

Brand Equity Determinants and Consumers Choices of Smartphone: A Case of Iphone's Users in Kuala Lumpur

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Abstract

With the rapid development and innovation of Smartphone technologies, consumers are becoming fussy and selective in choosing their Smartphones. Most consumers only have chosen a high quality of branded Smartphones which they believe have high Brand Equity. Apple, a Smartphone brand that currently dropped from the second to the third biggest market share before Samsung and Huawei brand is one of the top three trusted brands of Smartphones in Malaysia that consumers believed to have high Brand Equity. This paper focused on Apple due to the drop in its market shares in Malaysia by conducting further investigation on its brand equity against consumer choices, particularly on its iPhone. The investigation focused on the consumers' choices against Brand Equity and all its four determinants which are Brand Loyalty, Brand Trust, Brand Awareness, and Brand Image. 115 smartphone users (samples) were conveniently recruited in Kuala Lumpur and all questionnaires were successfully handed out to every one of them. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS. Surprisingly, the hypotheses for the test of the causal relationship between the antecedents of brand equity and consumer choice are found to be significant. Besides the dropped in Apple's market share in Malaysia, most Smartphone users believed that Apple still has high brand equity. This research able to give a clear insight into the factors that influence brand equity simultaneously reveal the impact on the consumers' choices towards Apple smartphones and it will help in reaching out to more consumers particularly for Apple and other Smartphone producers.

Keywords: Apple; Brand Awareness; Brand Equity; Brand Image; Brand Loyalty; Brand Trust; Consumer Choice



INTRODUCTION

Calling, communicating, messaging, networking, photographing, video recording, audio recording, photo editing, gaming, and many more entertainment activities are crucial in the everyday life of millennial consumers. Traditional telephone only made for communicating via calling and messaging. Other tasks above need to be performed separately, costly, and time-consuming. Thanks to the rapid development and innovation of technology nowadays which permit every one of us to do all of the above hassle-free using a smart telephone or better known as Smartphone. A Smartphone is a new form of mobile Internet device that combines the traditional features of a phone and a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), (Seo, Kwon, Ki-Duck, Kim, Park, Shin, and Jin, 2018). Another noteworthy definition of a Smartphone is that it is a mobile phone that offers more advanced computing ability and connectivity than a basic current mobile phone does (Baron, Mhatre, Nusca, Cunningham, and Durak, 2019). Smartphone has become a source of entertainment, a communication tool, a search engine and so much more. In today's technological era, the Smartphone is not only growing in popularity but also gives people a series of new possibilities in all fields such as information exchange, mobile working, entertainment at any time, anywhere (Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan (2014). The iPhone is a Smartphone created and made by Apple that was announced on January 9, 2007. The first demonstration of the iPhone was on January 29, 2007, at the Macworld Conference & Expo (Computer Hope, 2019). The iPhone utilizes a touch screen, giving its features in addition to that of regular cell phone such as an on-screen keyboard. Additionally, because the iPhone has a full-fledged operating system (iOS) it can run millions of different software apps, available for download and purchase through the Apple App Store. Furthermore, with significantly more storage space, the iPhone can hold a large number of photos, videos, and songs. Internet connectivity is provided through cellular service (4G LTE) and Wi-Fi. (Computer Hope, 2019). Stiff competition in the mobile vendor industry in Malaysia has forced Apple to become the third-largest market share of smartphones in Malaysia for 2019 from the second largest market share between the year 2012-2018 (Statista, 2019).



