cavendish, 2009).

Up-to-date, the existing literature on brand equity model within the fast food industry was still sparse (Tan et al., 2011). Besides, the identification of relationship among brand equity dimensions was not clearly extended by the implication of marketing theory (Gil et al., 2007; Konecnik and Gartner, 2007). Such limitations have caused ambiguity in managing and predicting the tangible and intangible characteristics of fast food brand. For instance: “Are there any pre-determinate constructs among the fast food brand equity dimensions?” “Are there any direct contribution of a) each dimensions b) certain dimensions to fast food brand equity?

In Malaysia, several research were conducted on brand equity framework in the consumer-goods industry (Norjaya et al., 2007), banking industry (Norzalita and Norjaya, 2010), entrepreneur perspective (Zainuddin et al., 2009), small to medium-sized enterprises (Maznah and Mohd Noor, 2010), but there was lack of research that had been done relating to Malaysian fast food industries. Thus, the main objective of this research is to develop a theoretical model which identified the relationships among brand equity dimensions within Malaysian fast food context. The present study had applied Gil et al.’s (2007) brand equity model into fast food context and proposed a modified model that was meaningful, both conceptually and statistically. Consequently, this research extended the understanding of fast food brand equity phenomena and its measurement, by exploring the sequential relationships between the brand equity dimensions.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Gil, Andrés and Salinas’s Theory of Brand Equity (2007)

Gil et al.’s (2007) theory was adopted to generate a meaningful research in examining the attitudes of Malaysian fast food consumers. The model was adequately extended and integrated i.e. the theory of both brand equity (Aaker, 1991) and hierarchy of effects (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). Gil et al. (2007) clearly identified the relationships among the dimension of consumer-based brand equity based on the explanation of cognitive-affective-conative, which served as a justification for the establishment of structural parameter estimate that provided better explanation than some of the recent studies (e.g. Hess et al., 2011; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011; Pike et al., 2010; Sanyal and Datta, 2011). Secondly, Gil et al. (2007) categorized the dimensions of brand equity with theoretical justification. For instance, perceived quality and brand awareness/association were considered as cognitive constructs, while brand loyalty was considered conative construct. The main advantage of this approach was this could lead to the better development of measurement items, which to ensure there were clear operational definition of the constructs and no overlapping of measurement items (Gil et al., 2007). Thirdly, Gil et al.’s (2007) study used a sample of actual consumers (non-student). Consequently the results were more open to generalization (Pappu and Quester, 2008). Besides, the selection of products/brands was based on the level of involvement that derived from the perception of consumer rather than the inherent characteristic of the product itself (Malär et al., 2011). For instance, they conducted a pre-test to indicate the degree of brand familiarity and level of usage. This was because Yoo et al. (2000) stated that if respondents had known and experienced the brand well, they would have been able to provide reliable and valid responses to the questionnaire.

FIGURE 1. THE THEORY OF BRAND EQUITY BY GIL, ANDRÉS AND SALINAS (2007)

Different Dimensions of Brand Equity across Industries

Different industries contributed dissimilarity of brand equity dimensions. According to Yoo et al.’s (2000), perceived quality, brand awareness/association, and brand loyalty dimensions were based on athletic shoes, camera film, and television sets. Angel and Manuel (2005) replaced brand association as brand image in durable goods study. Besides, Norjaya et al. (2007) classified the brand equity dimensions of household electrical appliances as brand loyalty, brand distinctiveness and brand association/awareness. Wang et al. (2008) suggested that global brand equity consisted of quality perception, brand awareness, brand resonance, and corporation ability association. Xu and Andrew (2009) defined the conceptual framework of hotel brand equity as brand loyalty, brand association, brand awareness and quality of experience. Thus, researchers have to monitor the dimensions of brand equity within the specific industry (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010). As for fast food industry, brand familiarity (Schlosser, 2002) and brand trust (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2005) were proposed as additional dimensions as they indicated as important dimensions in the context of fast food (Tan et al., 2011).
Conceptual Framework

Muller and Woods (1994) pointed out the importance of restaurant brand management instead of product management. They proposed the concept for the development of brand image depended on the brand name, which was vital in maintaining restaurant business. Muller (1998) highlighted that restaurant firms should focus on three key areas, which were the execution of service delivery, quality products and services, and the establishment of symbolic and evocative image. He further argued that these strong combinations had been attributed to opportunity for accruing price premium and developing customer loyalty.

