The Mediating effect of Brand Personality on the Relationship between Packaging and Brand Equity in Malaysian Small and Medium Enterprises

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Abstract: This study empirically investigates the mediating effect of brand personality on the relationship between packaging and brand equity among Malaysian consumers on SMEs food brand. Four hypotheses were developed to test the hypothesizing relationships between packaging and brand personality on brand equity. The data were gathered from 313 consumers of SMEs food product on Northern region of Malaysia. The collected data were coded into SPSS and analysed using Partial Least Square (PLS-SEM 3.2.3). The result indicated that packaging and brand personality appear to have a positive and significant direct relationship with brand equity. Interestingly, brand personality was found to be a mediator in the relationship between packaging and brand equity. The results are compared with earlier findings and implications for further research are discussed.

Keywords: packaging, brand personality, brand equity, small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

I. INTRODUCTION

Brand equity is a valuable intangible asset that brings many advantages to the companies. The obvious advantages of brand equity are provide companies with countless competitive advantage [22, 23, 29], leverage a brand using brand extension and reduce likelihood of product failure [15]. For the consumers, brand equity benefited in terms of facilitates them in purchase decisions, as a higher brand equity leads to greater satisfaction from consumptions [2]. Therefore, these intangible assets need to manage strategically. To manage this asset, marketers must develop a thorough understanding of its formative factors.

Revision on past literatures, numerous factors influenced the formation of brand equity. However, this paper focuses on the effect of packaging and brand personality in SMEs food industries. Packaging is a key element of product strategy and marketing tool that is able to build brand equity and drive more sales

with cost-effective, especially for low involvement or convenience products [7, 28, 30, 40, 46]. Researchers [30, 40] pointed out that packaging is considered as a key element of product strategy and a competitive tool in marketing strategy that are able to build brand equity and drive more sales with cost-effective way. Additionally, packaging also has a significant influence on brand personality [37]. This is because an effective packaging with a good brand personality are able to influence consumer's buying behavior [5].

Although packaging is a well-researched topic, but there is relatively little has been written regarding packaging in marketing and branding literature [42, 43, 51]. Likewise, limited number of studies were found to examine the effect of packaging on brand perspective such as brand personality [51] and brand equity [38, 45, 52]. It is appears that, there exists a research gap in past literature on the empirical evidence of packaging as an antecedent to brand personality and brand equity in SMEs food industries, particularly in Malaysia.

Brand personality has been regarded as an important factor that affects consumers' overall evaluations of brands. Although brand personality is a well-researched topic, but there is limited studies that tested its effect on brand equity [50]. Furthermore, most of the previous studies have mainly focused on determining its consequences and measurements in durable and luxury product [26, 44]. It is appears that, there is a research gap in past literature on the empirical evidence of brand personality as an antecedent to brand equity in SMEs food industries [35], including in Malaysia. In addition, majority of past studies examined the effect of such variables on brand equity in western cultures and very few studies were conducted in Asian countries, such as Malaysia [35].

Accordingly, this study was conducted to establish empirical evidence on the effect of brand personality towards brand equity. In relation, the investigation of brand personality as a mediator in the relationship between packaging and brand equity also will be executed. Hence, four research objectives were formulated as follow:

i)   To investigate the effect of packaging on brand equity
ii) To investigate the effect of packaging on brand personality
iii) To investigate the effect of brand personality on brand equity
iv) To investigate the mediating effect of brand personality between packaging and brand equity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

(A) Packaging and Brand Equity

Today, packaging has become one of the powerful tool in marketing context as it is able to attract consumer's attention and help to carve a unique position in the market place and in the consumer's mind [5, 6, 32, 39, 42, 51]. Furthermore, packaging is the first point of contact with the brand and manufacturer for consumers [17]. Besides, packaging is also proven as a powerful means of shaping consumers' reactions and behaviours [51] by creating positive impression which is able to boost customer's desire to repeat purchases [30].

According to researchers [42, 47], packaging is used by companies to create differentiation and identity not only for durables product but also the non-durables products. For the non-durables or low involvement product, usually consumers would not extensively search for their brand information and majority of purchase decisions are made at the store shelf [48]. Thus, the product's information which is channeled

mainly through its packaging is able to capture the customer's attention and facilitates quick and in-store decision making [7, 17, 32].

However, relatively little has been written regarding packaging in marketing and branding literature [42, 43, 51]. Likewise, limited number of studies were found to examine the effect of packaging on brand equity [38, 45, 52] including in low involvement product. This is due to claims that packaging is just a container [4] and not as a strategy that able to build brand equity, increase sales with cost-effective as well as firm performance [8, 30, 45].

Otherwise, in SMEs context, packaging is one of the important factors to be considered. This is because low investment in packaging can increase brand sales more than high-cost advertising [51]. Thus, this situation represents one of the gaps in the current literature about explaining the effect of packaging on SMEs brand equity. Hence, this study attempts to investigate the effect of packaging on brand personality.

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between packaging and brand equity.

