



**THE IMPACT OF BRAND IMAGE ON CONSUMER
PURCHASE INTENTION: A STUDY OF THE
SMARTPHONE INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA**

BY

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Science (Marketing)**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out the effects among brand image, brand loyalty, perceived quality purchase intention towards smartphone. It also aims to explore the mediating role of perceived quality and brand loyalty on brand image and purchase intention. Applying the theory of brand image and brand loyalty, a structural equation model was developed and tested on 204 respondents from the Klang Valley, using a self-developed questionnaire. The findings suggest that perceived quality does not mediate the relationship between brand image and purchase intention towards smartphone. Brand image and brand loyalty have significant impact on purchase intention while brand loyalty partially mediates the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. The findings also suggest that the impact of perceived quality on purchase intention is not significant. The study suggests that the smartphone brands to build higher brand image to increase the brand loyalty among the consumers. As a result, brand image and brand loyalty will increase the purchase intention towards smartphone.

ملخص

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة التأثير بين صورة العلامة التجارية، والوفاء بالعلامة التجارية، ونية شراء النوعية نحو الهاتف الذكي في الرأي. كما يهدف إلى استكشاف دور الوساطة من الجودة المتصورة والعلامة التجارية الوفاء بصورة العلامة التجارية نية الشراء. عن طريق تطبيق نظرية صورة العلامة التجارية والوفاء بالعلامة التجارية، تم تطوير نموذج المعادلة الهيكلية واختبارها على 204 مشاركا من وادي كلانج، وذلك باستخدام الاستبيان ذاتي التصميم. وتفتتح النتائج بأن الجودة في الرأي لا توسط العلاقة بين صورة العلامة التجارية ونية الشراء للهاتف الذكي. كان لصورة العلامة التجارية والوفاء بالعلامة التجارية تأثيرا كبيرا على نية الشراء في حين أن الوفاء بالعلامة التجارية يتوسط جزئيا في العلاقة بين صورة العلامة التجارية ونية الشراء. وتشير النتائج أيضا إلى أن تأثير النوعية المتصورة على نية الشراء ليس كبيرا. وتفتتح الدراسة للعلامات التجارية للهواتف الذكية بناء صورة العلامة التجارية أفضل لزيادة وفاء للعلامة التجارية بين المستهلكين. ونتيجة لذلك، فإن صورة العلامة التجارية والوفاء بالعلامة التجارية تؤثران على زيادة نية الشراء نحو الهاتف الذكي.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science (Marketing).

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DECLARATION

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents for laying the foundation of what I turned out to be in life.

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Firstly, it is my utmost pleasure to dedicate this work to my dear parents, my family and my wife who granted me the gift of their unwavering belief in my ability to accomplish this goal: thank you for your support and patience.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Mobile phone has gradually transformed from an interpersonal communication device to a multifunctional machine that is called 'smartphone'. The usage rate of smartphone in Malaysia is getting higher day by day (IDC, 2017). The world is changing rapidly where products are available both nationally and globally. It is compulsory to create a strong brand image to develop an identity of the brand in the market (Aaker, 1996; Suki, 2015). All popular smartphone brands are available in almost every country in the world. The smartphone market is very competitive in Malaysia because lots of smartphone brands are available in the market. The consciousness of consumers while buying any smartphone is getting more dipper day by day. This consciousness makes them to choose a known and favorable brand while purchasing any smartphone.

Companies must make sure that the consumers love to purchase their branded smartphones to defeat the competitors. Brand image is very important factor which influences consumer purchase decision even though the consumer already knows about the brand and wants to buy the product (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Whenever a customer thinks about buying a smartphone, a brand name always appears in his/her mind, it shows that specific brand has higher brand image. Consumers always try to choose their favorable brands because they are getting conscious about their purchase decision. A brand becomes favorable to a consumer due to different reasons but among them the most important one is brand image (Aaker, 1996; Suki, 2015). Higher brand image may influence a customer while taking a final purchase decision (Grewal,

Monroe & Krishan, 1998; Dodds, Monroe & Grewal 1991). This shows why a higher brand image ensures higher market share. In addition, it can be also seen that whenever customers try to select a smart phone brand, they are always concerned about the perceived quality and brand image.