Although the brand equity concepts for Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) were conceptualized differently, however, both theories defined brand equity from a customer perspective and emphasized that consumer-based brand equity provided value to the firms and consumers. As a result, brand image was reasonably proposed to replace brand association because fast food industry was grouped under the hospitality industry. Furthermore, brand association had been substituted with brand image in most of the hospitality research (see Henry et al., 2010; Kayaman and Arasli 2007; Kim and Kim, 2004, 2005).

Referring to consumers’ brand knowledge, the assessment of brand personality was expected to be affected by consumers’ knowledge and familiarity (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Furthermore, Aaker (1996) argued that brand recognition reflected familiarity and linking as acquired from past exposure. As a result, it was safe to include brand familiarity. With respect to brand trust, it was considered as a vital dimension to be evaluated in the fast food industry (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005), the reason being to evaluate the affective response on the consistency of business operation and performance.

According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), two perspectives of brand loyalty are behavioral brand loyalty and attitudinal brand loyalty. Attitudinal brand loyalty was selected because it was based on consumers’ commitment rather than consumers’ actual purchase behavior (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995), which served as an important and relevant outcome of other brand equity dimensions, and also was indicated as the closest element to the concept of brand equity (Zinnbauer and Bakay, 2004). On the other hand, behavioral brand loyalty was referred as spurious loyalty, such as simple repeated purchase behavior without emotional or psychological bonding (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995). Consequently, the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity for this study were perceived quality, brand awareness, brand familiarity, brand trust, brand image, and attitudinal brand loyalty.

Hypotheses Development

FIGURE 2. PROPOSED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Note: BA=Brand awareness, PQ=Perceived quality, BF=Brand familiarity, BI=Brand image, BT=Brand trust, ABL=Attitudinal brand loyalty, BE=Brand equity.
**H1: The Higher the Awareness of a Brand, the Greater the Brand Familiarity**

Gursoy and McCleary (2004) argued brand familiarity was formed by the acquired information through external sources, for instance word-of-mouth, advertising, and internal sources (such as the use of product). Researchers stressed out that the higher the brand awareness, the greater the brand familiarity and reputation (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; D'Souza and Rao, 1995). Researchers also proved that brand awareness was the dominant selection process among consumers (Reynolds and Olson, 1995). This could be supported by Alba and Hutchinson’s (1987) argument, where a consumer’s recognition and recall of a certain brand name would build a sense to familiarity. According to Keller (2003), brand awareness is related to the strength of the brand elements such as logo, symbol, character, packaging, slogan and so on, that store in consumers’ memory. For this reason, fast food brand elements instantly processed once the brand was retrieved from consumers’ mind, consequently, the repeated frequency of fast food brand information processing was stored as the cognitive representations of knowledge.

**H2: The Higher the Awareness of a Brand, the Greater the Brand Image**

Studies indicated that a low level of brand awareness could significantly result in purchase decisions, particularly when consumers had to make simple rule of decision (Hoyer and Brown, 1990; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), for instance fast food. Besides, brand awareness insisted that consumers had to have greater association with its brand image; it served as a vital element in formatting and presenting a strong brand in consumers’ memory (Keller, 1993). This could be further supported by brand awareness generated differences in information processing, and these differences, which were created by brand associations in the consumer’s memory, directly affected brand image (Hoyer and Brown, 1990). Studies had supported these statements with the evidence that brand awareness positively affected brand image in consumer goods product (Angel and Manuel, 2005; Esch et al., 2006). Therefore, brand awareness serves as a vital variable to explain the formation of brand image in the Malaysian context of fast food industry.

**H3: The Higher the Familiarity of a Brand, the Greater the Brand Image**

Researchers suggested that consumers evaluated the brand more positively when they were familiar with the brand and therefore created favorable images for familiar brand (Janiszewski, 1993; Holden and Vanhuele, 1999). Ho and Chong (2003) suggested that the level of brand familiarity and consumption experiences influenced consumers towards brand attributes; a component of brand image (Keller, 1993). For this reason, consumers individually assessed each descriptive feature of characterized products or services based on familiarity and experience that they had with the brand (Ha and Perks, 2005). Consequently, the higher level of brand familiarity led to the better evaluation of brand attributes, which ultimately contributed to higher level of brand image (Keller, 2003). The above statement could be supported by Zajonc and Markus’ (1982) study; they proposed that brand familiarity led consumers to have favorable evaluations on a brand. When a consumer was confronted with a familiar brand, he or she had felt emotional closeness and confidence and increased the level of consumer experience, thus drove to greater formation process of brand image (Zajonc and Markus, 1982). Therefore, when a consumer was confronted with a familiar fast food brand, he or she felt emotional closeness and confidence. Subsequently, enhance in the association of the brand in consumers’ mind, and positively affected consumers’ image towards the fast food brand.

