

Managing Knowledge: The Role of Market Orientation towards Branding in the Automobile Authorized Independent Dealers

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Abstract—Managing knowledge is crucial as knowledge is among of the most strategic weapon that can leads to sustainable competitive advantage such as brand equity. This research introduced the market orientation, the knowledge-related behaviour that able to build brand equity. The investigation is in the context of automobile authorized independent sales dealers. A survey method is used in this study. The findings showed that market orientation develop the brand equity assets as well as overall brand equity. The finding of the study is hoped to increase more research attention in further explore the important role of market orientation in branding perspective.

Index Terms—Brand equity, dealer, market orientation, retailer.

I. INTRODUCTION

Managing knowledge is crucial as knowledge is among of the most strategic weapon that can leads to sustainable competitive advantage such as sustained increase in profit, customer retention achievement, and satisfaction. Due to this, it's no wonder that many researchers have investigated enablers for fostering knowledge [1], [2], [3] suggest that market orientation is the knowledge fostering and as a marketing mechanism for knowledge transferring especially in managing the relationships among stakeholders [4] including customers and channels like a dealer.

Specifically, market orientation focused on market intelligence or information generation, dissemination, and responsiveness, which influence the scope and importance of market information process activity [5], [6]. The interaction of these knowledge-related behaviour elements actually shows clearly how the knowledge is managed. This is because the market information is transformed into knowledge through information processing activities that involve information generation, dissemination, and the use of the information. Knowledge becomes organizational when it can be applied in the form of generic rules produced by the organization [7], [8], [9]. The effective ways of managing the knowledge locates the competitive position for the firm [10].

Unfortunately, there is limited empirical evidence on this [11]. More obvious, there are less research conducted in exploring market orientation in the retailer's perspective such as the dealers [12], [13], [14]. Similarly, there are still lack of

research attention in investigate market orientation in branding perspective [15]. Based on these studies limitations, this paper will mainly to investigate the market orientation in influencing the brand equity development by looking at the retailer's context, represent by the automobile authorized independent dealers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand equity is valued as a very important concept in business practice as well as in academic research because achievement of brand equity will provide benefits such as competitive differentiation, premium prices, higher in sales volumes, economies of scales and greater security of demand through strong brands [16], [17], [18], [19]. Conceptualized brand equity into multidimensional of brand assets that consist of: loyalty, perceived quality and leadership, awareness, associations, and market behaviour. Aaker's definition is the most comprehensive definition of brand equity [20] and has brought the scope of brand asset, which represent the critical intangible aspects that bring success to the firm. In response to the trend of increasing customer-based value, the greatest about brand equity is where it can be accessed from customer mind set. This assessment represents the unique differentiation towards a brand in its comparison to another brand from the perspective of customer [11], [21]. In the customers point of view, all of the brand equity assets reflected the benefits that they satisfied, which offered by the brand they bought. These customers' benefits are vital for a firm, as its will translate to a firm's added value, which further sustained the firm competitive advantage. For this reason, the development of brand equity is an important issue and the management of brand not solely responsible by the firm. However, this responsiveness has to be involved by the entire organization including the retailer such as the firm's dealers [22], [13].

According to [23], [11], most of the strategies of brand equity development are focused on tangible aspects of marketing mix. This including of using the advertisement strategy [20], [24], [25], [26]; pricing [24]; slogans, public relations, symbols and packaging [21]; and warranties [27], [24]. In relation, Malaysia also is not exempted. Most of the Malaysia firms used the marketing mix strategy in developed the brand equity such as place strategy, promotion mix strategy including advertisement and sponsorship, product enhancement, and pricing strategy [28]. Unfortunately, previous research has indicated that it is not enough to build brand equity considering on marketing mix [11]. Other marketing efforts should be investigated in searching what

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are others factors build brand equity [29].

