Disentangling the Influence of Brand Equity on Customer Satisfaction: A Perspective from Mobile Phone Users in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between brand equity dimensions and customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. Using multiple regression analysis, the research examines the impact of brand association, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty on customer satisfaction. Findings reveal that brand association, perceived quality, and brand awareness have significant positive effects on customer satisfaction, while brand loyalty does not show a significant impact. Brand association emerges as the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction, followed by perceived quality and brand awareness. These results highlight the importance of enhancing perceived quality, building brand awareness, and cultivating positive brand associations for mobile phone companies to improve customer satisfaction and strengthen their market position. The study contributes empirical evidence to the understanding of brand equity and customer satisfaction within the context of the Malaysian mobile phone industry, providing practical implications for marketers and brand managers. Future research directions include exploring the moderating roles of demographic and cultural factors, as well as the integration of customer service, price, and social influence, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Brand Equity; Customer Satisfaction; Mobile Phone; Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

The mobile phone industry in Malaysia represents a dynamic and competitive landscape, characterized by rapid technological advancements and evolving consumer preferences (Isa et al., 2020). Within this environment, brand equity and customer satisfaction emerge as critical determinants of success for mobile phone manufacturers and service providers (Chee & Husin, 2020; Hassan, 2018). Brand equity, defined as the value associated with a brand, encompasses elements such as brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Charles & Zavala, 2016). Customer satisfaction, on the other hand, reflects the extent to which customers' expectations are met or exceeded through their experiences with a product or service. The interplay between brand equity and customer satisfaction is multifaceted, with each influencing and reinforcing the other, shaping consumer behaviour and impacting market share (Filieri et al., 2018). Specifically, strong brand equity can drive customer satisfaction by setting positive expectations and delivering on brand promises, while high customer satisfaction can, in turn, strengthen brand equity through positive word-of-mouth, repeat purchases, and enhanced brand image. Nevertheless, local companies in Malaysia face challenges in creating brands that resonate with consumers compared to foreign brands (Alqasa, 2021). Understanding this intricate relationship is essential for businesses operating in the Malaysian mobile phone market to develop effective strategies for building strong brands, fostering customer loyalty, and achieving sustainable growth. Brand equity is a complex construct, encompassing various dimensions such as brand loyalty, reflecting the degree to which customers repeatedly purchase a specific brand; brand awareness, indicating the extent to which consumers recognize and recall a particular brand; perceived quality, representing customers' subjective evaluation of a brand's excellence or superiority; and brand associations, capturing the mental connections and images that consumers associate with a brand (Yasin et al., 2007). These dimensions collectively contribute to

the overall value and strength of a brand in the minds of consumers. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia, and to offer insights into how businesses can leverage this relationship to enhance their competitive positioning and achieve long-term success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is defined as the degree to which customers' expectations are met or surpassed through their interactions with a product or service, playing a vital role in shaping consumer behaviour and influencing brand loyalty (Kegoro & Justus, 2020). Satisfaction is the emotional response resulting from a consumer's evaluation of a product or service, achievable when customer desires and preferences are prioritized (Araújo et al., 2023). In the context of mobile phone industry, customer satisfaction is crucial for retaining customers and fostering long-term relationships, especially in competitive markets like Malaysia. Previous studies on among mobile phone users have explored the impact of different factors on customer satisfaction, including product features, price, customer service, and brand image (Ramli & Suhaili, 2009). However, a comprehensive examination of the interplay between brand equity and customer satisfaction is needed to provide a holistic understanding of consumer behaviour in this sector. Despite the notion that numerous past studies have examined the determinants of customer satisfaction in different industries, including mobile banking, there's still a need for research into the unique dynamics of the mobile phone market in Malaysia.

Brand Equity

The concept of brand equity has garnered significant attention over the past few decades, with many viewing it as a crucial strategic asset for companies (Kyguolienė & Zikienė, 2021). Keller (Hyun, 2009) defines brand equity as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a brand. From a consumer perspective, brand equity is a multidimensional concept encompassing brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty and perceived quality. The understanding of brand equity is vital in the mobile phone industry, where consumers often base their purchasing decisions on brand perceptions and associations. A strong brand reputation has the potential to improve customer equity (Yu & Yuan, 2019). Brand equity offers companies a significant competitive advantage, contributing to reduced marketing expenses and more effective market expansion (Zulfikar, 2023). Although numerous studies have investigated the drivers and outcomes of brand equity in different industries, further research is needed to examine its specific impact on customer satisfaction within the Malaysian mobile phone market. This is critical as mobile phone industry in Malaysia is unique due to its cultural diversity, economic conditions, and technological advancements.