**H4: The Higher the Familiarity of a Brand, the Greater the Brand Trust**

Campbell and Keller (2003) advocated that increasing brand familiarity through accumulated customer experiences not only created a knowledge structure for the consumer, but also built up consumer confidence about the brand (i.e. positive evaluation), which led to brand trust (Zajonc and Markus, 1982; Sen and Johnson, 1997). These could be further supported by the development of familiarity which leads to higher level of brand trust (Keller, 1998). According to Alba and Hutchinson (1987), brand familiarity could be derived from customers’ experience. In other words, brand experience can be served or used as criteria for brand familiarity. As a result, brand familiarity had significant influenced on brand trust because of positive customer experience (Fullerton, 2005; Papadopoulou et al., 2001; Smith and Wheeler, 2002). Consequently, the increases in fast food brand familiarity through accumulated customer experiences and greater amount of time spent in processing brand information were not only created better knowledge structure, but also build up confidence and trust for the fast food brand.
H5: The Higher the Perceived Quality of a Brand, the Greater the Brand Image

According to brand knowledge (Keller, 1993), good evaluation of perceived quality had increased brand association. This was because when there is a good perception of quality, a positive brand image had been created as there were strong, favorable, and unique associations linked to the brand due to greater brand attributes, benefits, and attitudes as perceived by consumers. This could be supported by Kayaman and Arasli (2007), where tangibility, reliability and empathy (perceived quality in service industry) showed positive effect on brand image in a hotel study. Therefore, the perception of quality served as an important antecedent of brand image creation in the Malaysian context of fast food industry.

H6: The Higher the Perceived Quality of a Brand, the Greater the Attitudinal Brand loyalty

Gil et al. (2007) stated brand loyalty preceded brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality. They argued cognitive construct (perceived quality) had influenced affection, and affective response would drive to conative (attitudinal brand loyalty) and led to purchase decision. Consequently, causal effect could be identified (Chiou et al., 2002). On the other hand, Roberts et al. (2004) had also applied the concept of purchase decision stages to rationalize the relationships between perceived quality and loyalty. In this case, they had identified perceived quality as information evaluation stage, which proceeded to purchase decision stage, referring to loyalty. Thus, attitudinal brand loyalty could serve as precede construct of perceived quality in the context of Malaysian fast food industry.

H7: The Higher the Image of a Brand, the Greater the Brand Trust

A positive corporate image such as high competence and reliability would lead to higher level of consumer trust (Sichtmann, 2007). In the retail setting, Esch et al. (2006) confirmed that there was a direct impact of brand image on a consumer’s brand trust, and both direct and indirect influences of brand image on current and future purchases. For these reasons, this study had proposed that brand image had lead to higher level of trust as perceived by consumers. The hypothesis was in conjunction with online study (Esch et al., 2006; Yoon, 2002), hotel study (Back, 2005; Kandampully and Hu, 2007), financial study (Flavián et al., 2006), and restaurant study (Lee et al., 2005). Therefore, the existence of fast food brand image was considered as vital criteria for the development of brand trust.

H8: The Higher the Image of a Brand, the Greater the Attitudinal Brand Loyalty

In a financial study, Flavián et al. (2006) had stressed that brand image was one of the fundamental in building a sincere relationship of trust between customer satisfaction and loyalty. If customers had favorable images towards a certain brand, this process would exercise a positive influence on the customer’s trust (Esch et al., 2006; Flavián et al., 2006) and eventually reinforced their loyalty (Back, 2005; Kandampully and Hu, 2007). As a result, the image of fast food brand could be classified an essential predictor for the formation of attitudinal brand loyalty in the context of Malaysian fast food industry.