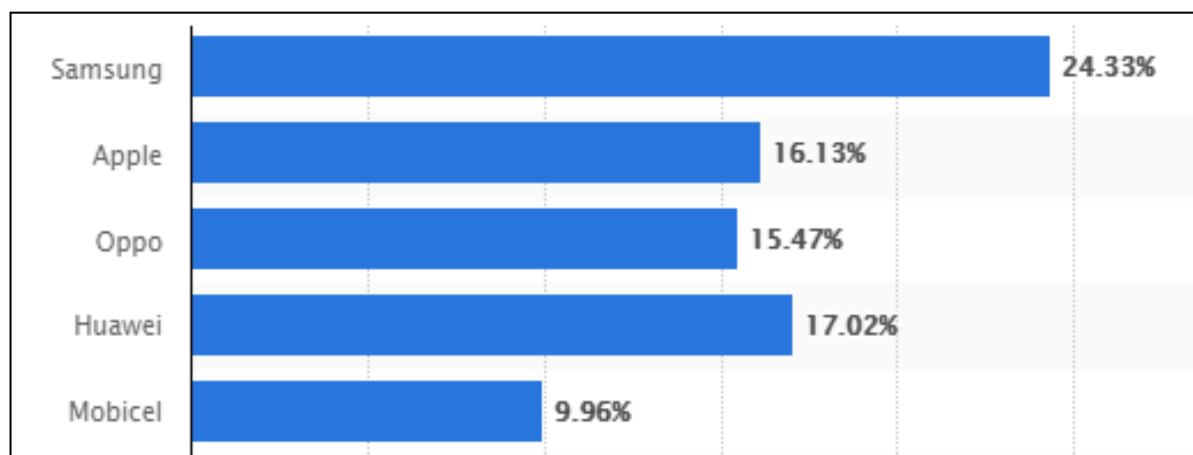


Figure 1: Market Share of Mobile Vendor in Malaysia (2019).

This drop-in market share is a bit shocked to Apple and all its users. There is one big question that goes around in the marketers' mind which is "what happens to the level of brand equity (brand loyalty, brand trust, brand awareness, and brand image) of Apple's brand? Zheng, Chatchai, and Rizwan (2014) claimed that brand equity is significantly associated with the market share of Smartphone brand in Thailand. They said that the higher the market share is a signal of higher brand equity and vice versa. Ahmad et. al, (2019) found that the high level of consumers' brand awareness will lead to a high market share and this will become a weapon for any brand to win the business competition in a highly competitive market (Aaker, 1991). These beliefs are supported by Dinçer, Bozaykut-Buk, Emir, Yuksel, & Ashill, (2019). They stated that organizational performance and market share depend on the brand equity of products sold in the market. A high market share is crucial for a company to sustain the turbulent landscape. Past studies have proven that brand equity level is giving a direct impact on the market share (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, there is a necessity to explore whether the drop of the market share is truly due to the drop in Apple's brand equity simultaneously reveals the actual scenario of consumers' choices towards this brand from the perspective of iPhone users particularly their brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand trust as well as their perception towards iPhone's brand image. The purpose of this study was to understand the iPhone's consumer choice based on the analysis of brand equity elements which are brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand trust, and brand image. Furthermore, this research able to give a clear insight into the factors that influence brand equity simultaneously reveal the impact on the consumers' choices towards

Apple smartphones and it will help in reaching out to more consumers particularly for Apple and other Smartphone producers.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Brand Equity

The term brand equity refers to a set of assets and liabilities associated with a brand, including its name and symbol, which could impose beneficial or detrimental effects on the values arising from the products or services (Aaker, 1996; Yasin et al, 2010). This brings the argument that, since brand equity draws on the imperfect and asymmetrical nature of markets (Erdem and Swait 2004), economic agents are required to transmit information about their specific characteristics through signals (Christodoulides, Chernatony, Furrer, Shiu, and Abimbola, 2006; Chatzipanagiotou, Christodoulides, and Veloutsou, 2019). Brand equity is the ultimate element in the brand that directly associated with customers' satisfaction (San Martín, Herrero, and García, 2019). Past works of literature have investigated that brand equity is a result from high brand loyalty (Aaker, 1996; Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, 2014; Shahzad, Bilal, Xiao, and Yousaf, 2019), high brand trust (Khadim, Hanan, Arshad, and Saleem, 2018; Tong, Su, and Xu, 2018), high brand awareness (Aaker, 1991; Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus, and Bilgihan, 2019) and brand image (Aaker, 1996; Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, and Jafari Najafabadi, 2018; Ansary, and Hashim, 2018). Thus, brand equity is deemed important and became the ultimate measurement of any commercial values associated with the products which simultaneously connected to consumers' perception towards the brands and products.

