CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this chapter is to present the results of the research. It is split into five parts:

Part 1: Overview of Study

Part 2: Summary of Research Results

Part 3: Managerial Implications

Part 4: Limitations of the study

Part 5: Recommendations

Part 6: Suggestions for Further Research

Part 7: Concluding Remarks

5.1 Overview of Study

This study attempts to investigate the importance of brand equity of sportswear apparel in Malaysia, why is brand equity important for sportswear apparel in Malaysia? In Malaysia, sportswear brands such as Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Puma, New Balance, Umbro and Fila are the most well known brands amongst sportswear consumers. Sportswear has also become a common and popular category among the youth as it identifies them with a more relaxed lifestyle, greater versatility and comfort. Thus it is important for the sportswear companies to know Malaysian consumers attitude towards the factors contributing to the brand equity, whether perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty matters to Malaysian consumers in strategizing their marketing effort in Malaysia. Specifically, the study examined the four customer-based-brand-equity elements in Malaysia, evaluating the significance of such elements to brand equity in Malaysian context. In

addition, the study endeavored to examine how the four brand equity elements contribute to brand equity meaning in Malaysia.

The data for the study was collected through a four page self-administered questionnaire. The sample consisted of 165 respondents living in Kuala Lumpur. In general, respondents in this survey are dominated by female 62%, age between 21-30 39%. Majority of the samples collected are Malaysians (73%), the Bachelor Degree group had the highest respondents at 40%, and Manager/Executive and Full time student groups both are at 42%.

5.2 Summary of the Research Results

In this study four main research questions were developed in the introductory chapter.

- Does perceived quality influence to the brand equity of sportswear market?

- Does brand awareness have a significant positive direct effect on brand equity?

- Does brand association contribute to the brand equity of the sportswear market in Malaysia?

- Does brand loyalty influence to the brand equity of sportswear market in Malaysia?

Based on our findings, perceived quality has no significant relationship with brand equity of sportswear in Malaysia. This is because Malaysian consumers may have high expectation from a sportswear brand. Perhaps they are looking for high quality features of the brand. On the other hand, the study found that brand awareness and brand association significantly influence to the brand equity of sportswear market in

Malaysia. This is because Malaysian consumers do have knowledge about the sportswear brand market and they are familiar with sportswear brand attributes, intangible benefits of the brand, brand class, user application, customer benefits for using the sportswear brand, and relative price of the brand. Nevertheless, our research results shows that brand loyalty has a negative influence on the brand equity of sportswear market in Malaysia. This maybe because Malaysian culture is different from other countries, to name a few, different expectations regarding price, brand design, store environment in the sportswear shop, and service quality of the sportswear center (as discussed in Chapter four).

Although these findings do not completely support all of Aaker's brand dimensions, we found that both brand awareness has a significant effect on band equity. Brand awareness demonstrated the strongest impact, indicating the essential role of developing brand awareness in building brand equity in the Malaysian sportswear market. This result confirms the research findings of Tong and Halwey (2009). Moreover, the results also show that brand association has positive and significant impact on brand equity. This means that, brand association support a competitively attractive and distinct brand position which can create a favorable feeling and behavior toward the brand and lead to a strong sportswear brand in Malaysia.

It is however different from the Chinese market as found by Tong and Hawley (2009), where their result showed that brand association and brand loyalty were important measures to brand equity, but not perceived quality and brand awareness. A number of suggested factors as to why it is thought could contribute to this matter were

discussed in Chapter 4, such as price, brand style, store environment, service quality and religion and cultural affect.

In conclusion, Nike seem to be the most popular brand for Malaysian sample and out of the four hypotheses, brand awareness and brand association were found to be important measures for brand equity for Malaysian sportswear market.

5.3 Managerial Implications

According to Yoo and Donthu (2001), a consumer-based brand equity scale is beneficial in several ways. First, it offers a means to test brand equity theories. Brand equity provides value to customers by enhancing their interpretation and processing of information, confidence in the purchase decision, and satisfaction. Brand equity also provides value to the firm by enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of marketing programs, prices and profits, brand extensions, trade leverage, and competitive advantage (Aaker, 1991).