Brand image is often treated as the starting point which creates the distinction between the businesses in competition in the market. The researchers working in the field of marketing are getting more and more attracted with the issues regarding brand image. Customers can have a subjective judgement with the help of perceived quality on overall product quality. This judgement leads to silent differentiation between brands and can be favorable brand in customer's mind (Aaker, 1991; Reichheld & Sasser, 2016). Besides all this brand loyalty is also plays an important role among them and it must be built up by the businesses. According to some studies it can be stated that the spent cost used to attract new potential customers is five times higher than the cost which is required to maintain existing loyal customers (Barsky, 1994; Reichheld & Sasser, 2016). Due to this reason, a business always must pay less when it has higher brand loyalty. This intention can be impacted by different determinants. It is very important to find out the determinants which ensure the purchase intention of a customer. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to identify the effects among brand image, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention towards smartphones. This study will also do try to find out the mediating effects of brand loyalty and perceived quality on brand image.

1.2 TOP SMARTPHONE VENDORS IN MALAYSIA

According to IDC (IDC, 2017), approximately 2.7 million units of smartphones are shipped to Malaysia in the 4th quarter of 2016 and the total amount of smartphone shipped to Malaysia is 8.8 million in 2016 (IDC, 2017). The top smartphone vendors in Malaysia are Samsung, OPPO, Huawei, Asus and Apple. In 2016 Samsung shipped 3,017,000 units of smartphone in Malaysia which made them the number one smartphone vendor in Malaysia. According to IDC Samsung has the 34.3 percent market share of the whole market where OPPO had 10.4 percent, Huawei had 9.7 percent, Asus had 9.6 percent, Apple had 8.1 percent market share and the other 27.9 percent market share is captured by other mobile phone vendors. By observing the year over change from the table 1.1, Samsung improved their market share by 17.2 percent where Apple's market share in Malaysia declined by 17.3 percent from the year 2015 to 2016. The highest declined happened with Asus by 43.3 percent from 2015 to 2016. The total market of all vendors also declined by 5.9 percent.

Table 1.1 Top 5 Smartphone Vendors Malaysia Shipments, 2016 (Units in Thousands)

Vendor	2016 Shipment Volume	2016 market Share	2015 Shipment volume	2015 Market share	Year-Over-Year Change
1. Samsung	3,017	34.3 %	2,574	27.6 %	17.2 %
2. OPPO	916	10.4 %	549	5.9 %	66.8 %
3. Huawei	852	9.7 %	799	8.6 %	6.6 %
4. Asus	842	9.6 %	1,484	15.9 %	-43.3 %
5. Apple	715	8.1 %	865	9.3 %	-17.3 %
Others	2,442	27.9 %	3,065	32.7 %	-20.3 %
Total	8,784	100.0 %	9,336	100.0 %	-5.9 %

Source: International Data Corporation, 2016

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are many smartphone brands in Malaysia like Apple, Samsung, Sony, Lenovo, HTC, Huawei, LG, Motorola, Asus, Blackberry, Oppo and XiaoMi. The competition between the brands are getting harder. In order to remain in the competition, the smartphone brands must know Malaysia consumers' purchase behavior regarding smartphone brands. In other words, the smartphone companies must understand whether brand image, perceived quality, brand loyalty impacting the consumers' purchase intention towards smartphone brands.

Consumers' purchase behavior is changing rapidly while buying smartphones especially the young adults, moreover studies that have been done regarding this issue is insufficient to justify this issue (Osman, 2012). While making the decision to buy a smartphone, consumers can identify a brand name, which shows that the smartphone holds higher brand image. The understanding on consumer behavior towards buying smartphones still has lots of lacking. In this technology oriented era, it becomes hard to interpret the consumer purchase intention towards smartphone brands. Telecommunication providers and smartphone companies are eager to invest to study the purchasing behavior of their respective potential consumers. Therefore, the quest of this research is to study the purchase behavior of consumers towards smartphone brands.

