RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND EQUITY AND CONCUMER PURCHASE DECISION: A CASE OF AN INTERNATIONAL BRAND OF FOOTWEAR

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ABSTRACT

Footwear has immense effects on the fashion industry and goes beyond fashion to cater to other functions such as sports, office, urban streets and technical outdoor. The objective of the study is to discover the relationship between brand equity and consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear. There are four elements in the brand equity model which are brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty. A total of 384 young adults participated in this study. In order to test the hypotheses, correlation coefficient was applied to identify the relationship between brand equity elements and consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear. The results suggest a noteworthy relationship between brand equity and purchase decision and the most significant determinant of brand equity is perceived quality. Hence, sustainable brand equity is significantly associated with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

Keywords: Brand equity; footwear; international brand; purchase decision

INTRODUCTION

Consumers are provided with a huge variety of footwear in the industry and have difficulties in making purchase decisions. According to American Orthopedic Foot and Ankle Society (AOFAS) (2016), the best designed shoes in the world will not do their job if they do not fit properly and it will cause foot problems. Therefore, they need to rely on heuristics in their choices although they are not aware of the heuristics behind their decision-making. Hence, branding is the most powerful mental shortcut available to the consumer (Leighton & Bird, 2014). It is significant to study about "why we buy it". Brands play a prominent role towards consumer purchase decision in this scenario.

According to the report of Packaged Facts (2009), between 2004 to 2008, the global footwear market grew at a compound annual growth rate of six percent. This was due to the largely increased sales in the emerging economies of Latin America and Asia. About eighty percent of authentic and athletic footwear as well as active sportswear in the market are branded (Tong & Hawley, 2009). Newberry (2008) revealed that Nike, Adidas and Reebok are the three global sportswear brands that have thirty-three percent of the global active sportswear and athletic footwear market in 2007. He also posited that the volume of branded footwear is expected to grow and reach approximately 15 billion pairs by 2010 (Newberry, 2008). The Tourism Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen (2009-2013) said that the local footwear manufacturing industry has reached a staggering RM1 billion in sales by 2012.

There were almost 150 local and international brands being showcased in the Malaysia International Shoe Festival (MISF) that was held from March 29 to 31, 2013 at the Putra World Trade Centre (The Star, 2013). Thus, this research aims to investigate the association of brand equity towards consumer purchase decision in international brand of footwear.

Today, there are plenty of footwear brands available in the market either from the international or local brands. According to Wood (2000), brands frequently deliver the main ideas of differentiation between competitive offerings in the consumer marketing. Goi and Chieng (2011) reported that some Malaysian consumers are unable to recall Malaysian brands due to low nationwide recognition towards Malaysian brands. On the other hand, a global brand is often associated with status and prestige and these products enjoy maximum market impact and reduction of advertising cost (Shahrokhi, 1998). In order to promote Malaysia as a shopping heaven in Asia, the Malaysian Government proposed import duty of footwear products to be abolished from 5% to 30%. (Istituto Nazionale Per il Commercio Estero, 2012). In terms of duty free status, an international brand footwear will earn more attention in the eyes of the customers especially footwear accessories and leather. Among the top ten popular footwear brands, Vans was ranked first and followed by Puma, Coach, Supra, Nine West, Steve Madden, Jessica Simpson, Nike, Aldo and Toms (Top rate, 2014). Therefore, this study was undertaken to investigate the association of brand equity and consumer purchase decision on an international brand of footwear.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Footwear

The transition from a commodity based economy into industry based economy subsequently changed the landscape of the Malaysian economy. Thus, Malaysia has reduced dependency on imports of raw commodities and increased its imports of processed or finished products. This change affected the fashion industry including the footwear sector (Istituto Nazionale Per il Commercio Estero, 2012). Table 1 shows the market share of major suppliers of footwear to Malaysia from 2009 to 2011. China was the biggest supplier with a market share of52.1 percent.

Table 1: Market Share of Major Suppliers of Footwear to Malaysia

Country	2009	2010	2011
Cina	48.6	54.8	52.1
Vietnam	17.7	14.2	14.8
Indonesia	8.5	9.6	9.5
Hong Kong	5.0	3.1	3.1
Italy	3.0	2.7	3.9
India	3.5	4.1	4.2
United Kingdom	3.3	1.5	0.8
Thailand	2.5	2.1	1.9
United States	2.0	2.3	3.6
Brazil	1.2	1.7	0.9

Source: Overview on Malaysian Footwear Industry by Istituto Nazionale Per il Commercio Estero (2012).

