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The Impact of Advertising on Relationship Quality: Empirical Evidence from Malaysia

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of advertising on relationship quality in Malaysian automotive market. Relationship quality in this study consists of three main elements namely; brand trust, brand commitment and brand satisfaction. The review of literature shows that past research has paid very less attention to examining the role of advertising in affecting relationship quality. The data in this study were collected from 287 passenger car users in Northern region of Malaysia (Penang, Kedah and Perlis) using systematic random sampling technique. The data were coded and analyzed using SPSS and Structural equation Modeling (AMOS). The findings indicated that advertising spending has significant positive effect on brand trust, brand commitment, brand satisfaction and overall relationship quality. These findings provide useful insights and suggestions for business practitioners to learn developing successful relationships with customers using innovative advertising techniques.

Keywords: Advertising, brand commitment, brand satisfaction, brand trust, relationship quality

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment, relationship marketing as an important strategy for enhancing business competitiveness has received noticeable research attention from both academicians and practitioners in different contexts (Reynolds and Arnold, 2000). The increasing interest in relationship marketing, both in business practice and as a centre of academic research has experienced rapid growth in the recent years (Srinivasan and Moorman, 2005). Relationship marketing emphasizes on meeting customers' needs and focuses on building, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges with them (Mitra *et al.*, 1999; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999). A good and maintained relationship quality between a company and its customers is considered to be a reflection of long-term marketing success which will eventually leads to loyalty (Tuan and Jusoh, 2013).

Previous literature reported that organizations focus on relationship marketing in order to build and improve long-term customer relationships which would ultimately enhance the power and financial performance of a brand (Barnes, 1997; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It also shows that building successful relationships should be established with customers, employees, suppliers, distributors, intermediates and retailers collectively in order to enhance overall relationship strength for achieving higher levels of brand success (Doaei *et al.*, 2011). Thus, relationship assets of any brand consist of knowledge, experience, trust and confidence among all members. The values of these relationship assets are

more worthwhile than physical assets and thus, they will affect brand value in the future (Kotler, 2001).

The increasing level of competition among brands nowadays requires them to look for the relevant strategies to maintain and attract customers. For example, advertising has been considered to be an important strategic factor that influences consumer behavior. However, despite the significance of such factor, there are limited researches that intended to test its effect on relationship quality, particularly in automotive sector. Therefore, the study aims to fill up this research gap and provide empirical evidence on the effect of advertising on relationship quality in Malaysian automotive market. The outcomes of this study would contribute to the body of knowledge on this topic and provide useful suggestions and guidelines for automotive manufacturers to learn developing profitable customer relationships through advertising tools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship quality: Relationship quality is one of the key indicators that measures relationship strength between a brand and its customers (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). It refers to the assessment of a relationship measured on how well a brand has met its customers' needs, perceptions, goals and desires (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Gummeson (1994) stated that relationship quality between a brand and its customers can be interpreted as the added value. Similarly, Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997) viewed relationship quality as the main factor that affects

customers' repurchasing behavior. Morgan and Hunt (1994) further considered relationship quality as the key element of successful relationship marketing strategy. By building and maintaining customer relationships, brands would have better chances to gain higher financial performance as well as to increase brand trust and commitment which would improve customer satisfaction (Hsieh *et al.*, 2002).

Relationship quality is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct that consists of several behavioral elements. For example, Crosby *et al.* (1990) viewed this concept as a higher-order construct that consists of trust and satisfaction. Similarly, Naude and Buttle (2000) indicated that relationship quality can be established in terms of three main dimensions namely trust, satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, certain scholars (Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Smith, 1998; Wong and Sohal, 2002) confirmed that trust, commitment, and satisfaction are the main components of relationship quality. Hilman *et al.* (2013) also synthesized that most of the scholars' perspectives to define the measurements of relationship quality used satisfaction, trust and commitment as the core elements. Therefore, this study measures relationship quality using these three dimensions.

Most researchers agree that trust plays an important role in influencing the supplier and customer's relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Past literature established that customers are more likely to maintain their relationships with a brand that they trust rather than switching to new ones (Tuan and Jusoh, 2013). Moorman *et al.* (1993) thought about brand trust as customer's willingness to rely on the other partners in delivering the offerings as promised. Consequently, the development of trust is indeed an important outcome of investing in dyadic customer-brand relationships (Gundlach *et al.*, 1995). Particularly, high relationship quality means that a customer is able to rely on the brand's integrity and has confidence in the future performance of that brand (Benouakrim and Kandoussi, 2013).