Brand Loyalty and Brand Equity

The relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity has been studied a long time ago in the works of literature (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996; Nam, Ekinci, and Whyatt, 2011; Emari, Jafari, and Mogaddam, 2012; Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, 2014; Rather, Sharma, and Itoo, 2018; Shahzad, Bilal, Xiao, and Yousaf, 2019). On the other hand, Su, and Chang, (2018) claimed that the central role of marketing strategies is the development and maintenance of customer brand loyalty, especially in markets with strong competition, great unpredictability, and a decrease in product differentiation (Nawaz and Usman, 2011). Brand loyalty is a conventional marketing idea that focuses on developing a long-term consumer-brand relationship (Shehzad, Ahmad, Iqbal, Nawaz, and Usman, 2014). Brand loyalty has been employed to measure brand equity and successful marketing strategies (Knox and Walker, 2001). As getting new customers can be very expensive for companies,



getting loyal consumers is their best intern. This advocates that "brand loyalty is the only basis for enduring profitable growth" (Su, and Chang, (2018). Brand loyalty is the strength of the brand and directly related to its equity level (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996; Knox and Walker, 2001; Nam, Ekinici, and Whyatt, 2011; Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Emari, Jafari, and Mogaddam, 2012; Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, 2014; Shehzad, Ahmad, Iqbal, Nawaz, and Usman, 2014; Rather, Sharma, and Itoo, 2018; Shahzad, Bilal, Xiao, and Yousaf, 2019). Zheng, Chatchai, and Rizwan (2014) studied the relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity among Smartphone users in Thailand and they found that brand loyalty towards a Smartphone is positively associated with the brand equity of the Smartphone brand which simultaneously increases the purchase and popularity of that respective brand. A similar study was conducted two years later by Yeh, Wang, and Yieh, (2016) among the 157 Smartphone users. They found that the result is in line with the findings found by Zheng, Chatchai, and Rizwan (2014). Chen, Chen, and Lin, (2016) in their study also found the significant impact of brand loyalty and brand equity based on the analysis involving 250 Smartphone users in Taiwan. The brand loyalty in this research is measured using 4 items adopted from Chen, Chen, and Lin, (2016). Based on the above reviews, it is seen that brand loyalty is directly associated with brand equity. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H¹: Brand Loyalty of Apple brand has a significant and positive impact on Brand Equity.

Brand Image and Brand Equity

Brand image is described as the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in the association experience in the consumers' memory" (Kotler et al. 2012). Brand image has a meaning associated with consumers with the brand (Faircloth, Capella, and Alford, 2001), which is retained in their minds (Farquhar, 1989). Zhang, (2015) defined brand image as an opinion about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer's memory. It is an abstract of brand elements in the memory of consumers which guides them towards purchase and ownership of the brand. A positive image towards a brand is important as it directly gives huge impacts on the consumers' trust and loyalty simultaneously increase the equity value of the brand from the consumers' point of view (Hsieh, Pan, and Setiono, 2004). Many of the past studies have investigated the relationship between brand image and brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, and Jafari Najafabadi, 2018; Ansary, and Hashim, 2018). Djatmiko and Pradana, (2016) in their research found that consumers not only choose a Smartphone due to the price



but also the brand image that they believed related to the brand equity of the Smartphone. Another study by Wijaya, (2013) which is closely related to this study found that brand image is one of the crucial reasons for customers to choose a brand of smartphones in Indonesia. He believed that brand image also associated with the brand equity of the selected brand of Smartphone and become the ultimate reason for the purchase. Meng, and Bari, (2019) and Al Koliby, and Rahman, (2018) also found significant effects of the brand image of Smartphone towards the brand equity and brand choice of consumers. The brand image in this research is measured using 4 items adopted from Wijaya, (2013). Based on the above reviews, it is seen that the brand image and brand equity are directly associated with one another. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H²: Brand Image of Apple brand has a significant and positive impact on Brand Equity.

Brand Trust and Brand Equity

Brand trust is defined as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001; Backhaus, and Tikoo, 2004; Carroll, and Ahuvia, 2006). The importance of trust has already been illustrated in sustainable relationships between the seller and buyer (Sahin, Zehir, and Kitapçı, 2011; Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı, and Özşahin, 2011). It is the trust that makes customers intimate to a company (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust is created when a company promises to provide quality products to consumers and successfully meets the promise (Nawaz and Usman, 2011). Scholars have demonstrated that trust is crucial in creating brand loyalty and brand equity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The study on the relationship between trust and brand equity is considered popular in branding discipline (Khadim, Hanan, Arshad, and Saleem, 2018; Tong, Su, and Xu, 2018). Academicians and practitioners have long ago considered trust as the antecedent of brand equity (Lake, Carlson, Rose, and Chlevin-Thiele, 2019; Tong, Su, and Xu, 2018; Shakil, and Majeed, 2018). A study conducted in Bangladesh by Kibria, (2018) found that one of the important reasons for consumers to purchase a Smartphone in Bangladesh is because of their trust towards the brand. In his study, he found that trust not only increases the confidence level of consumers towards any Smartphone's brands but also towards the Smartphone's equity value. In Thailand, consumers who purchased smartphones claimed that the selection of the brand is depending on the level of brand equity associated with the brand. Therefore, they look for a brand that the trusted most Tan, (2019). This finding is supported by Dauch, Intravisi, and