(B) Brand Personality and Brand Equity

Brand personality is referred as "*a set of human characteristics associated with a brand*" [3]. [9] defined brand personality as a set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands. Besides, [50] explained brand personality as an evaluation based on human personality traits applicable and relevant to the brand and cultural context in which they occur. In other words, brand personality is related to all personality traits which used to characterize a person and associated with a brand [24]. Brand personality is very important as it reflect on how people feel about a brand, rather than what people think about the brand is [27].

Brand personality has become a widely discussed issue in recent years. It has been emphasized in many brands and products, including durables good, non-durables goods, entertainment and luxury goods [31, 33]. However, only few SMEs food brands are used as the marketing researches target of brand personality. In addition, compared with western countries, studies on brand personality in Asia particularly in Malaysia are quite limited [12]. Literature indicated that, only few empirical studies was conducted to investigate the effect of brand personality on brand management [11, 35] especially on SMEs. Hence, [12] proposed that further investigation is needed for re-confirmation on the effect of brand personality on brand management. In the same vein, researchers [35, 36] argued more studies to be done to investigate the effect of brand personality on brand equity towards other SMEs brand as it may produce different result as compared to global brand. Hence, this study aims to empirically investigate the impact of brand personality on brand equity formation in the context of SMEs food product in Malaysia. Thus,

H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between brand personality and brand equity

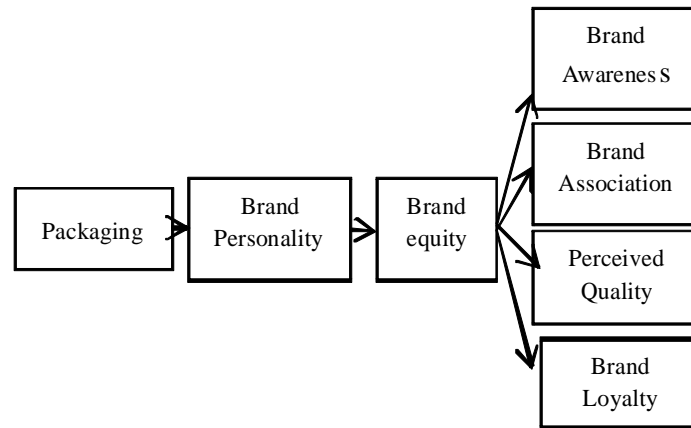## (C) Brand Personality as a Mediator

Earlier studies indicated that packaging plays a significant role in building brand personality. Researchers [2, 37] stated that packaging might be the antecedents to creating brand personality. This is because packaging can be a vital medium to convey brand personality of products [18]. Likewise past studies also have found that brand personality has a significant positive relationship with brand equity [14, 44, 49]. In particular,

researchers [3, 25, 28, 41] proposed that packaging and brand personality are the sources of consumer-based brand equity that needs to be considered when designing brand management strategy. Thus, this paper attempts to look closely on the influence of packaging as vital sources of brand equity in SMEs context.

At the same time, this study also attempts to investigate the effect of brand personality as a mediator in the relationship between packaging and brand equity. Therefore the hypothesis proposed as following:

H4: Brand Personality significantly mediates the relationship between packaging and brand equity.

Based on the above explanation, following is the research framework of this study:

Figure 1: The Mediator Effect of Brand Personality on the relationship of packaging and brand equity in Malaysia SMEs

This study focuses on the important source of brand equity. Overall, Figure 1 illustrates the research framework for this study showing the independent variable of packaging, the mediator effect of brand personality and brand equity as a dependent variable. In other words, there are direct and indirect relationship between packaging, brand personality and brand equity.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

(A) Sampling and Data Collection

This study was conducted among Malaysian SMEs food brands. This study is a cross-sectional, whereby data was collected from consumers of SMEs food brand in Malaysia at shopping malls in the Northern area of Malaysia; Perlis, Kedah and Penang. Further, this study used systematic sampling to select the respondents in which every first of tenth customers were approached at the entrance of the shopping centre. If the 10th customer was not a consumer for SMEs food product, then the questionnaire would be given to the next customer as a substitute. To avoid response bias, the questionnaires were distributed on the respondents during different times of the day at shopping centre. A total of 538 questionnaires were distributed, however, only 313 questionnaires useable and proceed to data analysis. All data is analyses using PLS-SEM.

(B) Measurement

The measurement used to measure packaging, brand personality and brand equity are adopted and adapted from the past studies with few modifications in order to suit with the context of this study. Packaging was measured using [20]. For the brand personality the measurement was adapted from [19] scale. [19] identified 12 brand personality items with five main dimensions: activity, responsibility, aggressiveness, simplicity and emotionality. The dependent variable which is brand equity was measured by using four dimensions namely brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Brand awareness was measure using seven items adapted from [13], which was based on works of [1]. Brand associations were adopted from [34], which was based on works of [53] and [1]. Perceived quality were measured using three items adopted from [13], which was based on works of [53]. Lastly, brand loyalty were measured using four items adopted from [13], which were based on works of [53]. All the items were measured with seven point Likert scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All the scales were selected because they have high reliability as the Cronbach's alpha value is more than 0.70 and had been tested in previous studies.