Footwear is more likely to be seen as the centerpiece of clothing rather than as accessories (Wolverine Leathers, 2014). The footwear market consists of all types of men's, women's and children's shoes (Datamonitor, 2009). In recent times, the footwear retail market has been highly fragmented. Consumers choose new shoes based on personal needs. As mentioned in previous studies, the health factor is taken into consideration in making purchase decisions.

Prior to purchase, a minor foot examination is conducted in order to advise consumers on the condition of their feet (Bonk, 2012) which may require specific attributes of footwear. A minor foot examination is conducted to advice consumers on the condition of their feet (Bonk, 2012). However, health care footwear is more expensive than normal brand footwear because the aim of health care footwear is to cure foot problems. This is consistent with Gables' (2016) finding that good shoes are more expensive and are considered as an investment for podiatric and orthopedic health. In another study, Chaturvedi (2015) concluded that brand is a critical factor in choosing footwear regardless of gender. Alexander, Khonglah, & Subramani (2015) also acknowledged that most of the customers were satisfied with branded footwear especially among those who were loyal to a particular brand.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of brand equity gained prominence in the late 1980's and has since been broadly discussed. Brand equity can be viewed from two aspects either financial or marketing perspective. In the context of financial perspective, brand equity is viewed in terms of a product's revenue that encounters incremental discounted future cash flow in association with the revenue that would occur if a similar product is without a brand name (Shahrokhi, 1998). While in the perspective of marketing, brand equity is a brand name and an icon which plus or minus from the value that is caused by a product or service to consumer connected with a set of brand assets and liabilities (Aaker, 1991). Moran (1991) also defined brand equity as any particular brand name that has certain implication and significance to its consumers, direct customers and distributive trade. Keller (1993) referred to brand equity as the variance outcome of brand knowledge on consumer reaction to the marketing of the brand. Thus, to create uniqueness, the company accomplishes the brand equity by expressing the resulting response to the actions to its target market. Furthermore, a strong brand equity will ensure brand sustainability when it works toward identity-based brand equity (Burman, Jost-Benz & Riley, 2009). Aaker (1991, 1996) proposed five elements of brand equity namely: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty and other proprietary brand assets, as shown in Figure 1. However, further studies by Burman et al. (2009) proposed that to sustain the brand competitiveness, the brand equity study should incorporate an integrated brand equity which covers internal (financial) and external (marketing) aspects. These elements are expected to improve the quality of brand management (Burman et al., 2009). Thus, the fulfillment of these brand equity elements will subsequently increase the company performance, including the customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, Shafi & Madhavaiah (2013) asserted that company's brand would enhance value to customers.

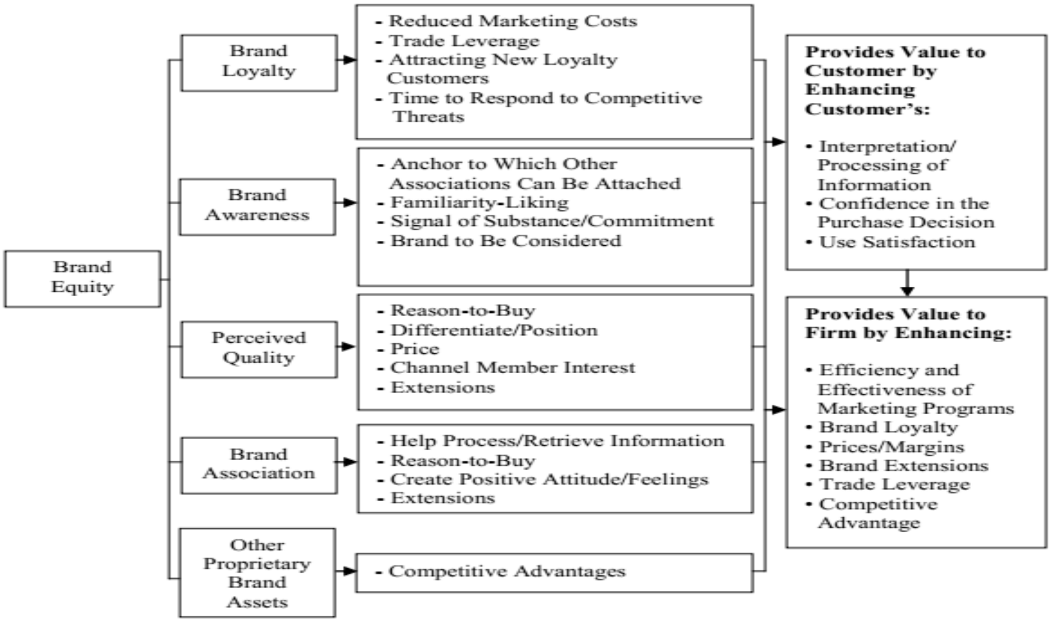

Figure 1: Aaker's Five Assets Brand Equity Model (Sources: Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996)