Lin and Chung (2013) further considered trust as a central determinant of higher-order relationship, especially in the initial stages of relationship development. Graf and Perrien (2005) considered trust to be the heart of customer-brand relationship and a key to developing customer commitment and affiliation with a brand. Trust was also viewed as a key element in establishing durable relationships with customers and maintaining a company's market share (Spekman, 1988; Urban *et al.*, 2000). It reflects the reliability and integrity of a relationship between both partners (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). For Gambetta (1988), trust means "the probability that the other party acts in our favour or at least not in our disfavour and is well mannered enough to agree to commit to a cooperation with it".

Brand commitment was also viewed as an important dimension of relationship quality, because it

is essential for measuring relationship strength between brand and its customers (Hilman *et al.*, 2013; Oliver, 1999; Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Robert *et al.*, 2003). Moorman *et al.* (1993) also asserted that customers who are committed to a relationship might have a greater tendency to remain consistent to it in selecting the same brand in future purchasing. Therefore, commitment is not only an important characteristic to maintain a strong and long-lasting relationship, but also an expression of willingness to stay with the same brand (Lin and Chung, 2013). Morgan and Hunt (1994) defined brand commitment as the desire reflected by customers to maintain a valuable relationship. This definition stresses the importance of the value creation in a relational exchange. Thus, successful relationships provide strong platforms for strengthening brand success and delivering customer values (Benouakrim and Kandoussi, 2013).

Similarly, brand satisfaction is another important determinant of relationship strength between a brand and its customers (Robert *et al.*, 2003). It refers to the ability to meet customers' expectation through some offering (Parsons, 2002; Payne and Holt, 2001). Previous studies explored satisfaction as a key element in customers' decisions to maintain or stop a given brand relationship (Lemon *et al.*, 2002). Payne and Holt (2001) argued that customer satisfaction is not only evaluated by the expectation towards the performance of a product or service, but also according to the values as well as the received benefits. Hennig-Thurau and Klee (1997) further described customer satisfaction as a key factor in the success of an organization and developing its competitive advantage. Cronin Jr. *et al.* (2000) also indicated that brand satisfaction plays an important role in consumer purchasing decision. It can be established when customers have a positive experiences based on their past purchases of products or services (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988).

Advertising: Advertising is a powerful tool for communicating a brand's functional and emotional values to the intended parties (De Chernatony, 2010). In general, the effectiveness of advertising depends on its content or message and the frequency by which consumers see the advertisement to become familiar with a brand (Batra and Myers, 1996; Kotler, 2000). Particularly, companies use advertising to create brand awareness for marketing their products and services. According to Sandra *et al.* (2008) declared that advertising plays an important role in modern life for accomplishing specific objectives. Psychologically it shapes the attitudes of customers thus, influencing their purchasing behavior (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2013). It also provides massive amount of information to customers to make better choices and draw conclusion (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2013).

Previous literature reported several definitions for advertising. For example, Belch and Belch (2003) described advertising as any paid form of non-personal

communication about an organization, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor. Advertising is a method to communicate a brand through various techniques in an attempt to persuade and influence the target audience (Cengiz *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, the American Marketing Association as acknowledged by Mutsikiwa *et al.* (2013) provided a more comprehensive definition of advertising as “the placements of announcements and persuasive messages in time and space purchased in any mass media by business firms, non-profit making organization, government agencies and individuals who seek to inform or persuade members of a particular target market or audience about their products, services or ideas”.

There are several advertising tools to promote products and services such as: television and radio advertisements; print advertisements in newspapers, magazines, and journals; direct mail advertisements through sending marketing materials directly to customers; and outdoor advertising such as posters, banners, signs and bus ads (Mogire and Oloko, 2014). Kotler (2000) described advertising as one of the main techniques that brands use to deliver persuasive communications to the targeted customers and public through paid media under apparent sponsorship. Organizations use it to communicate their functional and emotional values, because it is considered as a powerful tool to promote the brand (Chernatony, 2006). The goal of advertising as a promotional strategy is to generate a response from the targeted customer. Kotler (2000) further explained its purpose indicating that it aims to enhance customers’ responses to an organization and its offering.