Chaipoopirutana, (2019) in the study they conducted in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. In their study, the researchers found that Cambodians are believed only with the brand of smartphones that they trusted and the brand must have high brand equity and affordable for them to pay. Another finding from different research conducted by Yang, Sonmez, Gonzalez, Liu, and Yoder, (2019) also confirmed that brand equity is the result of brand trust and brand loyalty as well as the brand performance. The highly performed brand will be easily trusted and increase the confidence of consumers in the USA to adopt the Smartphone as their preferred choice of telecommunication vendor. The brand trust in this research is measured using 3 items adopted from Nawaz and Usman, (2011). Based on the above reviews, it is proven that brand trust and brand equity are directly associated with one another. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H³: Brand Trust of Apple brand has a significant and positive impact on Brand Equity.

Brand Awareness and Brand Equity

According to Keller (2003) stated that brand awareness can be referred to as the ability of a consumer to distinguish a brand under various conditions, Keller (2003) and Keller, and Sood, (2003) also noted that brand awareness is built and increased by familiarity with the brand as a result of repeated vulnerability which eventually leads to consumers experience with the brand. Consumer's personal experience towards the usage or consumption of a specific product or brand will help the brand to stick and permanently positioned in their memory. Moreover, brand awareness also can be referred to as the degree of consumers' familiarity with a brand (Aaker, 1991; Meng, and Bari, (2019) and Al Koliby, and Rahman, (2018). Past researchers have investigated the relationship between brand awareness and brand equity (Ahmad, Idris, Mason, and Chow, 2019; Aaker, 1996; Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, and Jafari Najafabadi, 2018; Ansary, and Hashim, 2018; Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus, and Bilgihan, 2019). Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán, (2005) conducted survey research in Spain and found that brand awareness and brand equity is interrelated to one another. Their finding is supported by Erkan, Gokerik, and Acikgoz, (2019) who investigated the role of brand awareness towards brand equity among Facebook users. It is known that, once the consumers are aware of any particular brands, their interest in the brands will be higher (Arora, and Kumar, 2018). Past research in Smartphone studies also found that the awareness towards Smartphone's brands will positively be related to higher brand equity and consumer purchase (Ai, and Dao, 2019; Hashim, Ying, and



Ahmed, 2019; Moslehpour, Chau, Dadvari, Do, and Seitz, 2019; Rosa, and Lestari, 2019; Sharma, 2018; Wijaya, and Kusumawati, 2018; Kim, and Chao, 2018). The brand awareness in this research is measured using 4 items adopted from Ansary, and Hashim, (2018). Based on the above reviews, it is proven that the brand awareness and brand equity is directly associated with one another. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H⁴: Brand Awareness of Apple's brand has a significant and positive impact on Brand Equity.

Brand Equity and Consumers' Choice

Highly satisfied consumers usually will perform the repeat purchase and led the products to gain more sales and revenue (Apéria, and Persson, 2018). Consumers nowadays especially the millennials are exposed to a wide variety of brands and products in the market. In Malaysia only, there are more than ten Smartphone brands available for consumers. These consumers not only gadget crazy but also look for something beyond that which is the brand equity associated with the Smartphone (Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, 2014; Shahzad, Bilal, Xiao, and Yousaf, 2019). As for Smartphone markets, the consumers normally will choose any brand of Smartphone based on the equity associated with the brand and not only the engineering aspects of it (Le, Tran, Pham, and Tran, 2018). Furthermore, these consumers will choose a brand of smartphones that they are aware of, loyal, and trust based on their experience becoming the users of that brand (Yang, Sonmez, Gonzalez, Liu, and Yoder, 2019). This condition supported by Shahzad et. al (2019) who found that the past experience of consumers using a Smartphone make them choose a similar brand if they wanted to change their Smartphone in the future. In their study, they found that past experience with a brand of smartphones will create special emotions that made the consumers emotionally attached to the brand which influenced their future choices of smartphones. The brand equity is measured using 3 items adopted from Farquhar, (1989) and Keller, (2013), and the Consumer Choice is measured using 3 items adopted from Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, (2014). Based on the above reviews, it is seen that the consumers' choices towards Smartphone brand (i.e: iPhone) are a result of brand equity associated with the Smartphone's brand. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H⁵: Brand Equity of Apple brand has a significant positive impact on Consumer's Choice.