Sustainable Marketing Enhances Brand Equity

Marketers have made numerous efforts to emphasize sustainable marketing in the 21st century. According to Fraj-Andre's, Martinez-Sallinas and Matute-Vallejo (2008), Miles and Covin (2000), Miles and Munilla (1993), Pujari ,Wright, & Peattie, (2003), Shrivastava (1995) and York (2009), there are many benefits for firms if they employ sustainable marketing, such as increasing sales and profits, enhancing brand images, returning on investment, entering new markets, differentiating products, using of resources efficiently, and enhancing competitive advantages. As mentioned by Keller (1998), a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition. According to Gregory (2001), the brand is one of the most significant assets of a company. As Aaker and Biel (1993) noted, brand equity deals with the value, usually defined in economic terms, of a brand beyond the physical assets associated with its manufacture or provision. Insch (2011) illustrated that brands can be classified as green if the users' are into environmental conservation and sustainable practices. According to Strähle and Köksal (2016), sustainable branding is becoming more powerful today due to consumer awareness. Kim and Hall (2015) used the schema theory as the conceptual framework in their study to explore the connections between consumers, brands and environmental sustainability. Their study concluded that customers' high level of knowledge and better understanding of the environmental implications has a very high association with product brand (Kim & Hall, 2015). According to Garcı´a-Gallego & Georgantzı´s, (2011),campaigns play an important role in enhancing consumers' awareness of the brand, which makes consumers willing to spend more money on green products .Ottman (1999) stated that developing environmental products could enhance brand and corporate images, decrease costs, and open new markets to meet consumers' needs to maintain a higher quality of life. Therefore, it can be concluded that the brand sustainability can be integrated in brand equity when sustainability awareness is part of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and eventually brand loyalty.

Research Framework

The proposed research framework (Figure 2) is adapted from the original model of brand equity by Aaker (1991, 1996). As mentioned above, brand equity can be viewed from two aspects, either financial or marketing perspective. In this study, only the marketing perspective will be discussed and the research framework focuses only on the four dimensions of brand equity model namely, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty.

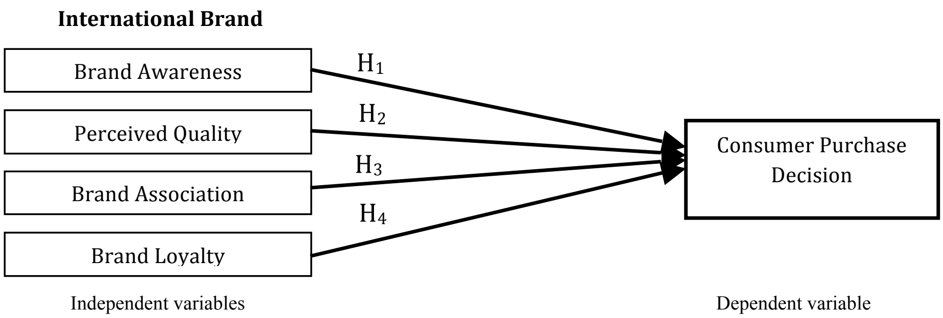

Figure 2: Research Framework Adapted From the Model of Brand Equity by Aaker

Hypothesis Development

1. Consumer Purchase Decision

As shown in Figure 2, consumer purchase decision is a dependent variable in this study. According to Pride & Ferrell (2007), consumers deal with decision making to seek variety in products in order to satisfy their needs and wants. Purchase decision process is important to assist consumers in identifying a set of product brands, evaluating products, choosing among alternatives and eventually making a good decision (Sumi & Kabir, 2010).

There are five stages in the purchase decision processes; needs recognition, information search, evaluations of alternatives, purchase decision and lastly, post purchase evaluation. Fuller (1999) noted that when the needs and wants of consumers arise, needs recognition occurs. The needs and wants of consumers are influenced by the present conditions, individual dissimilarities, and ecological influences (Ennew, 1993). For example, a person wants to spend the weekend hiking with his/her friend so, the intention to hike is the reason for buying sport shoes. Hence, the first stage of purchase decision occurs where needs and wants recognition happen.

