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Brand Tribalism, Brand Relationships, and Halal Brand Equity: A Study in Muslim Consumers

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the influence of brand tribalism and brand relationships on Halal brand equity of Muslim consumers in Thailand. The framework of the study comes from a new marketing concept, brand tribalism, which identifies a community of self-selected individuals formed on the bases of an emotional attachment to a brand, and its members are not just only consumers but also advocates. Brand tribalism focuses on creating network of heterogeneous persons, sharing value, ritual and belief in their group. This tribe is not outside the company, but it is part of the company network. It provides marketers an opportunity to engage in symbiotic relationships with groups of consumers. Although brand tribalism has now become an increasingly important phenomenon in contemporary marketing, previous research analyzing brand tribalism mainly focuses on sport fan club and luxury brand such as car and motorbike. There is a very limited knowledge to analyzed brand tribe that targets the mass market. The results of the study indicate that brand tribalism has direct and indirect influence on brand equity through brand relationships. Hence, brand tribalism is fundamental to the success of Halal brand. This study should help fulfill a gap in the brand and marketing literature and provide theoretical insights and managerial implications to marketing academic and practitioners.

Keywords: Brand Tribalism, Brand Relationships, Halal Brand Equity, Muslim Consumers

1. INTRODUCTION

Building brand equity requires marketers to plan and formulate branding strategies in consistence with consumer behavior and marketing factors which are always changing (Kim and Hyun, 2011; Goldsmith, Flynn and Clark, 2012; Tsiotsou, 2013). When the brand has its influence on purchasing decisions of consumers, this benefits the owner of such brand. Because of this, the brand which has an intangible characteristic becomes an asset of high value (Chernatony, McDonald and Wallace, 2011). The strong brands have tremendous value as can be seen in the case of Apple which is the most valued in the world at about 104.3 billion USD in the year 2012 (Forbes, 2013). Hence, product brand is like a precious asset of the company.

For many years, marketing scholars have studied the antecedents of brand equity. Kim and Hyun (2011) studied the effects of marketing mix and corporate image towards the brand equity. The variables of the marketing mix included the distribution channels, price, sales promotion and after-sales service. The results of the study found that marketing mix contributed positively to the brand equity and corporate image affected positively on the perceived quality. Rahmani et al. (2012) studied the effects of advertising and sales promotion on brand equity. This study found that both advertising and sales promotion had a positive effect with the brand associated perceived quality and brand loyalty. Valette-Florence et al. (2011) studied the influence of brand personality on brand equity and found that brand personality had a positive impact on brand equity. Brand personality could increase higher satisfaction and create brand loyalty.

Nowadays, a new strategy for building brand equity is to create brand tribalism (Tsiotsou, 2013; Taute and Sierra, 2014). It is a huge challenge for marketers because the creating process of brand tribalism is to build a network of individuals who have a passion for the same brand, have a connection, share emotions and opinions on the brand among the members in a group or tribe together (Dionisio, Leal and Moutinho, 2008). It looks like a tribe that has a symbolic expression, tribal culture and portioning out through rituals to demonstrate the commitment of the tribe members (Cova and White, 2010). In the literature, there are some empirical research finding that brand tribalism has its influence on brand relationship (Veloustsou and Moutinho, 2009; Jurisic and Azevedo, 2010; Loureiro and Oliverira-Brochado, 2013), and these brand relationships then create a positive relationship with brand equity (Breivik and Thorbjornsen, 2008; Lee and Kang, 2012; Valta, 2013).

Brand relationships are an important aspect of building brand equity because when consumers have already had an emotional bond with the brand, they would remember and be willing to buy the same brand repeatedly until this becomes a habit (Haas, 2007). Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) founded that satisfaction, trust, commitment, familiarity, and love are the explanatory characteristics of quality associated with the brand in the consumer's perspective. From many studies, they have found that brand relationships have positive effects on brand loyalty (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Alejandro et al., 2011; Abdul-Rahman and Kamarulzaman. , 2012; Valta, 2013). Furthermore, Marquardt (2013) pointed out that brand relationships have positive influence on brand equity. It can be seen that the brand relationships are essential in the process for developing the brand equity.