To improve brand equity, marketeers should concentrate their efforts primarily on perceived quality and brand loyalty, which have high importance in the construct of brand equity. In the highly competitive sportswear industry, the key is to create a unique, favorable, and strong brand image to provide customers with a reason to buy the brand, then work to keep their loyalty and gain their repeat business (Aaker, 1991; Tepeci, 1999). Celebrity/star endorsements, sports event sponsorships, advertising across different media and non-price promotion are potentially effective marketing

strategies to build a strong brand image and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2002; Tong and Halwey, 2009).

Brand managers in Malaysia should consider the correlations among the four dimensions of brand equity, especially the relationship of perceived quality to brand awareness and brand association, and the relationship of brand loyalty to brand awareness and brand association. Brand awareness and brand association are the two most important components of brand equity, as foundation to brand equity. This suggests that one must be aware of the brand and want to be associated to the brand before one decides whether the brand is worth buying or not. According to Chen (2001), brand association is the core asset for the building strong brand equity compared to three other assets of Aaker's brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality. He addressed several reasons for his argument. First, brand awareness is a necessary asset but not sufficient for building strong brand equity. Second, the other brand equity dimensions enhance brand loyalty. The perceived quality, the association, and the well-known name can provide reasons to buy and affect user satisfaction, shich results to brand loyalty. Nevertheless, brand loyalty is sometimes excluded from the conceptualization of brand equity. This is because consumers may be in the habit of buying a particular brand without really thinking too much about why. Finally, the perceived quality is one kind of brand association. The concept of brand knowledge also focuses on the association network.

It is not surprising to find that perceived quality and brand loyalty do not affect brand equity as much as brand awareness and brand association. Although according to Aaker, 1996, perceived quality is one of the key dimensions of brand equity-it is core

construct in the total research approach to measuring brand equity, Malaysian market is not applicable such. Brand equity is highly associated with key brand equity measures, including specific functionaly benefit variables. Hence, perceived qualty only provide a surrogate variable for other more specific elements of brand equity (Aaker, 1996).

As for brand loyalty, according to Brexerndorf et al (2009), sustaining brand loyalty is a key challenge in increasingly competitive markets. Brand loyalty generates numerous benefits like erecting barriers to competitors, generating greater sales and revenues, reducing customer acquisition costs, and inhibiting customer's susceptibility to marketing efforts of competitors. They also mentioned that brand loyalty is the central concern of bran equity. Building brand loyalty requires investments in marketing programs that target current and potential consumer. Through marketing programs, brand loyalty can influence to the consumers' mindset and may influence the result in a number of different outcomes, such as brand awareness, brand associations, attitude and behavior towards the brand. However, it can be concluded here that Malaysian consumers are not ready to be brand loyalty to a particular brand, as there are many suggested attributes that can c-influence this factor.

Therefore, this suggest that when concentrating on creating brand awareness and brand associstion, managers should not undervalue the effects of perceived quality and brand loyalty.

5.4 Limitations of the study

The study faces some limitations, which are explained below:

i. This study was limited to consumers in Kuala Lumpur area only, which may not be a good indicator of the total market in Malaysia. This is because, the international brands chosen in this study namely Nike, Reebok, Adidas, Puma and New Balance are more sold and well-known in Kuala Lumpur compared to other area in Malaysia. Consumers in Kuala Lumpur are also deem to be more brand conscious rather than other rural areas in Kuala Lumpur of which brand equity study may not be applicable to them.

ii. The study only focuses on four factors of brand equity, instead of the five factors in Aaker's (1991) original brand equity framework Aaker (1991), which includes other propriety brand assets. This factor was dropped in this study as among these five brand equity dimensions, the first four represent customers' evaluations and reactions to the brand that can be readily understood by consumers (Barwise, 1993, Yoo and Donthu, 2001), so they have been widely adopted to measure customer based-brand equity in previous studies.

iii. A sample size of 165 were obtained in this study, which in research can be interpreted as a small sample. Also convenience sampling was used in the survey, the respondents were shoppers found at the store and only those who are willing to participate in the survey. The survey was also not conducted at the same time and in the same place, which may induce some inconsistency.