Secondly, information search is required in the purchase decision process. Kotler, Amstrong, Brown and Adam (1998) stated that when consumers are stimulated to search for further information, then information search stage occurs. To increase involvement with products or brands, consumers seek for information through internal and external search from few major sources (Kerin, Hartley & Rudelius, 2011). As more information is gained, consumers' knowledge and awareness of the brands and features of product increase; thus, elimination of certain brands from the consideration set occurs (Kotler et al., 1998).

In stage three, evaluation of alternatives occurs. Firstly, consumers compare and emphasize attributes of the product that meet their needs. The degree of importance to different attributes is apportioned based on consumers' needs and wants. A set of beliefs on a specific brand or brand image are then formed by consumers on each attribute. Finally, consumers change the attitudes towards different brands after the evaluation process (Kotler et al., 1998).

Next, purchase decision occurs in the fourth stage of purchase decision process. When consumers limit the product alternative, they intend to purchase into the most desired brand. This is where the purchase decision occurs (Burrow, 2006). High-involvement purchase or low-involvement purchase occurs when the consumers choose to purchase the product (Riley, 2012). High-involvement purchase involves high expenditure or personal risk, while low-involvement purchase involves a very simple evaluation process. Inevitably, attitudes of others and unexpected situational factors are elements that could influence the purchase decision (Farooq, 2011). Farooq (2011) suggested two factors that will influence consumer purchase decision namely peers' attitude such as suggestions on product and other unexpected situational factors like economic turn down.

Post-purchase evaluation is the last stage in the purchase decision process. Customer satisfaction, post-purchase dissonance and customer loyalty are the possible outcomes of this stage. Cognitive dissonance results from post-purchase evaluation (Pride & Ferrell, 2007). Cognitive dissonance occurs when consumers are psychologically uncomfortable due to doubts in making the right purchase decision (Brassington & Pettitt, 2000). Cognitive dissonance also happens when there is high involvement of expensive products that have less desirable features in comparison with competing brands (Pride & Ferrell, 2007). Consumers feel satisfied in spending on the same brand when the product performance is greater than expectation. Loyal customers will purchase from the same brand and therefore pay less attention to other similar product class brands (Grewal & Lewel, 2010).

2. *Brand Awareness*

Brand awareness is the main basis of brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Shahrokhi, 1998; Tong & Hawley, 2009). The consumer's ability to identify or evoke a brand that has a weak linkage between the brand and the product categories is called brand awareness (Bornmakr, Göransson & Svensson, 2005). Keller (1993) proposed three main reasons for supporting brand awareness in a significant role in the consumer purchase decision. The first reason is about the chances that the brand has of being a part of the consideration set. He believed purchasing will increase when the brand awareness increases. Secondly, the decisions on the brands in the consideration set are affected by brand awareness even though there are no other essential brand associations. As mentioned earlier, the lowest level of brand awareness may be adequate for product selection that involves low decision settings. Lastly, brand awareness affects the consumer purchase decision influenced by the strength and formation of brand associations.

Brand recall and brand recognition are the sub-dimensions of brand awareness. Keller (1993) stated that by relating the brand awareness with a brand name, brand name will appear in the consumers' mind. When consumers are able to recall a brand name exactly with a given product category, brand recall occurs, whereas when there is a brand cue, consumers are able to identify the brand, thus, brand recognition occurs (Chi, Yeh & Yang, 2009). The ability of consumers to appropriately differentiate the brand with past experiences (either seen or heard previously) is referred to as brand recognition; while brand recall is related to the capability of consumers to appropriately retrieve the brand that is stored in the memory from the given product class (Keller, 1993). Brand recognition occurs in the undertaking of brand communication when the firm interconnects the product's attributes and a brand name is set up with which to be related to them (Tong & Hawley, 2009).