H9: The Higher the Trust of a Brand, the Greater the Attitudinal Brand Loyalty

Rauyruen and Miller (2007) argued that in order to gain loyalty of customers, one must first gain their trust. For this reason, brand trust had been recognized as a prominent variable leading to long-term relationship with customers, which in turn affected brand loyalty in a positive way (Sichtmann, 2007; Matzler et al., 2008). This could be further supported by many studies which proved that there was positive consumers trust on customer loyalty (Harris and Goode, 2004). Therefore, fast food brand trust was the key variable to maintain a loyal relationship with customers, and served as an important criterion in forming consumers’ positive behavioral intention, such as the intention to repurchase and to make recommendations to the other party (Lau and Lee, 1999).
H10: The Higher the Attitudinal Loyalty of a Brand, the Greater the Brand Equity

Scholars argued that loyalty was the foundation of brand equity (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Clarke, 2001), because loyal consumer would treat a focal brand as primary choice, prolong to buy a product or service of focal brand even the alternative choices were better than the focal brand (Oliver, 1997). Many studies indicated attitudinal brand loyalty had significant effect on brand equity (Gil et al., 2007; Kim and Kim, 2004; Norjaya et al., 2007; Tong and Hawley, 2009; Yoo et al., 2000). This showed the essential role of attitudinal brand loyalty in brand equity creation. Thus, this study proposed the importance of managing loyalty as part of the brand equity management (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2004; O’loughlin, 2006), and it have to be extended to the Malaysian fast food sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A preliminary study was conducted to select fast-food restaurant chains and to develop the measurement items of brand image. According to Low and Lamb Jr. (2000), the development of brand image scale was designed to be product-specific. Chowdhury, Reardon and Srivastava (1998) also stated that a free response technique needed to be applied in brand image studies. Therefore, two open-ended questions were addressed to 50 fast food consumers because it allowed for gathering consumers’ point of view, feelings and any perspective that related to the brand image (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). The first question was “Please list three fast food restaurant chains in which you had most frequently dined”; while the second question adopted Keller’s (2003) “You can freely describe any characteristics that come to mind when you think about … (above brand(s) name)… using any words/phrases your choice”. The result showed that the most popular fast food brands were McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut, Marrybrown, and 1901 Hot Dogs. 8 measurement items of brand image were developed from preliminary study. A pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity of the questions, as well as the reliability and validity of the measurement items (Hishamuddin, 2007). The validity of the questionnaire was determined by academicians, who are experts in the area of branding research studies. The reliability of the measurement items was tested by 50 pilot surveys of fast food consumers. The range for Cronbach’s Alpha was from 0.75 to 0.91, which satisfied the cut-off value as suggested, indicated internal consistency for the constructs (Nunnally, 1978). The final version of measurement items were presented in Table 1.

According to Norzalita and Norjaya (2010), Klang Valley was considered as the most populated region in Malaysia, which populated with economically and socially most advances people from diverse ethnic compositions and demographic groups, such as people from different states of Malaysia. Non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted as it was efficient and appropriate (Cavana et al., 2000). A total number of 600 self-administrated questionnaires were distributed because this study was in line with nonprobability sampling of previous studies (Perez et al., 2011; Yoo et al., 2000). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a statistical methodology with a confirmatory approach was selected to analyze multivariate data. This was because SEM was frequently and widely used technique in psychology and social sciences research (Bentler, 1983; Browne, 1984; Hair et al., 2010; Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was not recommended to be performed as this study had identified the numbers of composite dimensions (Hair, et al., 2010). That is, it required the confirmation process of pre-specified observed variables in representing a particular construct instead of data summarization. Thus, confirmatory factor analysis was recommended rather than EFA (Hair, et al., 2010).
### TABLE 1. MEASUREMENT ITEMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument Items</th>
<th>Authors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived quality</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The staff of X gives customers individual attention.</td>
<td>Kim and Kim (2005, p.559)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff of X provides its prompt services at promised times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff of X handles complaints of customers effectively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff of X are always willing to help customers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff of X are knowledgeable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Awareness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of X.</td>
<td>Park (2009, p. 56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X is highly recognized.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have heard a lot about X.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Familiarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am familiar with X.</td>
<td>Park (2009, p. 57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable of X.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can easily recognize X.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Image</strong></td>
<td>Preliminary study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompt service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good dining environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place for social gathering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good value for money</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X is safe to me.</td>
<td>Matzler et al. (2008, p.156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust X.</td>
<td>Park (2009, p. 57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X is reliable to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudinal Brand Loyalty</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to visit X because it is the best choice for me.</td>
<td>Chiou and Droge (2006, p.625)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself to be a loyal customer of X.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X is special to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would love to recommend X to my friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Equity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if there is another [fast food category] brand as delicious as X, I still prefer X.</td>
<td>Gil et al. (2007, p.193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X is definitely my choice in [fast food category].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even if another [fast food category] brand has the same price as X, I would still buy X.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
RESULT

The study was collected from 1st April, 2011 to 1st May, 2011 across fast food restaurants that located in Klang Valley, a sampling design was planned to reduce the potential bias and increase the precision of estimates for non-probability sampling (Chang and Chieng, 2006). Subsequent to the data screening process, 15 surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses. Thus, 585 or 97.50% of respondents were proceeding for further analysis. Out of the pool of completed survey forms, 50.43% were male and 49.57% were female. With respect to ethnic groups, 63.09% were Malays, followed by Chinese 26.15%, Indian 4.96%, and others 5.80%.