The sample frame of this study is Muslim consumers in Thailand. Muslim population is recognized as the highest growth rate, compared to other religions. The number indicates a growth rate at 1.84%, compared with 1.12% of the average rate of world population growth. (Borzooei and Asgari, 2013) The market value of the Halal food in the world is estimated at 661.6 billion USD in the year 2012, increased from 2011, with a value of USD 634.5 billion or market value increase was equal to 4.3% (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2013). To be successful in the market of Muslim consumers is not easy by using the traditional marketing strategies because the principles of Islam have its perfections, covering all aspects of Muslim life, from waking until bedtime (Sandikci, 2011; Razzaque and Chaudhry, 2013). Therefore, the study of brand tribalism and brand relationships should provide an important insight in building affects the brand equity among Muslim consumers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brand Equity

Brand equity is a key indicator of the success of the brand. (Buil, Chernatony and Martinez, 2013), Brand equity is reflected by the perception of consumers towards the brand (Aaker, 2014). According to Aaker (2014), brand equity is viewed as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand. The assets and liabilities under the brand equity are linked to the names and symbols of such brand. Aaker (2014) has classified the brand equity into four major dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations, and one additional dimensions which is other proprietary brand assets.

From the brand and marketing literature, Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000) and Yoo and Donthu (2002) conducted the research that pioneered the development of brand equity measurement, by categorizing the elements of brand equity into 3 dimensions as follows: 1) perceived quality, 2) brand association, and 3) brand loyalty. Similarly, a number of marketing researchers have divided brand equity into three dimensions, such as Gill and Dawra (2010), Biedenbach, Bengtsson and Wincent (2011), Valette-Florence, Guizani and Merunka (2011), Kim and Hyun (2011), and Rahmani, Mojaveri and Allahbakhsh (2012), while brand awareness and brand association include into the same dimension (Biedenbacj and Marell,2010; Kim and Hyun, 2011; Yoo et al., 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2002). This is consistent with most of marketing scholars who accepted such dimensions of brand equity (e.g., Biedenbach et al., 2011; Loureiro, 2013, Wang and Tsai, 2014).

2.2 Brand relationships

Brand relationships are considered a key marketing concept to maximize brand equity because it help the company to building and maintaining a long term relationship with customers (Lee and Kang, 2013, Valta, 2013). These brand relationships are trust, satisfaction and commitment (Alejandre et al., 2011; Abdul-Rahman and Kamarulzaman, 2012; Marquardt, 2013).

The trust in the brand is the crucial dimension of a marketing relationship. It is formed when one party has confidence in credibility and integrity of the other party. Trust in the organization that sells a product or provides a service will then happen (Skermeas et al., 2008) when the consumers or service users have a great experience, a great attitude to maintain a relationship with the company (Abdul-Rahman and Kamarulzaman, 2012). The element of trust is a need of the service users to receive a response or fulfillment from service providers which can be considered from integrity and reliability of the service providers or responders. This includes care and sensible benefit; although, there is not any obligation (Cater and Cater, 2010).

The following dimension is satisfaction on the brand, which is the evaluation of overall feeling towards what consumers have used and experiences gained from the service. The customer satisfaction will have a comparative assessment of the experiences and expectations of service. If that is not adequate, or is below expectations, the service users will not be satisfied. If things they get as their expectations, they will be satisfied (Lee and Kang, 2012). The satisfaction of consumers could happen before the service, which will result in the real availability and satisfaction after service. It will cause willingness to use the service again. The key is to reduce

conflicts caused by using the service. The conflict caused by unfriendliness, hostile and grievances towards another party is element which hinders building of quality relationships (Abdul-Rahman and Kamarulzaman, 2012; Xie and Heung, 2012). Therefore, good relationship will be achieved by creating a satisfaction in the consumer perspective (Valta, 2013).