Moreover, brand awareness can be differentiated in terms of both depth and width (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). The depth of brand awareness refers to the way of making the consumers recall and identify brands easily while width of brand awareness describes the brand name that immediately crosses the consumers' minds when the consumers purchase a product. Mentioning about purchase decision of a product, a specific brand will enter a consumer's mind if the product has both brand depth and width which indicates the product has greater brand awareness (Chi et al, 2009). In addition, brand awareness is mainly important in the low-involvement purchase where a little vigorous search for information to aid choices is engaged by consumers (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:
H1: Brand awareness has a significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

3. Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is one of the significant elements in the brand equity model (Aaker, 1991; Aaker 1996). A number of researchers have concluded that perceived quality and brand equity are significantly related (Shahrohki, 1998; Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000). In evaluating brand equity, perceived quality is reported as a vital part of the study (Shafi & Madhavaiah, 2013). Consumer perception of the quality or superiority of a product is referred to as perceived quality yet in the relation to alternatives competitors, it is not the genuine product quality (Zeithaml, 1998). Perceived quality of a brand may be an essential reason for consumers to buy the product (Aaker, 1991). While consumers are considering which brand to be selected, perceived quality influences which brands shall be included or excluded from the choice. Perception of good quality may encourage consumers to choose the brand and eliminate alternative brands by leading them to identify and differentiate the superiority of the specific brand (Yoo et al, 2000). Aaker (1991) claimed that perceived quality enables the company to charge a premium price which increases the company profits. This is confirmed in the study carried out by Lee, Kumar and Kim (2010), where consumers are more likely to purchase the brand among the competing brands with a superior price when a brand is perceived to have high quality. However, the result from a study by Goi and Chieng (2011) contradicts this finding. They discovered consumers had difficulty making rational judgment of the product quality. Nevertheless, perceived quality differentiates the brand from competing brands and enables the consumers to have a reason to buy with the value provided by perceived quality (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2005). In developing countries, foreign brands are generally perceived as having better quality than domestic brands (Kinra, 2006). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:
H2: Perceived quality has a significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

4. Brand Association

Brand association increases the impressiveness of a specific brand; therefore, brand association and brand equity have a strong relationship (Aaker, 1991). The main association and differentiation elements of brand equity normally involve the image dimensions unique to a brand (Shahrokhi, 1998). Besides its unique image, product attributes and benefits also generate brand association (Keller, 1998). Product attributes refers to the descriptive features that characterize the product and is classified into product-related attributes and non-product-related attributes. Brand personality, price, user, and usage imagery is classified under non-product-related attributes. Product attributes involving what consumers expected the product to be is concerned with its purchase or consumption. Product benefits are the product attributes that are assigned by the consumers' personal values. It is classified into functional, experiential, and symbolic benefits. Lastly, product attitudes is the general evaluations of the consumer towards the brand.

Brand association also includes other elements such as the produce usage, consumer lifestyles, competitors, and country of origin (Shafi & Madhavaiah, 2013). The features of the product or the product independent aspect reflect brand association (Chen, 2001). Brand image is formed when a set of association is structured in a significant way (Tong & Hawley, 2009). Shafi and Madhavaiah (2013) pointed out that consumer purchase behavior and user satisfaction are influenced by associations of a well-established brand name. Importantly, brand association is useful in helping consumers to process or retrieve information, provide a reason to purchase, generate positive attitudes or emotions, offer a basis for extension, differentiate the brand as well as shape and control information in consumers' memory (George, Low & Lamb, 2000; Martensen & Gronholdt, 2003). Hence, it creates value among the firm and its customers (Aaker, 1991). Chen (2001) mentioned that brand association is the basis for brand loyalty and consumer purchase decision. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:
H3: Brand association has a significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

5. Brand Loyalty

Throughout the years, the definitions of brand loyalty are widely reported in literature. Brand loyalty is the strength of preference on a brand in comparison with similar alternatives (Wong & Yahyah, 2008). According to Aaker (1991), brand loyalty adds a significant value to a brand and/or its firms because it provides a set of typical purchasers for a long period of time. Besides that, a customer's preference to stay, repurchase decision, and validation towards the brand is influenced by loyalty (Shafi & Madhavaiah, 2013). From Rubini's (2010) case study, brand loyalty is defined as an event of consumers' purchasing the same product category, either a conscious or unconscious decision process measurement of how frequently a customer is likely to buy a product from the same brand. A strong brand is created by a high loyalty level that in turn allows for higher margins and price points which enable the brand trade acceptance and low price elasticity to maximize the company revenues (Benson & Hedren, 2013). It is expensive to find new customers rather than to retain existing customers; thus, having loyal customers is crucial in reducing the cost for attracting new customers (Rowley, 2005).