Furthermore, Moorthy and Hawkins (2005) reported that advertising expenditure works as an indicator of product quality, because in most cases customers believe that brands which offer high-quality products would advertise more than those with low-quality products. They further provided sizeable support for the above argument indicating that advertising repetition enhances perceived quality. Moreover, advertising spending can successfully deliver useful messages to consumers regarding brand equity, therefore, it is a strong vehicle to build a brand (Barone *et al.*, 2005). Specifically, brands that spend enough budgets on advertising programs can create strong brand equity, obtain higher market share and increase their profit margins (Low and Mohr, 1999).

In general, advertisement being a powerful tool that is highly exercised by various companies for their better communications with targeted audience is found to be vital for creating brand trust, brand commitment and brand satisfaction which might in turn enhances brand power (Aaker, 1996; Baidya and Basu, 2008; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Haefner *et al.* (2011)

demonstrated that organizations can establish strong customer relationships and increase the possibilities of brand success through advertising competency. Therefore, driving brand success on account of building strong customer relationship and appropriate capabilities of communication is never practicable unless good advertisement techniques are used (Dahlstrom and Nygaard, 1995; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

In past literature, a number of previous studies found out advertising spending has significant influence on relationship quality elements such as brand trust (Balaji, 2011; Zehir *et al.*, 2011), brand satisfaction (Baidya and Basu, 2008; Angulo *et al.*, 2006; Grewal *et al.*, 2010) and brand commitment (Goodman and Dion, 2001; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Merisavo and Raulas, 2004). Their findings were supported by certain scholars (Grace and O’Cass, 2005; Low and Lamb, 2000) who reported that advertising spending enhanced relationship trust between a brand and its customer. Moreover, Duncan (2002) revealed that advertising is vital for reinforcing relationship strength among customers through gaining positive responses from them. Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are presented:

- H1:** Advertising has positive effect on brand trust.
- H2:** Advertising has positive effect on brand commitment.
- H3:** Advertising has positive effect on brand satisfaction.
- H4:** Advertising has positive effect on overall relationship quality.

METHODOLOGY

This research followed quantitative approach in which the primary data was collected through self-administered questionnaire. The designed questionnaire with guidelines to complete it was distributed on passenger car users in Northern Malaysia. Besides, it was translated to Malay language for the ease of respondents. Based on the information provided by the official portal of transport and road department, the total number of passenger car users in this region exceeds one million. Therefore, based on the table provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for determining sample size, a sample of 384 is recommended for this number of population. In response to their suggestions, 384 questionnaires were distributed to passenger car users at several shopping malls. Systematic random sampling procedure was used to ensure the randomness of data collection whereby every 10th leaving customer from the selected shopping malls was approach at the entrance to participate in answering the questionnaire.

The instrument employed in this study to measure the constructs is adapted from past studies. As stated above, this study measures relationship quality in terms of three dimensions; brand trust, brand commitment and brand satisfaction. Thus, the measurement scale of brand trust is adapted from the study of Ok *et al.* (2011). The items were reported at high Cronbach's alpha reliability with values more than 0.8. Brand commitment was also measured using four items adapted from certain previous studies (Ok *et al.*, 2011; Breivik and Thorbjørnsen, 2008). The items were selected because they had high reliability with Cronbach's alpha of more than 0.7. Similarly, the measurement scale of brand satisfaction employed in this study was adapted from previous studies (Oliver, 1997; Zboja and Voorhees, 2006). The selection of items refers to high Cronbach's alpha reliability ranging between 0.94 and 0.96. Finally, the measurement scale of advertising was adapted from Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco (2005) to fit the context of this study. The items were reported at an acceptable reliability.

The collected data is analyzed using structural equation modelling on AMOS 18. In order to ensure reliability of constructs, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are used. Moreover, validity tests are conducted for meeting construct validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity. For example, confirmatory factor analysis and factor loadings are calculated to determine convergent and construct validity. Similarly, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated to test discriminant validity. Finally, measurement and structural models are drawn to test the hypothesized relationships using several fit criteria for the model. The next sections present the results that in sequel will approach to the

worthwhile policy recommendation based on the conclusion done on empirical analyses.

RESULT ANALYSIS

To meet the requirement of data collection, 384 questionnaires were distributed on respondents, but only 287 were returned back representing 74.7% of response rate. The respondents profile indicated that 47.4% of respondents were male, while 52.6% were female. Moreover, 12.5% of respondents were less than 25 years, while the majority (48.8%) represented the age group between 25 and 35. Those whose age between 35 and 45 represented 16%, but 22.6% represented the age group of 45 and above. The results further indicated that the majority of respondents (75.3%) were Muslims, 14.6% were Buddhists, 4.5% were Hindu, 4.9% were Christians and only 0.7% had other religions. In terms of educational level, it shows that 43.2% of respondents had high school certificate, 21.6% had diploma, 25.4% obtained bachelor's level, 5.2% had master degree, 2.8% had doctorate certificate, whereas 1.7% had other certificates. Finally, the respondent profile revealed that 57.8% had government jobs, 23.7% work in private sector, 10.1% have their own business, whereas 8.4% were unemployed.