The final dimension is commitment to a brand caused by reasonableness and economic benefits in maintaining a relationship or a negative pledge with reasonable conditions. The pledges therefore play an important role in building marketing relationship (Alrubaiee and Al-Nazer, 2010; Cater and Cater, 2010). The findings of Ruiz-Molina and Gil-Saura (2012) found that commitment is mediating variable between trust and loyalty of business.

2.3 Brand Tribalism

Brand tribalism can be considered as a new marketing concept having a great challenge for marketers in a postmodern era, changing the dynamics on how to build a brand as a tribe (Veloutsoe and Moutinho, 2009.; Taute and Sierra, 2014) that consumers have a common interest, reciprocal relationship, enjoy the same brand and create social subculture, have value and share rituals within the consumer society groups or tribes (Cova and Pace, 2006).

Brand tribalism occurs from brand-value products that affect consumer emotions (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Acosta and Devasagayam, 2010). This is a concept developed from the concept of brand community, which is the integration of the communities associated with the same brand or that have an interest in the same thing or like the same brand. They came together with willingness and accept a formal membership of the group (Tsiotsou, 2013). This is different from the concept of brand tribalism in the way that integration does not require a formal manner but members of the group have to express the behavior of the group or tribe (Veloutsou & Mautinho, 2009). Brand tribalism is formed by social subculture, values and rituals shared within groups or tribes (Cova and Pace, 2006). Therefore, the numbers of tribe outnumbers the communities associated with the brand (Tsiotsou, 2013). The structures and symbols of the brand tribalism associated with the brand are depended on the system of values, norms and rules and regulations members of the group set together (Dioniso et al., 2008).

In the literature, Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) has divided the brand tribalism into 5 dimensions: 1) degree of fit with lifestyle, 2) passion of life, 3) reference group acceptance, 4) social visibility of brand and 5) collective memory. There are other researchers, such as Jurisic and Azevedo, (2010); Loureiro (2013) who admitted such elements. Moreover, the results of a recent study indicate that the brand tribalism is one of the processes for creating society through the consumption of the brand which is the key making the brand royalty and brand equity (Tsiotsou, 2013; Taute and Sierra, 2014).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

This study proposes a conceptual framework of brand tribalism, brand relationships, and brand equity in the Muslim consumers in Figure 1 below.
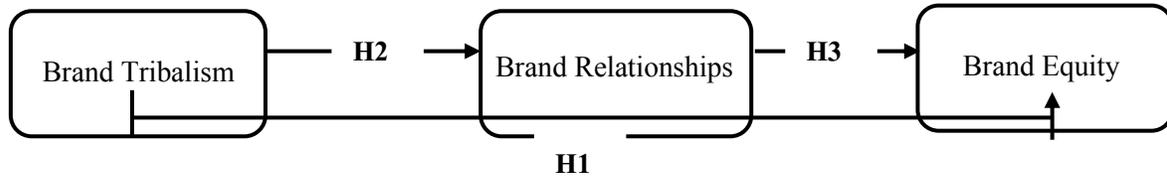

Figure 1: A conceptual framework model of brand equity in Muslim consumers

According to the literature review, the brand tribalism should have a direct relationship to the brand equity. Cova and Pace (2006) noted that the brand tribalism is the creation of the value to occur in the groups interested in the same brand and McAlaxander et al. (2003) added more information that the brand tribalism creates a society through consumption of the brand, which is the key causing brand loyalty and brand equity. Additionally, Taut and Sierra (2014) provided a reason that the brand tribalism has its objective to extend the emotional creation towards the brand and to maintain the tribe group. Such reason contributes to the emergence of brand equity, occurred from brand tribalism. Tsiotsou (2013) found that the brand tribalism has its influence on brand loyalty which is to create brand equity. Therefore, the researchers have a research hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 1: **There will be a positive relationship between brand tribalism and brand equity.**

In addition, there is also an empirical study conducted by Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) which found that the brand tribalism can predict brand relationship. This is consistent with the study of Loureiro and Oliverira-Brochado (2013) finding that the brand tribalism is more important than brand reputation that affects brand relationship. Also, a number of studies such as those of Jurisic and Azevedo (2011), indicating that brand tribalism has a positive relationship to a brand relationship in the consumer's perspective. Therefore, the researchers have the second hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 2: **There will be a positive relationship between brand tribalism and brand relationships.**