One item of perceived quality “The staffs of X are knowledgeable.” and three items of brand image “Easy”, “A place for social gathering”, “Convenient” were deleted because the standardized residuals values for pair of items were above 4.0, which deserved for deletion (Hair et al., 2010). After the purification process, the final measurement models satisfied all the fix statistic values as recommended by Hair et al. (2010); demonstrated perfect results for the degree of uni-dimensionality ($\chi^2 = 859.593, \chi^2/df = 3.384$, RMSEA =.064, SRMR = .037, CFI = .950, PCLOSE = .06), and the p-value associated with chi-square was .0001. In term of convergent validity, the values of construct reliability ranged from 0.86 to 0.94, enormously above the cutoff value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted were above the cutoff value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2 presented the average variance estimated of each constructs was above the squared correlation with other constructs. The results provided evidence that the seven constructs were unique and had captured some phenomena that other measures had not. It was evident that these results had contributed adequate evidence for discriminant validity of the final measurement model (Hair et al., 2010). The goodness-of-fit statistics, indicating the overall acceptability of the structural model analyzed, were satisfied ($\chi^2 = 917.953, \chi^2/df = 3.490$, RMSEA =.059, SRMR = .050, CFI = .946). Out of twelve hypotheses, nine statements were supported and three hypotheses were rejected (see Table 3). The squared multiple correlation ($R^2$) for brand equity was 0.74, attitudinal brand loyalty (0.62), brand trust (0.67), brand image (0.55), and brand familiarity (0.54). However, $R^2$ was not applicable for exogenous constructs such as perceived quality and brand awareness. It was estimated that the predictors of brand equity explained 74 percent of its variance. In the same vein, the error variance of brand equity was approximately 26 percent of the variance of brand equity itself.

**TABLE 2. RESULT OF THE DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY ANALYSIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(AVE)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. BA</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BF</td>
<td>0.55(0.74**)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. PQ</td>
<td>0.09(0.29**)</td>
<td>0.08(0.27**)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. BI</td>
<td>0.14(0.38**)</td>
<td>0.23(0.48**)</td>
<td>0.44(0.67**)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. BT</td>
<td>0.22(0.47**)</td>
<td>0.47(0.69**)</td>
<td>0.26(0.51**)</td>
<td>0.53(0.73**)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ABL</td>
<td>0.23(0.48**)</td>
<td>0.40(0.63**)</td>
<td>0.29(0.54**)</td>
<td>0.52(0.72**)</td>
<td>0.55(0.74**)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. BL</td>
<td>0.17(0.42**)</td>
<td>0.32(0.57**)</td>
<td>0.21(0.46**)</td>
<td>0.35(0.59**)</td>
<td>0.36(0.60**)</td>
<td>0.75(0.87**)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. **. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).
b. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are greater than the squared correlation estimates, showing discriminant validity.

*Note: BA=Brand awareness, PQ=Perceived quality, BF=Band familiarity, BI=Brand image, BT=Brand trust, ABL=Attitudinal brand loyalty, BE=Brand equity.*
This model states that both perceived quality and brand awareness are the initial stage of brand building in consumer-based context (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Hoyer and Brown, 1990). The awareness of fast food brand served as an important role in enlightening the relationships with brand familiarity (H1: β = 0.73, se = 0.06, t value = 14.08, α < 0.001), however, brand awareness alone was not sufficient in providing the brand image hold in the consumer’s memory (H2: β = -0.09, se = 0.05, t value = -1.38, α = 0.17). This was because fast food brand image involved greater association of consumers’ memory than just recalling or recognizing (Keller, 2003).

Consumers had felt comfortable on trusted brand because the brand had long-term relationships with them (Chiou and Droge, 2006; Flavián et al., 2006; Sichtmann, 2007; Matzler et al., 2008). Therefore, the familiarity of fast food brand was essential (H4: β = 0.43, se = 0.04, t value = 10.96, α < 0.001), as it enhanced consumers’ formation process of brand image (H3: β = 0.40, se = 0.05, t value = 6.37, α < 0.001) and feelings of greater trust between the restaurant brand and the consumers (Lee et al., 2005). These were because brand familiarity had driven to a sense of reduced anxiety, faith in the provider, reduced perceptions of risk, and consumers knew what to expect directly.