In [15], they argued that market orientation philosophy is aim to build brand equity by involving firms, customers and other stakeholder including retailers in the development of the brands. Market orientation that focused on knowledge-related behaviour [5] has been recognized as a pillar of superior company performance by both academics and practitioners for over than four decades [30]. However, in relation to branding, market orientation is not explicitly linked to brand-building capability [15]. This has created the gaps in market orientation which required more research have to be executed.

In response to retailer context, the exploration of market orientation towards their area is still poor [14], [12]. Particularly, retailers (i.e., the firm’s dealers) are acknowledged as the key aspect in bringing superior customer value compared to other elements of the value chain. This is due to dealers’ responsibilities towards firm’s customer have made them more experienced with customers. Their exposures have made them able to possess knowledge in terms of customer’s perception and preference, as well as market performance and profitability information of the brand carried-out by them. Hence, knowledge about customer’s viewpoint toward the firm’s brand is in their “hand”. Somehow, the dealer’s perception toward firm’s brand is actually represented the voice of customers which important for enhancing the brand [13]. Unfortunately, how far this market orientation activities roles by the dealers in developing superior customer value such as brand equity is still questionable.

The above argument generally concurs with [31], who asserted that research regarding the effect of market orientation on customer satisfaction and loyalty, is still considered to be weak. As brand equity is a comprehensive measure, which includes elements capturing customer satisfaction and loyalty that address the customer-focused elements, determining whether market orientation concerns brand equity development is therefore an important brand management issue that needs to be concerned. Additional to that, the lack of empirical studies on market orientation as important sources in Eastern countries, including the Malaysian channel context, reflected the limitations in understanding market orientation as an important strategy [32], [33].

Thus, this study presents a framework of market orientation in developing brand equity based on dealers’ perspectives. The dealer in this study is represented by the automobile authorized independent sales dealers in Malaysia. Although it might look as a simple framework but the finding of the study is hoped to encourage more research attention in further explore the important role of market orientation in branding perspective. This will further enhance the role of market orientation as a source of competitive advantage for the firm.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The proposed theoretical framework is mainly based on the brand equity theory. In brand equity theory, [21], [19], and [11] are among the pioneer brand researchers who

proposed the brand equity framework. In [21], [16], customers’ participation in identifying brand equity is crucially important. The word “customer” actually refers to both end users and those at the infrastructure level, including the retailers (i.e., the dealers).

The important view of [21], [16] towards customers in brand equity context is further supported by [19]. Based on [19] customer-based brand equity, in enhance brand equity a favourable response to marketing activities for the brand needs to be created. For this reason, marketing programmes such as pricing policy, marketing communication effort, sponsorship, publicity, and other activities need to be designed effectively.

Despite the importance role of marketing activities in building brand equity, little conceptual development or empirical research addresses the issue of which marketing activities build brand equity [29]. In response to this, [29] proposed their brand equity model and suggests that brand-building efforts influence several brand equity assets. However, due to the limitations existent in their study, [29] have suggested that other marketing efforts should be explored. Therefore, we proposed our present study framework (see figure 1) by considering the role of market orientation in developing brand equity. In relations to the importance roles of retailers as discussed earlier the study is conducted in their context which represented by the automobile authorized independent sales dealers.

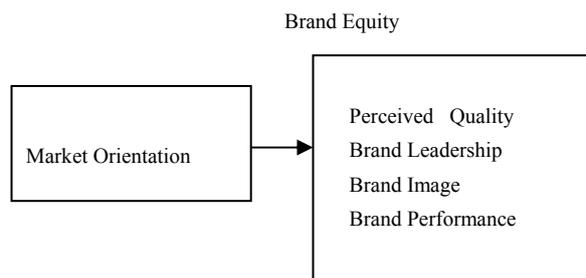


Fig. 1. The role of market orientation towards branding in automobile authorized independent dealers.