Valta (2013) indicated states that brand relationship is positively related to the brand royalty. This is consistent with Abdul-Rahman and Kamarulzaman (2012), studying the influence of relationship quality in hotel industry and finding that relationship quality is positively correlated to the customer loyalty and the research results of the Heung (2012) found that the brand relationship will help to reduce the impacts when the customer is not feeling well while the service is lesser. This affects purchasing intention in the future of customers. Marquardt (2013) found that relationship quality is an important resource in building the brand equity. In addition, Alejandro et al. (2011) pointed out that the brand relationships are positively related to the brand

loyalty, and Marquardt (2013) noted that the brand relationships have a positive influence on brand equity. Therefore, the researchers have the third hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 3: **There will be a positive relationship between brand relationships and brand equity.**

4. Research Methodology

The samples used in the study are 400 Muslim consumers in Bangkok, Thailand. The tool used is a questionnaire comprised with 37 items, including 16 questions of brand tribalism (Jurisic and Azevedo, 2010), 10 questions of brand relationships (Valta, 2013), and 11 questions of brand equity (Ha et al., 2010; Kim and Hyun, 2011; Lai et al., 2011; Buil et al., 2013). This study utilizes seven point Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Thereafter, the method of translation - back translation is used (Douglas and Craig, 2007). Final version of the questionnaire is pre-test with 30 samples to ascertain the quality of the survey instrument before it is used in a large-scale survey.

5. Results of Data Analysis

5.1 Preliminary Data Analysis

The majority of 400 respondents are female, accounted for 62.3% and 37.2% of them are male. Their age is mainly between 21-30 years old, accounted for 34.8%, followed by the age between 31-40 years, accounted for 30.5%. According to the questionnaire response, the mean value of the items ranges from 5.11 to 6.86 and the standard deviation ranges from .463 to 1.460. All values for the items fall within the -2 to 2 range of skewness and kurtosis. Hence, the data collected in the study are normal distributed (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

An analysis of common method bias by Harman's single factor test (Harman, 1967) indicates that the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for the items has eleven factors with eigenvalues greater than one and totally accounted for 69.603% of the variance. Individual dominant factor accounted for variance ranges from 1.744% to 36.126%. The absence of a single dominant factor suggests that common method bias is not a serious issue in this study. Besides, the tests of correlation matrix (.261 to .719), VIF (1.762 to 3.465), Tolerance (.289 to .567) reveal no problem of multicollinearity (Stevens, 2009).

5.2 Analysis of Measurement Model

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of Brand Tribalism (BT) is composed of degree of fit with lifestyle (4 items), passion of life (2 items), reference group acceptance (4 items), social visibility of brand (2 items), collective memory (2 items) (Chi-Square/df = 3.101, GFI = .930, CFI = .964, RMSEA = .073, SRMR = 0.0338). Brand Relationship (BR) consists of trust (4 items), commitment (2 items), satisfaction (4 items) (Chi-Square/df = 3.528, GFI = .947, CFI = .975, RMSEA = .080, SRMR = .0328). Brand Equity (BE) is composed of perceived quality (2 items), brand association (3 items), brand loyalty (2 items) (Chi-Square/df = 2.949, GFI = .976, CFI = .987, RMSEA = .070, SRMR = .0174). The results of reliability and validity are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability and validity analysis