Measurement model: At first, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to analyze the validity of constructs using factor loadings. Items with factor loadings lower than 0.5 were eliminated. Specifically, five items were eliminated from the model based on modification indices. The details are shown in Table 1.

Thus, the modified CFA with remaining items was then estimated. More specifically, the chi-square

Table 1: Measurement scales of constructs

Relationship quality dimensions	Factor loadings
Brand satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.977$)	
I am satisfied with my decision to purchase this car	0.948
My choice to buy this car was a wise one	0.943
I think that I did the right thing when I bought this car	0.957
I am happy that I bought this car	0.949
I truly enjoyed the purchase of this car	0.934
Brand trust ($\alpha = 0.927$)	
The car brand I'm using is trustworthy	0.943
The car I'm using is reliable	0.965
The car I'm using is being delivered on time	0.719
The car I'm using is safe	0.850
Brand commitment ($\alpha = 0.925$)	
I am willing to make small sacrifices in order to keep using this car brand	0.821
I have made a pledge to stick with this car brand	0.949
I will stay with this car brand through good and bad times	0.936
Advertising ($\alpha = 0.970$)	
I think the advertising of this car brand is in general attractive	0.745
I like the advertising campaigns for this car brand	0.915
My opinion about this car brand's advertising is effective	0.868
I always have seen the advertisements of this car brand	0.540

Table 2: CFA results

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Advertising	Ad1	0.745	0.838	0.871	0.533
	Ad2	0.915			
	Ad3	0.868			
	Ad6	0.540			
Relationship quality	Trust	0.916	0.967	0.914	0.780
	Commitment	0.798			
	Satisfaction	0.929			
Brand trust	BT1	0.943	0.927	0.928	0.765
	BT2	0.965			
	BT3	0.719			
	BT4	0.850			
Brand commitment	BC2	0.821	0.925	0.929	0.814
	BC3	0.944			
	BC4	0.936			
Brand satisfaction	BS1	0.948	0.977	0.977	0.895
	BS2	0.943			
	BS3	0.957			
	BS4	0.949			
	BS5	0.934			

Table 3: Discriminant validity

	Advertising	Relationship quality	Brand satisfaction	Brand commitment	Brand trust
Advertising	0.730				
Relationship quality	0.459	0.952			
Brand satisfaction	0.437	0.951	0.956		
Brand commitment	0.361	0.787	0.748	0.902	
Brand trust	0.413	0.899	0.855	0.707	0.921

Table 4: Key parameters of the structural model

Hypothesis			Standardized coefficient	t-value	Significance
H1: advertising	→	Brand trust	0.628	7.212	Supported
H2: advertising	→	Brand commitment	0.592	6.907	Supported
H3: advertising	→	Brand satisfaction	0.727	7.814	Supported
H4: advertising	→	Relationship quality	0.523	6.606	Supported

statistic ($\chi^2 = 221.388$, $df = 98$) is significant, the ratio of the chi square value to degree of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 2.259$) is less than the cut-off value of 5. Furthermore, other indices such as GFI (0.902), TLI (0.968) and CFI (0.973) are greater than the recommended value of 0.9. The Root-Mean-Square Error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.070 which is less than the cut-off value of 0.08. Therefore, it can be concluded that the measurement model achieved good fit for the data (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2006).

Table 2 reports the CFA results. The t-values of all the standardized factor loadings for items are significant ($p < 0.01$). Construct reliability estimates range between 0.838 and 0.977 which exceed the critical value of 0.7. The average variance extracted of all constructs ranges between 0.533 and 0.895 indicating that all values are more than 0.5. These results indicate that the measurement model has good convergent validity. In addition, Table 3 shows the discriminant validity, whereby a squared root of AVE of each construct is greater than the correlation coefficients of the corresponding inter-constructs, confirming discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Thus, convergent and discriminant validity were achieved.