Despite the above shortcomings, the findings of the research could provide insights in to the importance of the customer-based-brand-equity factors in Malaysian sportswear market.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

There are many areas on which further research can be conducted to gain a better understanding of customer-based-brand-equity model in sportswear market in Malaysia as the followings:

i. The findings on Nike being more preferred for Malaysians than non-Malaysian suggest that Malaysian are more brand conscious as compared to non-Malaysian sample. A study on this area would be useful to examine the bias of Malaysians towards certain brand without having to consider the importance of the customer-based-brand-equity elements which may have contributed to this decision. Parents influence on the brand preference could also be another interesting factor to be investigated to get a better understanding of the study.

ii. It would also be interesting to investigate how Malaysian consumer's perception and mindset on western brands as compared to local brands, as the brands used in this study are mainly western brand. As mentioned by Lim, Arokiasamy, Moorthy (2010), while national reputations for products vary from country to country the consumers and their attitudes or behaviours are a very important factor to be considered. Consumers generalize their attitudes and opinions across products from a given country, based on their familiarity

and background with the country, and their own personal experiences of product attributes such as "technological superiority", product quality", "value for money" and "credibility of country-of origin" of a brand. Quality signal, social values and esteems and corporate social responsibility are some of the relative's important global brands dimensions that will influence the consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviours. Thus, this might have some underlying influence in answering the survey.

iii. The questions on religion, marital status and income level of respondent were taken out from the questionnaire. Initially it was thought that these factors may create awkwardness feeling to the respondents as they are rather personal questions and will discourage the respondents from answering the survey. In fact 8 out of 15 responses were rejected due to no personal details were answered at all. This suggests that a number of respondents were still uncomfortable in providing their personal details although those factors mentioned above were taken out already. It would be interesting to include religion, marital status and income level in further research as different kinds of interpretations can be derived from such data.

iv. Maybe more information regarding what are the sportswear being used for by the respondents, whether for serious outdoor sports, or indoor fitness usage or only of leisure fashion would be useful for further deliberations and conclusion of this study.

v.   The selection of samples could also be improved as this study only did convenient sampling of consumers around Kuala Lumpur area. This study could be further expanded to other cities and smaller towns in Malaysia to gauge the real feeling of Malaysian market. Also, for the interest of the managers, target sampling of certain segmentations could also be done to get better understanding of certain targeted market of interest.

vi.   From the research result, it is surprising to see that brand loyalty is not significant in this study. It would be interesting to further research what are the fators attributing the brand loyalty that may have affected the result. Some factors suggested by Yee and Sidek 2008 are price, brand style, store environment, service quality and religion and culural affect. Which particular factors that are lacking in Malaysian market so that it would give good indicator for the marketeers to strengthen their marketing effort in this area.

5.6 Concluding Remarks

This study's findings are based on the evidence from the sportswear market in Malaysia from a small sample taken in Kuala Lumpur, they are helpful in other clothing-related industries as well, such as general clothing, footwear, fashion accessories, and cosmetics. Based on the findings and analysis, it is suggested that different brand equity dimensions contribute to overall equity in different ways, and that an order exists among the four dimensions. Since marketeers often have limited resources (e.g. money, time, and manpower) to implement branding strategies, these findings can help them prioritize and allocate resources more optimally across the dimensions.

The study also shows that the Malaysian consumers have a high familiarity with brand awareness and brand association which are part of the brand equity perception of sportswear. But to be a successfully brand equity, the crucial factors that the sportswear companies should be concerned on perceived quality and brand loyalty together to influence the brand equity of sportswear market in Malaysia.

In this study, brand managers could utilize the findings to enhance their brand equity and fulfill brand competitiveness beyond their competitors by applying innovative marketing strategies.

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