METHODOLOGY

This research is quantitative via the utilization of a questionnaire to collect the primary data and to investigate the factors that influence the brand equity of Apple's Smartphone (iPhone). The population of the study is the respondents (iPhone's user). 115 iPhone users were conveniently recruited for data collection purposes. All of them are in Kuala Lumpur. The questionnaires were distributed via emails using an Online Google questionnaire. Apple brand (particularly iPhone) was chosen as the main investigated brand in this research. The respondents were asked to give their opinions about Apple's Smartphone. The survey responses in the questionnaire had specifically utilized the five-point Likert scale on strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) against the antecedents of brand equity (brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand trust, brand image), brand equity and consumer choice. This research has 6 variables in total. Those variables are consumer choice as Dependent Variable and brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand trust, brand image, brand equity as Independent Variables. All items for this research were adopted from past research.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the above literature, the following research framework is developed to be further investigated and analyzed.

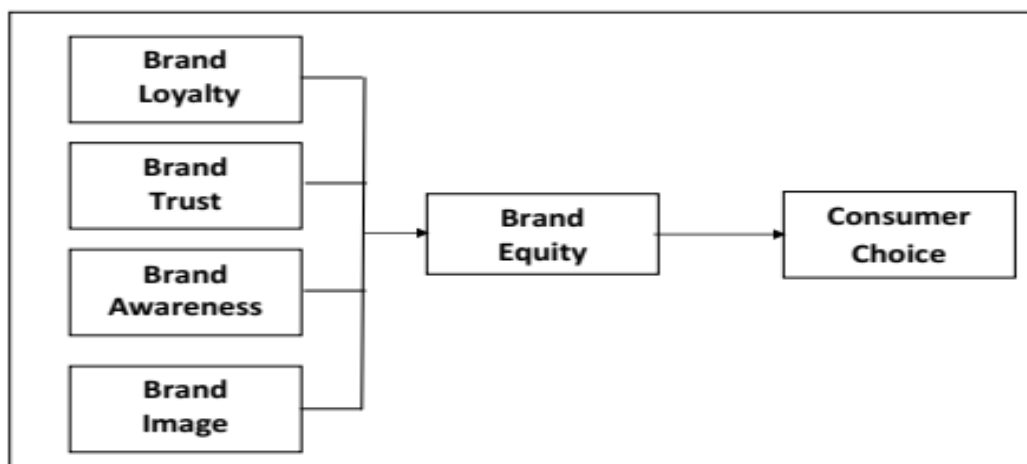


Figure 2 Theoretical framework.

Measurements and Reliability Analysis

The overall reliability coefficient of this study is 0.955. Therefore, it is greater than the critical value 0.7, and this indicated that the overall reliability of the items used in

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the research is good. The details of the reliability values for each construct and items are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Measurement and Reliability analysis.

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Overall	0.955	21
Brand Loyalty	0.869	4
Brand Trust	0.798	3
Brand Image	0.825	4
Brand Equity	0.833	3
Brand Awareness	0.780	4
Consumer Choice	0.802	3

RESULTS

Descriptive Distribution

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Apple's (iPhone) Users in Kuala Lumpur.

	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL
FREQUENCY	80	71	151
PERCENT	53.0	47.0	100
VALID PERCENT	53.0	47.0	100
CUMULATIVE PERCENT	53.0	100.0	

In this research, 151 questionnaires were successfully emailed to each respondent and the response rate is 100 percent. Based on Table 1 above, there were 80 females and 71 males accounting for 53 percent and 47 percent respectively. Surprisingly, the finding confirmed that female is the highest gender that owned and used Smartphone in South East Asia. According to research conducted by Tan, (2019), most of the Smartphone users in Thailand were female and this finding is also in line with Dauch, Intravisit, and Chaipoopirutana, (2019) which found that females denote the highest number of Smartphone users in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.