Structural model and hypothesis testing: A structural equation model was applied to estimate the effect of advertising on relationship quality including its dimensions; brand trust, brand commitment and brand satisfaction. The results indicate that the proposed model fits the data well whereby the value of chi-square (χ^2) is equal to 222.914. Other fit indices were used to ensure goodness of model fit ($df = 100$, $GFI = 0.901$, $AGFI = 0.866$, $TLI = 0.968$, $CFI = 0.974$ and $RMSEA = 0.069$). Based on these results, it can be concluded that the model has achieved good fit for the data (Hair Jr. *et al.*, 2010).

However, in order to test the direct effect of advertising on relationship quality, the regression table was extracted from the structural model. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that advertising has significant positive effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.628$, $t\text{-value} = 7.212$, $p < 0.05$) and explains 23.6% in its variance, thus, H1 is supported. Moreover, H2 proposed that advertising has significant effect on brand commitment. The results demonstrate that advertising has significant positive effect on brand commitment ($\beta = 0.592$, $t\text{-value} = 6.907$, $p < 0.05$) and explains 23.7% of its variance, thus, H2 is supported. The significant positive effect of advertising on

brand satisfaction is also supported ($\beta = 0.727$, t -value = 7.841, $p < 0.05$), consequently H3 is accepted. Meanwhile, advertising explains 27.4% of variance in brand satisfaction. Finally, the results indicate that advertising has significant positive effect on overall relationship quality ($\beta = 0.523$, t -value = 6.606, $p < 0.05$), thus H4 is supported. On the whole, advertising explains 21.1% of total variance in overall relationship quality.

DISCUSSION

The importance of building and maintaining customer relationships has been a significant theme in the previous literature (Hilman *et al.*, 2013). By leveraging such relationships, it can be said that organizations will be in stronger positions to gain better opportunities to enhance their success in the global marketplace. This study demonstrates the importance of advertising in building brand relationship quality based on mutual trust, commitment, and satisfaction between a brand and its customers. Interestingly, the findings revealed that advertising has a significant positive effect on brand trust, brand commitment, brand satisfaction, and overall relationship quality as well. The findings were supported by several previous studies (Baidya and Basu, 2008; Jakpar *et al.*, 2012) which considered advertising as an important strategic factor for creating successful relationships with customers and enhancing competitive advantage. By focusing on advertising and employing creative mechanisms to inform customers about brand's products and services, it would be possible for such brands to maintain their customers and gain better recognition in international markets.

Overall, the establishment of relationship quality along with its dimensions is significantly influenced by advertising. The ability of a brand to successfully implement favorable advertising programs that influence the perceptions of customers positively will as a result provide it with a strong platform to acquire larger market share and obtain sustainable competitive advantage. Copulsky and Wolf (1990), Pi and Huang (2011) and Haghghi *et al.* (2013) reported that when customers are exposed to extensive and continuous advertisements of a brand, then that brand can attract and maintain successful relationships with them. Based on the results of this study, it is suggested that business managers should pay significant attentions to advertising programs, which as a results could lead to more favorable response among customers and engendering better brand value in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of advertising on relationship quality and its dimensions in Malaysian automotive market. Relationship quality is a valuable

intangible asset for any brand which leads to better performance, however, implementing and managing advertising programs not only help to deliver the products and services efficiently to business customers, but also enhance firm's competitiveness and market performance through enhancing customer-brand relationships. The findings revealed that advertising plays a significant role in building successful relationship quality. Moreover, the results indicated that advertising has significant positive effect on brand trust, brand commitment, and brand satisfaction. Consequently, managers should pay significant attention to the important role of advertising activities in improving and managing customer relationships.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the significant relationships between advertising and relationship quality in automotive sector. These results may benefit business practitioners and guide them to develop appropriate strategies for building successful relationships with their customers. Such activities would enhance the performance of the brand in the long run and provide it with better opportunities for strengthening global market competitiveness.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has several limitations which would open opportunities for future researches. For example, it focuses only on one predictor of relationship quality; advertising. Moreover, the respondents are limited to car users in Northern region of Malaysia. Besides, a survey method is employed to collect the data from respondents to understand the importance of advertising in building relationship quality. Thus, the proposed model and results of this study open several avenues for future researches. First, future research can look into other relevant factors that may affect relationship quality such as customer service and sales promotions. Second, additional quantitative studies would be relevant for this endeavor to verify the results. Future research may also wish to test the model in different contexts and employ larger sample size. Finally, with reference to qualitative research, we suggest for future studies to utilize case studies and in-depth interviews of successful companies. Such studies may provide a rich understanding on relationship quality creation process.

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