Particularly, the brand equity assets in this study consist of perceived quality (brand quality), brand leadership, brand image, and brand performance. The selection of these four brand equity assets are tailored by [34], but little adjustment is made in order to fit with the present study context. [34] adapted [21], [16] model in order to fit with their study context that is customer durable goods. In relation to market orientation, the interaction of three main knowledge-related behaviour elements (i.e., intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and responsiveness) indicates the process of market information activities and clearly exposed on how the knowledge is managed. The more market oriented a firm is, the more it is focused on process to create superior customer value [35], [5]. Since superior customer value is critical for a firm, the firm’s requirement for its dealers to become market-oriented is pivotal as only superior customer value achievement will enable the firm and dealer to achieve competitive advantage [36], [37].

Further, market-oriented dealers makes them more knowledgeable, as being a market-oriented dealer will expose them to activities of information collection about

consumer needs, competitive tactics and strategies, market trends and developments, and the business environment in general. This makes them more knowledgeable about their industry [12]. In addition, any evaluation or decision that they have to make is based on the market-knowledge aspect and is not reliant on their own perspective alone. As market orientation concern on customer-based information [5], [38], it will increase a dealer's understanding of consumers' wants and needs.

Thus, the ability of knowledgeable dealers to develop superior customer value, such as brand equity, is high compared to the non-knowledgeable dealers. In fact, there is evidence from past studies of a significant relationship between market orientation and customer responses such as customer retention [39], [33], [38], [40] and satisfaction [22], [31], [33]. Market orientation as well is found to have a relationship with some of the brand equity dimensions such as brand awareness and image [35]. Consequently:

H1a: There is a relationship between dealers' market orientation and perceived quality

H1b: There is a relationship between dealers' market orientation and brand leadership

H1c: There is a relationship between dealers' market orientation and brand image

H1d: There is a relationship between dealers' market orientation and brand performance

H1e: There is a relationship between dealers' market orientation and overall brand equity

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Sampling Procedure

This study focused on market orientation in branding context. It represents the authorized independent sales dealers of four major automobile brands in Malaysia as the study respondents. There are referring to the authorized independent sales dealer for Proton, Perodua, Toyota, and Honda brands. In this study, the authorized independent sales dealers are referring to "individual independent dealer and superdealer (if have) that are contractually appointed by a firm as important intermediaries that deal with all activities involved in carry and selling exclusively the firm's product/brand to final customer; indirectly represent firm's business "partnership" that perform the important function on behalf of a firm in fulfilling customer needs; and, a firm's business "customer" as well, who bought in a certain or large volume of the product (stock) and tied with the payment arrangement for any stock allocation".

For the purpose of data collection, a survey method is used. A questionnaire is developed and distributed to these authorized independent dealers in Peninsular Malaysia. There are 132 authorized independent sales dealers which randomly selected. The dealer's sales managers are selected to answer the questionnaire because they are the most qualified informants [22]. The selections of these dealers are followed the procedure proposed by [41], which is based on a random number using Statistical Tables. All respondents were given two-weeks to complete the questionnaire. From 132 responses, only 129 valid responses were received

giving a response rate of 97.7 percent.

B. Research Construct

1) Brand Equity

In this study, the brand equity represent as dependent variable. As this study is focused on durable goods perspective, thus, brand equity is defined based on definition developed by [34]. Pertaining to this, it reflected four main brand equity assets: brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand image. However, as this present study will be conducted in retailer's context some adaptation of the scale is involved. For examples, the component of brand loyalty and awareness are excluded. It is the fact that all of these cars' dealers already loyal and aware about the car brands they carry. Thus, as these cars' dealers received huge loyalty and awareness toward the brand they sold, thus, this is the reason of why these two brand equity assets are excluded. Otherwise, two other brand equity assets are maintained: perceived quality, and brand image.

In addition, there is another two brand equity assets are involved in this study: brand leadership and brand performance. The introduction of brand leadership is for supplement to perceived quality construct. This is due to perceived quality alone is still not tapping the dynamics of the market, for example in terms of innovation, popularity and leader category [16]. For brand performance, as it is important benchmark for retailers, thus, this brand equity asset will also be considered as well. Indeed, in order to develop credible measurement of brand equity, it is good to incorporate both attitudinal and behavioral components of brand equity [21], [16], [13], [20].