Constructs	Loading	CR	AVE	α
Brand Tribalism (BT)				.905
Degree of fit with lifestyle (DFI)		.914	.726	.914
Halal brand is right for me.	.842			
Using Halal brand does something good for me.	.867			
Halal brand fits my image.	.839			
Halal brand is related to the way I perceive life.	.860			
Passion of life (POL)		.814	.686	.813
Halal brand make a contribution in life.	.850			
There is something about Halal brand that goes beyond its tangible characteristics.	.806			
Reference group acceptance (RGA)		.921	.745	.920
I would buy Halal brand because I am sure that my friends approve of it.	.836			
I am very loyal to Halal brand because my friends also use it.	.938			
My friends buy Halal brand and I buy it too just because I want to be like them.	.853			
I achieve a sense of belonging by buying the same brand as my friends buy.	.820			
Social visibility of brand (SVB)		.755	.606	.754
I know of many people who own/use Halal brand.	.762			
I know that people feel good about Halal brand.	.795			
Collective memory (CLM)		.867	.766	.867
When my friends buy product they consider Halal brand purchase.	.891			
When my friends buy product they choose Halal brand.	.859			
Brand Relationship (BR)				.938
Trust (TRT)		.909	.714	.908
I trust Halal brand.	.857			
Halal brand meets my expectations.	.821			
I feel confident in Halal brand.	.896			
Halal brand never disappoints me.	.803			
Commitment (COM)		.803	.672	.799
I feel a sense of belonging to Halal brand.	.756			
I care about the long-term success of Halal brand.	.879			
Satisfaction (SAT)		.932	.775	.932
I feel pleased with Halal brand.	.850			
I feel happy with Halal brand.	.892			
I feel contented with Halal brand.	.893			
I feel satisfied with Halal brand.	.885			
Brand Equity (BE)				.881
Perceived quality (PCQ)		.898	.815	.899
Halal brand offers very high quality products.	.906			
Halal brand offers product of consistent quality.	.900			
Brand association (BAS)		.879	.708	.881
I can recognize of Halal brand.	.801			
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of Halal brand.	.835			
I am familiar with Halal brand. (BE8)	.886			
Brand loyalty (BLY)		.777	.637	.772
I consider myself to be loyal to Halal brand.	.862			
Halal brand would be my first choice.	.729			

From Table 1, it can be seen that Cronbach's Alpha are between .754 and. 932, higher than .70 (Zikmund et al., 2010). The factor loading are between .729 and .938, higher than .40 (Hair. et al., 2010). The CR are between .755 and .932, higher than .60 and the AVE are between .606 to .815, higher than .50 (Fornell and Larcher, 1994). Hence, the measurements used in this study are within the acceptable level, supporting the reliability and validity.

5.3 Analysis of Structural Model

The results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) of the relationships among brand tribalism, brand relationships and brand equity yield a good fit (Chi-Square/df = 3.425, GFI = .957, CFI = .967, RMSEA = .078 and SRMR = .0627) (Kline, 2010). The structural model with standardized path coefficients is shown in Figure 2.
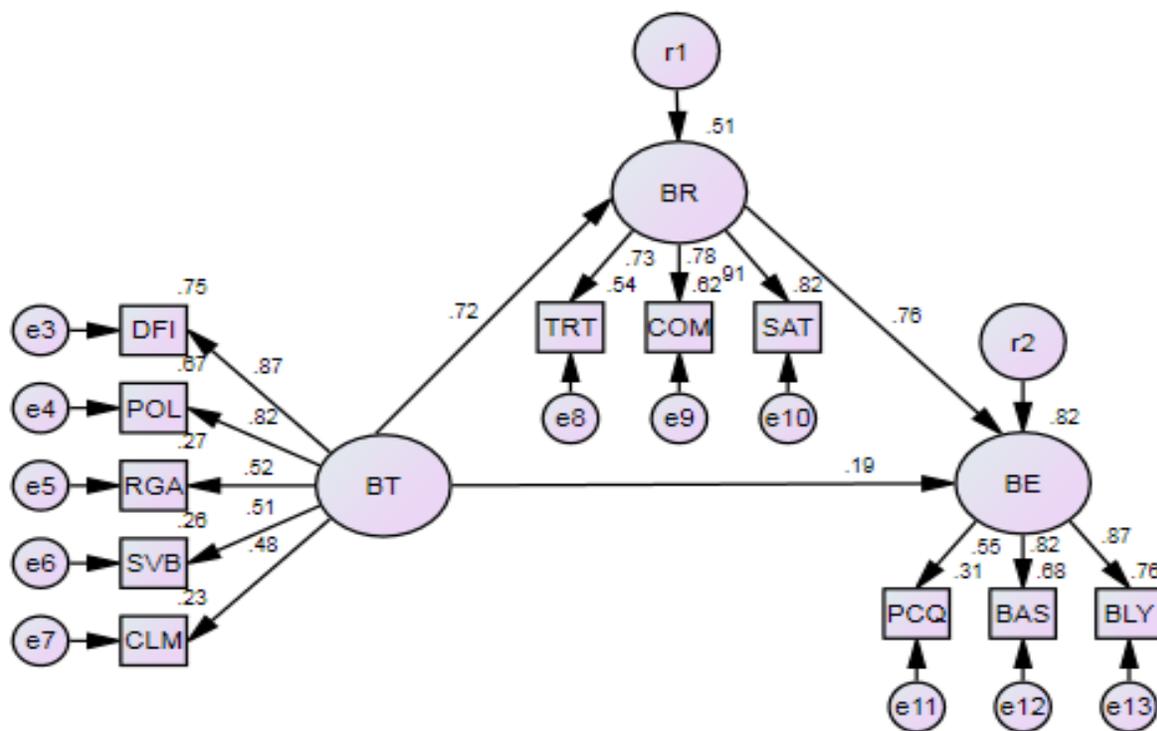
Chi Square = 113.027, df = 33, Chi Square/df = 3.425,
GFI = .952, CFI = .967, RMSEA = .078