In addition, the changes and development in smartphone industry is always drastic and tremendous. New models are being launched frequently. The evaluation of smartphone has affected the purchase behavior of consumers while buying smartphone. According to IDC (2017) in 2016 the seller of smartphone in Malaysia is Samsung but Apple has the higher brand image. This evolution of smartphone market has effected

the smartphone consumers purchase behavior. So, it needs to be determined what are the factors that are impacting the purchase intention of consumers.

Moreover, though there are many research studies done on purchase intention of consumers towards smartphone, there is not enough research on linking brand image, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention towards smartphone. This research is solely focused on these factors to determine the impact on purchase intention.

1.4 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In general, this research examines the impact of brand image on purchase intention and while doing so it mediates the brand loyalty and perceived quality towards smartphone brands.

This research has five specific objectives

1. To examine the impact of brand image on purchase intention towards smartphone.
2. To examine the impact of brand loyalty on purchase intention towards smartphone.
3. To examine the impact of perceived quality on purchase intention towards smartphone.
4. To examine the impact of brand image on perceived quality towards smartphone.
5. To examine the impact of brand image on brand loyalty towards smartphone.
6. To examine the mediating effect of perceived quality between brand image and purchase intention towards smartphone.
7. To examine the mediating effect of brand loyalty between brand image and

purchase intention towards smartphone.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research seeks the answer of following questions.

1. What are the impact of brand image, brand loyalty and perceived quality on purchase intention towards smartphone?
2. What is the impact of brand image on perceived quality towards smartphone?
3. What is the impact of brand image on brand loyalty towards smartphone?
4. Does perceived quality have any mediating effect between brand image and purchase intention towards smartphone?
5. Does brand loyalty have any mediating effect between brand image and purchase intention towards smartphone?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research study is conducted to address the objectives of this study, so it will contribute to literature both from academic and managerial perspectives. There are few studies available in this field focusing on brand image, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention towards smartphone. From theoretical side, it will add knowledge to the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. It will also check the mediation effect of brand loyalty and perceived quality between brand image and purchase intention. In addition, a structural model will be proposed and examined in this study. The structural model will investigate the impact of brand image, brand loyalty and perceived quality on purchase intention. Moreover, as most of the brand

image studies are conducted in developed countries, this research will be able to show some alternative view of this topic in a developing country (i. e. Malaysia).

From managerial perspective, this study will help marketers to identify the role of brand loyalty and perceived quality towards brand image and how it will be able to influence in purchase intention of smartphone brands. This study will be able to provide a conceptual framework for the smartphone firms for a better understanding on the factors that influence the purchase intention of consumers towards smartphone. It will also explain how brand loyalty and perceived quality mediates between brand image and purchase intention. Finally, this study will help the marketers to see how the structural model relates between brand image and purchase intention.

Finally, this study would highlight the urgency of improving brand image to the smartphone customers. The main impact of this study would be the effect of brand image on purchase intention. The findings would contribute new knowledge to the smartphone industry. This study will enrich the literature on brand image, brand loyalty, perceived quality and purchase intention. It will also provide empirical background for future studies of similar topics.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

The organization of the thesis has been shown in this section. There are five chapters in this research. In chapter one the issues related to the topic is discussed and it starts by introducing the topic followed by problem statement, research objectives and significance of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the literature related to the topic that is brand image, purchase intention, brand loyalty and perceived quality.