For the purpose of study, 20 items is proposed as these items are able to provide adequate representation for all components of brand equity: six for perceived quality, five for brand image, three for brand leadership, and six for brand performance (Refer Appendix A). All of these 20 items is used with minor modification on the wording for the appropriateness with the study context. These scales represent the main measurement of brand equity [16], [13], [34]. Hence, overall brand equity in this study was the mean of all items for each of the brand equity asset [42].

2) Dealers' Market Orientation

Dealer's market orientation represent as the independent variable in this study. For the purpose of this present study, market orientation will be measured using the instrument developed by [43]. Pertaining to this, it reflected three basic elements of market orientation: intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination, and responsiveness.

Particularly, 20 items are proposed in measuring these three elements of market orientation: six for intelligence generation, five for dissemination, and nine for responsiveness [43]. However, as this present study is focused on dealer's perspective, thus, only 18 items will be selected as another of two items is more applicable to be used in the context of supplier [12]. This revised items are specifically refers to six for intelligence generation, five for dissemination and seven for responsiveness. All of these 18 items is used with minor modification on the wording for the appropriateness with the study context. Besides, due to

dealer’s market orientation in this study is posited to improve the company performance the overall market orientation is used to represent the independent variable [6].

V. ANALYSIS AND RESULT

The result of sample characteristics showed that most of the firms have operated for more than six years with the number of workers being more than 15 people. The majority of sales managers have experience with the brand carried by their firm for more than 6 years. Also, the majority of them have working experience of more than 6 years. As expected, the majority (58.1%) of the dealers are located in the Selangor (37.5%) and Kuala Lumpur (21.1%) area, which is the most modern and advanced region in Malaysia both economically and socially. Indeed, in Malaysia, these areas are where most organizations are located. In terms of firm’s location, most of the firms are located in shop lot areas, followed by stand-alone and business lot areas representing 41.9%, 25.0%, and 21.0%, respectively.

The findings of the study showed that reliability test represents by Cronbach Alpha ranged from 0.88 to 0.96, and are generally considered sufficient for research purpose [44]. So the scales can be regarded as relatively reliable. In determine the role of market orientation towards brand equity Table 1 explained that there is significant relationship between market orientation and all four brand equity dimensions as well as overall brand equity.

TABLE I: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKET ORIENTATION AND BRAND EQUITY

Dependent Variable	Standardized Beta (β)	T	Sig. (p-value)	R ²	Sig. F
Perceived Quality	0.39	4.13	0.00	0.15	0.00
Brand Leadership	0.37	3.91	0.00	0.14	0.00
Brand Image	0.38	4.04	0.00	0.14	0.00
Brand Performance	0.37	3.88	0.00	0.13	0.00
Overall Brand Equity	0.42	4.62	0.00	0.18	0.00

Note: p<0.05

All regression analyses showed significant relationship at less than 0.05 levels. Particularly, market orientation is found to have a significant relationship with perceived quality at R²=0.15 (β =0.39), brand leadership at R²=0.14 (β =0.37), brand image at R²=0.14 (β =0.38), brand performance at R²=0.13 (β =0.37), and overall brand equity at R²=0.18 (β =0.42). Based on R square values, market orientation contributed 15% of the total variance in perceived quality, 14% in brand leadership, 14% in brand image, 13%

subjective brand performance, and 18 percent in overall brand equity. All of the regression models for each of the relationships are significant at p<0.05, indicating 95% confidence in explaining the dependent variable. These findings substantively support hypotheses H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study basically contributed to the brand equity theory. Particularly, the introduction of market orientation in developing brand equity further extends the [21]’s brand equity theory and enhances [29]’s brand equity model. Despite this contribution, an important insight into other marketing activities with the ability to influence the formation of brand equity aspects, especially from the channel context has been determined. In relations, the measurement of brand equity in this study is slightly different. Groundwork on the brand equity assets proposed by [34] and [21], [16], the brand equity assets in this study are refer to perceived quality, brand leadership, brand image, and brand performance, which adapted according to the appropriateness for the study context. Further, this combination of brand equity assets in Malaysian automobile authorized independent dealers highlights different perspectives of measuring brand equity in retailers of consumer durable goods.