Perceived quality required greater information processing as it focused on explaining how consumers cognitively had established an overall brand impression, before reaching a fast food consumption choice. Perceived quality was involved in the perception of brand’s quality and superiority. The perception could be based on past experience (Dabholkar, 1995; Donovan et al. 1994) and affective quality signals in marketing efforts (Grönroos, 1984). Thus perceived quality was sufficient for the creation of brand image (H5: β = 0.59, se = 0.04, t value = 12.65, α < 0.001), because it involved consumers in developing, maintaining, and giving meaning to the influence of personal experience of the stimulated brands. The finding indicated that perceived quality did not statistically cause attitudinal brand loyalty in the context of fast food industry (H6: β = 0.08, se = 0.05, t value = 1.84, α = 0.07). Nevertheless, this result was in line with some of the previous studies (Gil et al., 2007; Tong and Hawley, 2009). This could be further explained that attitudinal brand loyalty had been considered as a conative construct, while perceived quality was considered as a cognitive construct, based on arguments of cognitive-affective-conative hierarchical model (Chiou et al., 2002).

Brand image exercised a strong direct influence on brand trust (H7: β = 0.46, se = 0.08, t value = 8.49, α < 0.001) and attitudinal brand loyalty (H8: β = 0.31, se = 0.09, t value = 5.00, α < 0.001). Therefore, the image of fast food brand was considered important because it served as image drivers, such as the association between the fast food brand and intangible symbolic benefits as perceived by consumers, which satisfied consumers in term on social
class, self-emotional, and any other perception of needs (Keller, 1993). In addition, the image drivers were also extended to lifestyle, trustworthiness, and self-concept (Neal and Bathe, 1997).

Brand trust contributed significantly on attitudinal brand loyalty (H9: β = 0.48, se = 0.05, t value = 9.43, α < 0.001). It presented an emotion-driven aspect (affective character) of long-term relational exchanged between fast food brands and consumers, rather than the utilitarian value (cognitive character) of the brands.

Attitudinal brand loyalty played as a key variable for explicating the relationships between other dimensions and brand equity (H10: β = 0.86, se = 0.04, t value = 24.95, α < 0.001). In other words, fast food brand equity would not exist when there was no attitudinal brand loyalty. Nevertheless, when there was absence of brands’ affective reactions, attractiveness, aesthetics, or signals of benevolence (affective sense of brand trust), consumers would less likely in repeat purchase intention, recommendation to others, or willingness to pay a price premium. Thus, the trustworthiness of fast food brand served as a vital antecedent for the development of attitudinal brand loyalty, which ultimately drove to overall brand loyalty.

In term of limitation, cross-sectional data might have limited the detection of causal inferences (Hair et al, 2010). Therefore, a longitudinal study should be designed, which was often used in psychology, involved a series of observations made over long period of time. Future research could explore the possibility of a longitudinal study through repeated observations, and invariance test across different samples should be conducted to make certain the components of measurement model and structural model are remained equivalent. Consequently, it would yield more insightful results than a cross-sectional observation study.

**MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION**

Malaysian fast food managers have to establish the most relevant brand input in consumers’ mind; which clearly identify the product or service categories that is offered, as compared to other competitors. Therefore, the identification of the brand position and category served as a necessity and crucial marketing plan in creating fast food brand equity. Besides, managers have to provide constructive inputs and maintaining the consistency of brand exposure from time to time. In term of perceived quality, managers have to be cautious on the appraisal of service performance because consumers have different expectation on the nature operation, for instance prompt services, handling complaints, individual attention, willingness to help, quick service, and minimum waiting time. For the purpose of creating positive brand image, managers should emphasize on variety of choices, good value for money, and good dining environment. In term of emotional brand image, managers could have planned for a long-term theme campaign, along with the campaign title; sub-topic could be launched to proactively encourage affective response of consumers. Besides, managers have to ensure that there is high consistency of brand reliability, credibility, operational, and serviceability across different outlets as these will contribute to the creation of strong brand image and brand trust. In term of maintaining long term brand relationship with customers, customer loyalty programs such as frequency programs, club marketing programs or gift card programs could be designed.
REFERENCES