Figure 2: The SEM result of Halal brand equity in Thailand

Table 2: Summary of the findings of the study

	Hypothesis	**Standardised Coefficient**	**t-value**	**Result**
H1	There will be a positive relationship between brand tribalism and brand equity.	.19	3.19**	Supported
H2	There will be a positive relationship between brand tribalism and brand relationships.	.72	11.76**	Supported
H3	There will be a positive relationship between brand relationships and brand equity.	.76	9.22**	Supported

** Significant at the 0.01 level

The SEM results represented in Table 2 indicate that the hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are supported. The standardized estimates for the hypothesis are all statistically significant (β = .19; p < .01, .72; p < .01, and .76; p < .01, respectively). Overall, the structural model exhibits excellent explanatory power. The model explains 51% of the variance in brand relationships and 82% of the variance in brand equity.

6. Conclusion

Most of the studies related to the antecedents of brand equity tend to focus on the marketing mix (e.g., Rong and Emine, 2012; Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann and Neslin,. 2012; Shafi and Madhavaiah, 2013), brand personality (e.g., Lin, 2010; Valette-Florence, Guizani and Dwight, 2011; Khani, Imanikhak, Gheysari, Kamali and Ghorbanzadeh, 2013) and brand image (e.g., Beristain and Zorrilla. , 2011, Lee, Lee and Wu, 2011; Richard and Zhnag, 2012. The studies related to brand tribalism are quite limited (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Taute and Sierra, 2014). Furthermore, Most of them focus on the sports marketing such as surfing (Moutinho, Dionisio and Leal, 2007), football (Dionisio, Leal and Moutinho, 2008; Tsiotsou, 2013) and Rugby (Meir, 2009), and luxury brand such as car and motorbike (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann, 2005). Hence, the marketing academics have limited knowledge on how to build Halal brand equity.

This study provides one of the pioneer attempts to shed light on the effect of brand tribalism to brand equity in Muslim consumers. The SEM results indicate that brand tribalism, brand relationships, and brand equity are related in a theoretically predicted manner and demonstrate that the framework of the study succeeded in explaining 82% of the variance in brand equity. Consistent with the brand and marketing literature (Veloustsou and Moutinho, 2009; Jurisic and Azevedo, 2011; Tsiotsou, 2013; Valta, 2013), brand tribalism has direct and indirect influence on brand equity through brand relationships.

The findings of the study help fulfill a gap in the marketing literature and provide theoretical insights and managerial implications to marketing academic and practitioners. This study should provide insights value into the process of building Halal brand equity and useful implications to develop effective marketing strategies for the Muslims market such as establishing a network of Muslim consumers (online and offline) to share their stories and experience with Halal brand.

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