Besides, the significant relationship of market orientation, which focuses on market information activities geared towards the formation of brand equity, gives a clear implication for firms to encourage their authorized independent dealers to practice the market orientation approach. A strong concern for the activity of intelligence generation, such as meeting with customers to find out which products they need for the future, conducting a large amount of in-house market research, and being faster to detect changes in customers’ product preferences, makes the dealers more knowledgeable and increases their understanding of their customers’ behavioral responses, especially in term of their preferences, purchase intention, and actual purchase decision. Dissemination activities, for example, through interdepartmental meetings including those between the dealer’s employees and the firm, or specific marketing personnel discussions on all of this market information generation will further enhance this knowledge-related behavior. Indeed, the responsiveness in relation to intelligence generation and dissemination, such as responding to competitors’ price changes and being alert to changes in customers’ product preferences, will further develop and strengthen the dealer’s knowledge of their firm’s brand. All of these activities will lead to the formation of brand quality (or perceived quality), brand leadership, brand image, and brand performance from their perspective. This postulation supports [15] that argued market orientation can build brand equity by involving not only firms and customers but retailer as well.

In other cases, from the dealers’ perspective, having reliable and well-built market knowledge in their hands will motivate them not to switch from one brand to another. Importantly, this well-built market knowledge will strongly

increase the dealers' level of confidence regarding the brand they carry. A greater quality implemented market orientation approach will assist the dealers' knowledge in clearly and confidently communicating the brand's value to the customers. For example, a firm produces a multi-purpose vehicle (MPV) (with seven seats) in response to market orientation activities. When the knowledge of this multi-purpose vehicle is in dealer's hand, the brand value can be communicated confidently. The brand value as either a functional value and/or an emotional value is a key driver of attitudes and behavior. All of this enhances the strategic approach regarding brand development and communication, especially in the selling strategy [45]. Hence, the firms' encouragement of their dealers to be market-oriented companies is vital as this approach enables the dealers to increase their market knowledge, which influences the formation of brand equity for the brand they carry.

On the whole, this study is actually open up the importance role of market orientation from the branding area, which emphasized on retailers' consumer durable goods. In addition, this study also encouraged for more research in explaining the role of market orientation as important predictor of brand equity development. To establish greater generalizability, future research should test this framework of study in other industries as well, such as in different industrial contexts, product categories, and service contexts. Indeed, the investigation can also be extended to the perspective of entrepreneurship focusing on small and medium-sized companies. This will also further strengthen and enhance all of the dimensions involved.

APPENDIX

"1" means "Strongly disagree" and "7" means "Strongly agree," Please select only one response for each statement. The word "X" is referred to main brand of car passenger sold by your company.

	Strongly disagree							Strongly agree
Perceived quality of the brand (Perceived Quality)								
a. X is of high quality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
b. The likely quality of X is extremely high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
c. The likely that X will be satisfactory is very high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
d. The likely that X is reliable is very high		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Compared to its competitors, X brand is much appreciated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
f. Compared to its competitors, X brand is more respectable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Leadership of the brand (Brand Leadership)								
a. Compared to its competitors, X brand to become popular is very high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
b. The X brand to be a leading brand in it category is very high		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

c. The X brand to be respected for innovation is much appreciated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Image of the brand (Brand Image)								
a. X has a strong personality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
b. X has a strong image	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
c. X is a very good brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
d. X is a very nice brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
e. X is a very attractive brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Perceived performance of brand (Perceived Brand Performance)								
a. The profitability for carrying X brand is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
b. The margin for carrying X brand is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
c. The sales volume for carrying X brand is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
d. The market share for carrying X brand is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
e. The sales growth for carrying X brand is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
f. The return on investment for carrying X brand is satisfactory	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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