Brand loyalty is also seen as a behavior or as an attitude. Schoell and Guiltinan (1990) viewed behavioral loyalty as concentrating on purchase of the products of a particular brand within a product class over time, while the attitudinal perspective assumes that a positive attitude towards the brand is associated with the consistency of purchasing from a brand which will guarantee further purchases (Amine, 1998). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:
H4: Brand loyalty has a significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed to test the four formulated hypotheses. The majority of the questions in the questionnaire were adapted from previous studies (Aaker, 1991; Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005; Lassar, Mittal & Sharma, 1995; Mittal, 1989; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section is on the respondents' demographic information which include the respondents' gender, preferable brand and the number of international brand of footwear owned. The second section consists of the dependent variable namely consumer purchase decision which is adopted from Mittal (1989). The third section of the questionnaire is concerned with the independent variables which were adapted from Aaker (1991). After modification, twenty-four items associated with brand equity, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty were included. The four dimensions of brand equity which are brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty were developed with reference from previous empirical studies (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Lassar et al., 1995; Pappu et al., 2005; Yoo et al., 2001). The seven-point rating scale was used as the research instrument The options range from 1 to indicate strong disagreement to 7 which shows strong agreement. The respondents were required to answer accordingly for each item.

According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, only a minimum sample of 375 respondents are needed for the 16,000 undergraduate population of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Mustapha, 2013). However, in 2015, the researcher was able to collect 384 sets of questionnaires from footwear customers between the age of 18 years old to 40 years old in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The sampling method used in this study was convenience sampling. As mentioned by Wiederman (1999), the process to distribute the questionnaire to the respondents who volunteered and to select the members among the population is based on their ease of access and convenient sources of data. This study focused on young adults from 18 –to40 years old as they are aware of current trends in local and international footwear brands. Table 2 shows 384 respondents from various states who were studying in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. There were 120 male respondents and 264 female respondents involved in this research at 31.3% and 61.8%, respectively. Table 2 also presents the various age groups of respondents in this research. The majority of the respondents were between 23 –to 25 years old which consisted of 266 respondents or 69.3% of the sample. The second largest group of respondents were between 20 to 22 years old which was f 94 respondents or 24.5%. Meanwhile, the respondents aged between26 - 28 years old in this research were 17 respondents or 4.4%. There were 2 respondents or 0.5% within the age range of 17 - 19 years old and 29 - 31 years old. Lastly, there was only one respondent in the range of 32 - 34 years old, 35 - 37 years old and 38 - 40 years old that were involved in this research which only accounted for 0.3% each of the total respondents. Majority of the respondents preferred the international brand which was a total of 326 respondents or 84.9% while only 58 respondents or 15.1% preferred the Malaysian brand. Table 2 shows the volumes of the international brand of footwear owned by the respondents. Majority of the respondents owned 3 to 4 pairs of footwear which were136 respondents or 35.4%. Next, 102 respondents or 26.6% owned 5 to 6 pairs of footwear. 54 respondents or 14.1% owned 7 to 8 pairs of footwear. Meanwhile, 36 respondents or 9.4% owned 10 pairs or more of footwear. Only 31 respondents or 8.1% owned 1 to2 pairs of footwear. Lastly, only 6.5% of the respondents owned 9 to 10 pairs of footwear.

Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Profile

Variables	Frequency	Percent %
Gender		
Male	120	31.3
Female	264	68.8
Total	384	100.0
Age		
17 - 19	2	0.5
20 - 22	94	24.5
23 - 25	266	69.3
26 - 28	17	4.4
29 - 31	2	0.5
32 - 34	1	0.3
35 - 37	1	0.3
38 - 40	1	0.3
Total	384	100.0
Preferred Brand		
International brand	326	84.9
Malaysian Brand	58	15.1
Total	384	100.0
Volumes of international brand of footwear owned		
1 - 2	31	8.1
3 - 4	136	35.4
5 - 6	102	26.6
7 - 8	54	14.1
9 - 10	25	6.5
10 and above	36	9.4
Total	384	100.0

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reliability Analysis

Table 3 shows the results of the reliability test for 384 respondents. Both dependent variables and independent variables are reliable. According to Junoh and Yaakob (2011) the reliability of all the variables exceeding the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 is considered as reliable, 0.6 – 0.7 is acceptable while less than 0.6 is unreliable. As stated in Table 3, the Cronbach's Alpha value of this research variables are ranged between 0.791 and 0.904 and it is definitely reliable. In addition, the independent variable of perceived quality is considered as the most reliable with the greatest Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.904.