Table 2: Age Distribution of Apple's (iPhone) Users in Kuala Lumpur.

AGE	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+	TOTAL
FREQUENCY	120	25	3	2	1	151
PERCENT	79.5	16.6	2.0	1.3	0.7	100.0
VALID PERCENT	79.5	16.6	2.0	1.3	0.7	100.0
CUMULATIVE PERCENT	79.5	96.0	98.0	99.3	100.0	

Based on the above table, it is found that among the 151 total respondents were 120 (79.5 percent) of respondents aged between 20 to 24 years old and the smallest number of respondents' group between 40 years old and above. This denotes that, the millennials are the popular category of consumers who owned smartphones and using this Smartphone to facilitate their daily communication and entertainment activities (Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, 2014; Yang, Sonmez, Gonzalez, Liu, and Yoder, 2019).

Validity analysis.

The validity analysis of this study showed that the value is **KMO** is 0.938. Therefore is greater than 0.6 and a significant value p-value less than 0.001, which is shown that the variable has good validity and reaches a significant level and can be used as factor analysis, As shown in Table 2.

Table 4 Validity Analysis.

KMO		0.938
	Approximate	2.330.340
Bartlett's test	df	210
	sig	0.000

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

The results for the examinations and tests for all the hypotheses are shown in Table 5. Based on the table, all proposed hypotheses are found to be supported. The H^1 of the research is fully supported and brand loyalty is truly having a significant impact on the brand equity of Apple's brand of iPhone. This result is in line with the finding from the past researches (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996; Knox and Walker, 2001; Nam, Ekinici, and Whyatt, 2011; Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Emari, Jafari, and Mogaddam, 2012; Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, 2014; Shehzad,



Ahmad, Iqbal, Nawaz, and Usman, 2014; Rather, Sharma, and Itoo, 2018; Shahzad, Bilal, Xiao, and Yousaf, 2019; Yeh, Wang, and Yieh, 2016; Su, and Chang, 2018; Chen, Chen, and Lin, 2016). On the other hand, brand trust is also found to be very significant in predicting brand equity and consumers' choices in buying Apple's Smartphone. The H^2 of the research is fully supported and brand trust is significant in predicting the brand equity of Apple's brand of iPhone. This result is also in line with the finding from the past researches (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001; Backhaus, and Tikoo, 2004; Carroll, and Ahuvia, 2006; Sahin, Zehir, and Kitapçı, 2011; Zehir, Şahin, Kitapçı, and Özşahin, 2011; Nawaz and Usman, 2011; Khadim, Hanan, Arshad, and Saleem, 2018; Tong, Su, and Xu, 2018; Tong, Su, and Xu, 2018; Shakil, and Majeed, 2018; Kibria, (2018); Lake, Carlson, Rose, and Chlevin-Thiele, 2019; Tan, 2019; Dauch, Intravisit, and Chaipoopirutana, 2019; Yang, Sonmez, Gonzalez, Liu, and Yoder, 2019).

Moreover, the third hypothesis (H^3) of this research predicted that brand awareness has a significant positive impact on Apples' Smartphone and the result shows that it is fully supported. This finding is similar to the past finding which claimed that the brand equity of any brand is associated with its brand's image (Aaker, 1996; Farquhar, 1989; Faircloth, Capella, and Alford, 2001; Hsieh, Pan, and Setiono, 2004; Wijaya, 2013; Zhang, 2015; Djatmiko, and Pradana, 2016; Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, and Jafari Najafabadi, 2018; Ansary, and Hashim, 2018; Al Koliby, and Rahman, 2018; Meng, and Bari, 2019). As predicted, the H^4 of this research also supported and the brand image is truly influenced brand equity and subsequently, the consumers' choices and preferences towards Apple's Smartphone brand. This finding is similar to the past finding which claimed that the brand awareness of any brand is associated with the brand's equity. The finding for this particular hypothesis is supported by many past researches (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996; Delgado-Ballester, and Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Ansary, and Hashim, 2018; Arora, and Kumar, 2018; Salehzadeh, Khazaei Pool, and Jafari Najafabadi, 2018; Ansary, and Hashim, 2018; Wijaya, and Kusumawati, 2018; Kim, and Chao, 2018; Sharma, 2018; Meng, and Bari, 2019; Al Koliby, and Rahman, 2018; Ahmad, Idris, Mason, and Chow, 2019; Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus, and Bilgihan, 2019; Erkan, Gokerik, and Acikgoz, 2019; Ai, and Dao, 2019; Hashim, Ying, and Ahmed, 2019; Moslehpour, Chau, Dadvari, Do, and Seitz, 2019; Rosa, and Lestari, 2019). Finally, based on the table, the H^5 of the research is fully supported and brand equity is truly has a significant impact on the consumers' choice towards Apple's brand of iPhone. This result is in line with the finding from the past researches (Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 2013; Zheng, Chatchai and Rizwan, 2014; Apéria, and Persson, 2018; Le, Tran, Pham, and Tran, 2018; Zheng,