IV. FINDINGS AND HYPOTHESES TESTING

First the measurement model of all construct was check for reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity, prior to testing the hypothesized model. The measurement model for this study was fix where all loadings was greater than 0.5 [10], average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs was greater than 0.5 [16], and composite reliability scores (CR) were all higher than 0.7 [21]. As such, it can be concluded that this model has good convergent validity (see Appendix 1). Also, the discriminant validity was examined by the estimated correlation between constructs with the variance extracted. An average variance extracted of greater than 0.50 indicates that the validity of both the construct and individual variables is high. All the constructs meet this conservative test of discriminant validity, meaning that each construct was statistically different from the others (Table 2). Therefore, the measurement model is reliable and meaningful to test the structural relationship among the constructs.

Table 2

Table Head	Latent variable correlations and the square roots of average variance extracted						
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*
BPActive	**0.866**						
BPAggresiveness	0.598	**0.880**					
Brand Awareness	0.646	0.379	**0.862**				
Brand Association	0.560	0.349	0.774	**0.888**			
Brand Loyalty	0.555	0.446	0.641	0.625	**0.892**		
Packaging	0.591	0.393	0.562	0.497	0.528	**0.723**	
Perceived Quality	0.621	0.415	0.815	0.765	0.740	0.619	**0.876**
BPResponsiveness	0.775	0.488	0.638	0.564	0.533	0.597	0.666

Note: Entries shown in bold represent the square root of the average variance extracted.

As indicated in Figure 1, all the hypotheses were tested by examining the significance of the respective path coefficients. Direct positive effects of packaging on brand personality and brand equity are in support H1-H2. Packaging has a positive effect on brand personality ($\beta = 0.632$) and brand equity ($\beta = 0.277$). Brand personality mediates the effect between packaging and brand equity.

Table 3
Structural Model Assessment with Mediator

HyP	Relationship	Path Coeff	SD	T-value	P Value	Findings
H1	Packaging → BE	0.277	0.038	16.353	0.000	Supported
H2	Packaging → BP	0.632	0.036	17.409	0.000	Supported
H3	BP → BE	0.538	0.049	11.026	0.000	Supported
H4	Packaging → BP → BE	0.340	0.024	14.098	0.000	Supported

SD= Standard Deviation, BP=Brand Personality, BE=Brand Equity

V. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to examine the mediating effects of brand personality on the relationship between packaging and brand equity for SMEs food brands in Malaysia. The findings of the hypotheses testing suggest that all the path coefficients were positive (β value between 0.277 and 0.632) and significant at the level of $p<0.001$ (p-values = 0.000). In general, as expected, the relationship between packaging and brand personality is strong ($\beta=0.632$), followed by brand personality and brand equity ($\beta=0.538$), mediating effect of brand personality in the relationship between packaging and brand equity ($\beta=0.340$), and the last relationship between packaging and brand equity ($\beta=0.277$).

The findings of this study reveal that packaging and brand personality affect brand equity of SMEs food consumers. The result reflects the findings from previous literature that stress on packaging as a critical success variable to brand personality and brand equity. Overall, this study confirms the mediating effect of brand personality on the relationship between packaging and brand equity among Malaysian customer for food brands. This study is consistent with prior literature that showed that packaging and brand personality have a positive and significant relationship on brand equity [44, 45, 49, 52]. For the effect of packaging and brand personality, [37] stated that packaging is able to influence brand personality of the product. Hence, this study proposed SMEs to focus on creating distinctive and relevant packaging for their product as it able to become one of the valuable assets in creating brand strength and increase consumer's attention on SMEs food brands.

Brand personality plays crucial roles as mediator in the relationship between packaging and brand equity. If the packaging is creative and innovative, it will lead to increase the level of brand personality, then this in turn increase the level of brand equity. This study has contributed to extending the packaging, brand personality and brand equity framework in the SMEs food industry context. The findings of this study provide several managerial implications for packaging, brand personality and brand equity in SMEs food brands. The importance of these aspects to the SMEs food industry is because they have the ability to create rich experience to the consumers which play a crucial role in developing or building brand equity.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There are several limitations in this study that should be addressed in future researches. Firstly, this study investigated the role of brand personality as a mediator. Therefore, future researches are recommended to test the mediator effect of other elements in branding perspective such as brand image, brand experience and brand relationship quality. Secondly, this study relied on primary data through questionnaire as a survey instrument. Future researches may use other methodologies such as in-depth interviews with customer to gain better insights about the main factors that they tend to consider in selecting SMEs food brands. Finally, the scope of this study was limited to Northern region of Malaysia and thus, future researches may re-examine the variables in different contextual regions.

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Appendix A

Table 1
Average Variance Extracted and Composite Reliability

Constructs	Average Variance Extracted (AVE) First Order	Composite Reliability (CR)
Brand Awareness	0.743	0.935
Brand Association	0.789	0.937
Perceived Quality	0.767	0.930
Brand Loyalty	0.795	0.921
BPResponsibility	0.770	0.909
BPActivity	0.750	0.900
BPAggressiveness	0.774	0.873
Second Order		
Packaging	0.620	0.963
Brand Personality	0.522	0.884
Brand Equity	0.545	0.900