Table 3: Result of Reliability Test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Consumer Purchase Decision	0.791
Brand Awareness	0.832
Perceived Quality	0.904
Brand Association	0.878
Brand Loyalty	0.888

Correlation Coefficients

Correlation Coefficient is used to estimate the strength and direction of linear relationship association between independent (X) and dependent (Y) variable ranging from -1 to +1 (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2012). If the value indicates a +1, there is a total positive correlation between the variables, at 0 there is no correlation, and at -1 there is a total negative correlation between the variables. According to Junoh and Yaakob (2011), the magnitude relationship will be explained as r = 1.0 as perfect relationship; r = -0.7 – 0.9 as high relationship; r = 0.5 – 0.69 substantial; r = 0.3 – 0.49 as moderate; r = 0.1 – 0.29 as low relationship and r = 0.01 – 0.09 as slight relationship or negligible. Thus, the result of this study as stated in Table 4 shows that the four independent variables (brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand loyalty) are significantly correlated to the dependent variable (consumer purchase decisions) where p-value is at 0.000 and the relationship magnitude is moderate.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Variables		**Consumer Purchase Decision**	**Relationship magnitude**	**Hypothesis**	**Result**
Brand Awareness	*r*	0.366**	Moderate	H1	Accepted
	Sig	0.000			
Perceived Quality	*r*	0.452**	Moderate	H2	Accepted
	Sig	0.000			
Brand Association	*r*	0.411**	Moderate	H3	Accepted
	Sig	0.000			
Brand Loyalty	*r*	0.397**	Moderate	H4	Accepted
	Sig	0.000			

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Hypothesis results

H1: Brand awareness has a significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

Based on Table 4, brand awareness is significantly related with consumer purchase decision with correlation coefficients of +0.366. The p-value of the brand awareness is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 and this is sufficient evidence that H1 is accepted. Brand awareness is found to have only moderate relationship with consumer purchase decision; however, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that brand awareness significantly influences the consumer purchase decision in international brand of footwear. Therefore, the first objective of the study is achieved. The finding of this study is similar to the finding of Keller (1993) who claimed that brand association influences the consumer purchase decision. Furthermore, brand awareness which is identified as the third influential determinant also influences the customers purchase decision of footwear in an international brand. As consumers are overwhelmed by the many choices available in the market, brand awareness enables the respondents to differentiate between international brands and local brands. It is consistent with the finding of Bornmakr et al., (2005) that brand awareness is the consumer's ability to identify or evoke a brand that has a weak linkage between the brand and the product categories. The higher the awareness level towards the brand, the higher the chances the consumer will purchase the brand.

H2: Perceived quality has a significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

Perceived quality is found to have the highest coefficient value of +0.452 with the significant level (p-value) of 0.000. Table 4 shows the positive relationship between perceived quality and consumer purchase decision. Therefore H2 is accepted. Perceived quality is found to have a moderate relationship with consumer purchase decision; however, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that perceived quality significantly influences the consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear. Therefore, the second objective of the study is reached. The findings are similar to the study by Pappu et al. (2005) who stated that perceived quality differentiate the brand from competing brands and influences the consumer purchase decision. Based on the result above, perceived quality is the most influential determinant of brand equity towards consumer purchase decision of footwear in an international brand. The respondents found that the perceived quality of international brand is reliable; therefore they expected superior performance from the international brand. It was supported by Yoo et al. (2000) where the perception of good quality may encourage consumers to choose the brand and eliminate the alternative brands by leading them to identify and differentiate the superiority of the specific brand. Thus, in the perspective of customers, the international brand of footwear offers good quality and excellent features that will increase the confidence level of the consumers towards the footwear and hence it will affect the consumer purchase decision.

H3: Brand association has significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

As shown in Table 4, brand association significantly influences the consumer purchase decision (correlation coefficient = +0.411). The correlation coefficient of brand association is ranked the second highest among all independent variables. The p-value for brand association is less than 0.05 (p-value = 0.000) and this is sufficient evidence to conclude that H3 is accepted. Brand association is found to have only a moderate relationship with consumer purchase decision. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that brand association significantly influences consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear. Therefore, the third objective of the study is achieved. Furthermore, this study also shares similar findings with Shafi and Madhayaiah (2013) who pointed out that the brand association influences the consumer purchase decision.

The logo, status and style of the international brand that matches the consumer personality will affect the consumer purchase decision as it is well regarded by the consumer's friends and family. It is consistent with Keller's (1998) statement on brand association. Thus, the unique brand image of the international brand of footwear affects the consumer purchase decision too.