Shahzad, Bilal, Xiao, and Yousaf, 2019; Yang, Sonmez, Gonzalez, Liu, and Yoder, 2019; Shahzad et. al, 2019).

Table 5 Result of the Research Hypotheses Examination

Item s	Hypothesis	Result
H^1	<i>Brand Loyalty of the Apple brand has a significant positive impact on Brand Equity.</i>	Support ed
H^2	<i>Brand Trust of Apple brand has a significant positive impact on Brand Equity.</i>	Support ed
H^3	<i>Brand Awareness of the Apple brand has a significant positive impact on Brand Equity.</i>	Support ed
H^4	<i>Brand Image of Apple brand has a significant positive impact on Brand Equity.</i>	Support ed
H^5	<i>Brand Equity of Apple brand has a significant positive impact on Consumer's Choice.</i>	Support ed

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, AND RECOMMENDATION

This research able to give a clear understanding of the factors that influence the brand equity simultaneously the consumers' choices towards Apple smartphones and it will help in reaching out to more consumers particularly for Apple and other Smartphone producers. Based on the analyses and findings, it can be concluded that consumers will be loyal because they feel good about the brand and they will be started to purchase the product over and over. Instead, although not all consumers are aware of every product advertisement made by Apple, there are still having a number of them who aware about Apple can easily recognize Apple smartphones among other competing brands. Consumers easily place trust on a brand if it is safe to be used and sincere in introducing the product in a first step. Brand image is so much important to the consumer and they must make a correct choice toward Smartphone brands. It shows that majority of the respondents agreed that well-functioned products could develop a positive brand image. Because the values of the brand are higher, consumers preferred to purchase Apple's brand although there are many other competing brands available in the market. As mentioned by past researches as well as from the findings, this is because of Apple's brand equity. The Smartphone industry in Malaysia has received huge challenges and impacts particularly from the growth of economic in this

country. The expansion of the telecommunication business in Malaysia creates tension among the players as well as the Apple's vendors. The changes in consumers' demographic also affected the customers' lifestyle. These could bring opportunities and threats to Apple's vendors as the desire, needs, and wants of customers also changed. Also, due to the presence of many Smartphone brands, consumers would have more choices, and this creates intense competition. The positive changes due to the upgraded individual education level, age, employment also led to the improvement of socio-economic and increase the purchasing power among customers. With a variety of offers, customers have to decide which kind of products would satisfy their needs and expectations. This situation would be a major issue for businesses particularly the Smartphone vendors in the industry. They need to survive and remain sustainable in the industry because if they failed to gain high brand equity and competitive advantages, they will not be able to compete in the arena. Therefore, the purpose of developing this research is to help the businesses involved in the industry particularly the Apple's operators to understand the importance of brand equity, brand loyalty, brand trust, brand image, and brand awareness as well as how to successfully identify the important elements that have important roles concerning the fulfillment of choices of Smartphone within the consumers. Conclusively, Apple needs to pay extra attention to this issue to maintain and sustain in the Smartphone industry in Malaysia. Future research is highly recommended to highlight other brands of smartphones in Malaysia. The research also could see other variables such as demographic factors and other elements in the brand equity model such as brand familiarity, brand associations, brand personality, brand value, brand attributes as well as brand immutability. Future researchers also might conduct a comparative study between two competing brands of smartphones to see the similarity and differences in the brand equity of each and particular smartphones. Findings from these studies could enrich the current body of literature in brand equity study as well as strengthen the model to be more comprehensive.

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