Chapter Three shows the methodology part which includes research design, data collection and data analysis including SEM. Chapter Four shows the findings of the research and the interpretation of the results after analysis. In the last chapter which is Chapter Five, the results from chapter four will be discussed with the implication for marketers and future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have contributed to the literature regarding the impact of brand image on purchase intention while mediating brand loyalty and perceived quality. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, it reviews the theoretical aspects and the second section reviews the empirical studies. Section 2.2 reviews the theories related to the concept of brand image, purchase intention, brand loyalty and perceived quality. Section 2.3 focuses on the empirical literature review related to the topic. Related theories regarding brand image, brand loyalty, perceived risk and purchase intention are stated in section 2.2.1 to section 2.2.5. Related imperial studies are included in the section 2.3.

2.2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

2.2.1 Brand Image

Brand image holds the worth of a brand to its customers as integral part of brand equity. A person may hold different beliefs, impression and ideas regarding any object which can be defined as image (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brand Image can be defined as the thoughts and feelings of a customer towards a brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2007). A set of associations can also be treated as brand image when they are significant to the customers. Brand image also represents the image of any product that relates to the consumer's mind which links the memory to a certain brand (Aaker, 1991). Brand image also can be related to the type of product and their classification. The uniqueness of a products sets it aside from other products which also performs as brand image (Bearden

& Etzel, 1982; Park & Arinivasan, 1994). In other words, it can be said that it's an overall mental image that customers have drawn in their mind while differentiating a certain brand from other brand and the uniqueness they consider creating the differentiation (Faircloth, 2005). According to Kotler (2000), brand is symbol, name, term and it is used to create differentiation from the products of the competitors. According to Keller (1993, 1998) the perception possessed by consumers about a certain brand can be defined as brand image.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1994) "Symbols and objects" being drawn as mental image in the mind of consumers to represent certain aspect of a certain brand which can be treated as the basis of a relationship between the brand and the customer is brand image. In simple words, brand image is a kind of image that consumers have in their mind regarding a product or a company. It's a form of mental image of people which is designed and drawn by a company to create their identity in consumer's mind (Kotler, 2006). Bird et al, 1970 defined brand image in simple words by addressing it as an attitude about brand. According to Keller (1993) brand image is the brand that is attached to consumer's mind through the association of the brand itself. Consumers hold a brand image to gather the overall perceptions of a certain product (Richardson, 1994). Brand image is a rational construct which is visualized by the consumers based on few impressions and this image is originated from an inspired process where these all impressions are ordered, embellished and elaborated (Reynold, 1965).

2.2.2 Conceptual Evolution of Brand Image

Gardner and Levy (1955) described the social and psychological nature of brand image where they introduced it in 1950s. Brand image has its identity in the root of the discipline of psychology and being so it got its place in the field of consumer behavior

research. It can be supported by different aspects of psychological variants and those aspects relates it to consumer behavior (Gardner & Levy, 1955). This concept was developing in 1960s to early 1970s. At that time, it was researched and later conceptualized based on “attitude” which is treated as a construct of social psychology. Soon brand image started to be considered as vital element to the marketing managers when its importance in purchase decision was supported by empirical research (Dolich, 1969). In 1978 Gench found a relationship between brand preference and brand image with significance. After that in 1980s the research world was dominated by attitude-based image research. It created more interest in the researchers to link brand image and consumer behavior. They also linked it with marketing management (Zinkhan & Hirschheim, 1992).

In 1988 Noth applied the concept of semiotics. From the perspective of Noth, it can be said that semiotic system is formed by the objects of a market system and consumer’s brand image is defined by studying the sign the commodities. The research was continuing by the researchers to this same direction in 1990s and brand image was treated as the main key element of brand equity (Hsieh, 2004). Due to different research focuses different meanings are always getting related with brand image. Brand image is the perception of consumers in total which is derived from emotional and reasoned judgement towards a brand (Reynolds & Gutman, 1984). This construct is often represented by interchangeable terminology by the researchers.

In 1996 Aaker tried to warn the researchers regarding “Brand image trap” issue. He explained to make the issue clear by emphasizing the significant difference between brand identity and brand image. In 2008 Kim explained while conducting a research on brand image (hospital), brand image cannot be treated as absolute, it always relates the brand image of the brand competing against the certain brand. Kim also added that the