H4: Brand loyalty has a significant relationship with consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear.

In Table 4, brand loyalty and consumer purchase decision is found to be statistically significant with the coefficient value of +0.397 and the significant level (p-value) of 0.000. Therefore, H4 is concluded that to be accepted with sufficient evidence. Brand loyalty is found to have a moderate relationship with consumer purchase decision; however, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that brand loyalty significantly influences consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear. Therefore, the forth objective of the study is reached. The finding reported in Aaker's (1996) study also claimed that brand loyalty influences consumer purchase decision. Brand loyalty is the second most influential determinant to customer purchase decision of footwear in an international brand. The loyal consumer intends to purchase the international brand of footwear again and again, even in the near future as mentioned by Rubini (2010) in her case study. Indirectly, brand loyalty will give more profit as mentioned by Rowley (2005) where it is expensive to find new customers compared to retaining existing customers, thus, loyal customers are beneficial in reducing cost as compared to attracting new customers.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, all the dependent variable and independent variables have been examined and all the hypotheses of the study are accepted. The study's research objective and research questions are reached and are answered. Furthermore, several methods of analysis were used to analyze the data collected in this study including descriptive analysis, reliability test and correlation coefficients analysis. The descriptive analysis analyzes the respondents' demographic profile. The results presented are that female made up the majority of the respondents and most respondents were aged between 23 to 25. Moreover, the results also show that most respondents preferred international brand of footwear and majority owned 3 to 4 pairs of footwear each.

In addition, correlation analysis was used to evaluate the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. The hypothesis is accepted through the correlation analysis with the significant value (p-value) that is less than 0.05. The results show that all the independent variables are significantly related to the dependent variable. All the elements of the brand equity which are brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty are significantly related to the consumer purchase decision in footwear in an international brand.

Theoretical Implication

The method of determination of this study was designed from the literature review of previous studies and with the combination of past studies and empirical studies. The brand equity model was used to measure the effectiveness of brand equity towards consumer purchase decision of footwear in an international brand. The four dimensions focused in this study are brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty. In this study, perceived quality was found to bring the biggest impact on consumer purchase decision of footwear in an international brand. As mentioned before in the literature review, perceived quality is one of the significant elements in the brand equity model proposed by Aaker (1991, 1996) and a few researchers had concluded that perceived quality and brand equity are significantly related (Shahrohki, 1998; Yoo et al., 2000). The perceived quality of a brand may be an essential reason for consumers to make a purchase (Aaker, 1991). However, the other three dimensions are also important to determine the effectiveness of brand equity towards consumer purchase decision of footwear in an international brand and thus the hypotheses are supported. Last but not least, all the hypotheses of this study were accepted, hence the selected variables from the previous studies are supported.

Managerial Implication

Based on the results, this research has a positive impact on the international brand of footwear. The sustainability of brand equity towards consumer purchase decision in an international brand of footwear can be determined and improvised to meet the consumer demands. Additionally, the result has shown that consumer purchase decision towards footwear based on the perceived quality could lead the footwear manufacturer to better understand their customers' needs and wants. Undoubtedly, local brands are now at par with international brands such as DR. CARDIN, CROCODILE, JOHN BIRD and LARRIE (Istituto Nazionale Per il Commercio Estero, 2012). Thus, perceived quality has the most important impact on consumer purchase decisions for an international brand of footwear.

Limitation

Firstly, this study is limited to respondents who were undergraduate students of University of Sarawak Malaysia. Therefore, the findings could not be generalized to the entire Malaysian consumers. Furthermore, potential biases occur while respondents answered the questionnaires. The majority of the questions in the questionnaire survey were developed by using the 7-point rating scale. However, from the result of the collected data, there were a number of respondents who gave all neutral responses, either all strongly agree or all strongly disagree. This proved that the respondents were not sincere in answering the questionnaires, thus, the result of the study may not reflect the reality.

Recommendation

As mentioned above, the respondents of this study are University of Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) students. In order to obtain a broader view of consumer purchase decision of footwear in an international brand, it is highly recommended to collect data from different public universities in Malaysia. Thus, it will give an accurate reflection of young adult Malaysian consumers purchase decisions. Besides that, it is suggested that consideration should be given to include the workforce with higher purchasing and are able to afford more expensive footwear brand compared to undergraduate students. Also, it is recommended that gender is used as the moderator variable to identify female and male purchase decision of footwear in an international brand.

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