Brand Association

Brand association is defined as the information retained in the consumer's memory (Ligaraba et al., 2024). Brand association can be built through advertising and it will affect the value that customers perceive in the brand. In the context of mobile phone industry, positive brand associations can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, while negative associations can have the opposite effect. Brand association involves a symbolic association that consumers rely on when making purchases (Susanto & Handayani, 2020). Consumers may develop specific purchase intentions based on the information they receive from sources such as advertising, word of mouth, and other communication channels. Brand association is crucial in influencing perceived quality and consumer satisfaction (Singh & Suresh, 2019). Previous research has explored the role of brand associations in shaping consumer behaviour in various industries, and highlighting the importance of managing brand associations to create a positive brand image. Therefore, in this study brand association is expected to correlate positively with customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Brand association positively affects customer satisfaction among mobile phone users.

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is one of the dimensions of brand equity, and can be defined as the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service compared to alternatives (Masrek, 2018). Perceived quality is a key driver of customer satisfaction and loyalty, as customers are more likely to be satisfied with products or services that they perceive to be of high quality. Perceived quality encompasses not only the tangible features and performance of a product but also the intangible aspects such as reliability, durability, and aesthetics. Moreover, perceived service quality significantly influences attitudes towards using mobile banking applications (Kim et al., 2023). In the mobile phone industry, perceived quality can be influenced by factors such as the phone's design, features, performance, and reliability. Past studies have demonstrated the significance of perceived quality in shaping customer satisfaction and brand loyalty across various industries. Given the significant role of perceived quality in influencing consumer behaviour, it is essential to examine its impact on customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is derived:

H2: Perceived quality positively affects customer satisfaction among mobile phone users.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness can be described as the extent to which consumers are familiar with the qualities or image of a particular brand of goods or services. Brand awareness is another important dimension of brand equity, and can be defined as the extent to which consumers are aware of a particular brand and its products or services (Juniantari & Sulistyawati, 2019; Tuinesia et al., 2022). It is vital to understand how brand awareness can influence customer satisfaction among mobile phone users (Hyun & Kim, 2011). Brand awareness plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchase decisions. Consumers are more likely to consider brands they are familiar with when making purchasing decisions, especially in product categories with numerous options (Zhang, 2020). Previous research has explored the relationship between brand awareness and customer satisfaction, and found that higher levels of brand awareness are associated with higher levels of customer satisfaction (Hosseini & Moghadam, 2017). Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the role of brand awareness in influencing customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia and the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: Brand awareness positively affects customer satisfaction among mobile phone users.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty reflects a customer's commitment to repurchase a brand's product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour (Jahan & Shahria, 2021). Brand loyalty is the ultimate goal of many businesses, as loyal customers are more likely to make repeat purchases, recommend the brand to others, and resist competitive offers. Brand loyalty is a multifaceted construct that encompasses attitudinal and behavioural components. Customer loyalty, viewed as an extension of satisfaction, involves repeated purchases driven by customers' approval of a brand (Chauhan, 2023). In the context of mobile phone industry, brand loyalty is critical for sustaining competitive advantage and ensuring long-term profitability. Brand loyalty can lead to reduced marketing costs, positive word-of-mouth referrals, and increased resilience to competitive threats (Surapto, 2020). Moreover, brand loyalty is the origin of the revenue and it can be obtained from customer feedback, price premiums, and increased sales (Selvarajah, 2018). Given the pivotal role of brand loyalty in driving business success, it is important to examine its relationship with customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia (Azma & Abedi, 2019; Kegoro & Justus, 2020; Surapto, 2020; Yuwo et al., 2019). The following hypothesis is proposed based on the aforementioned discussion:

H4: Brand loyalty positively affects customer satisfaction among mobile phone users.

A conceptual framework based on the literature review is provided in Figure 1 below.
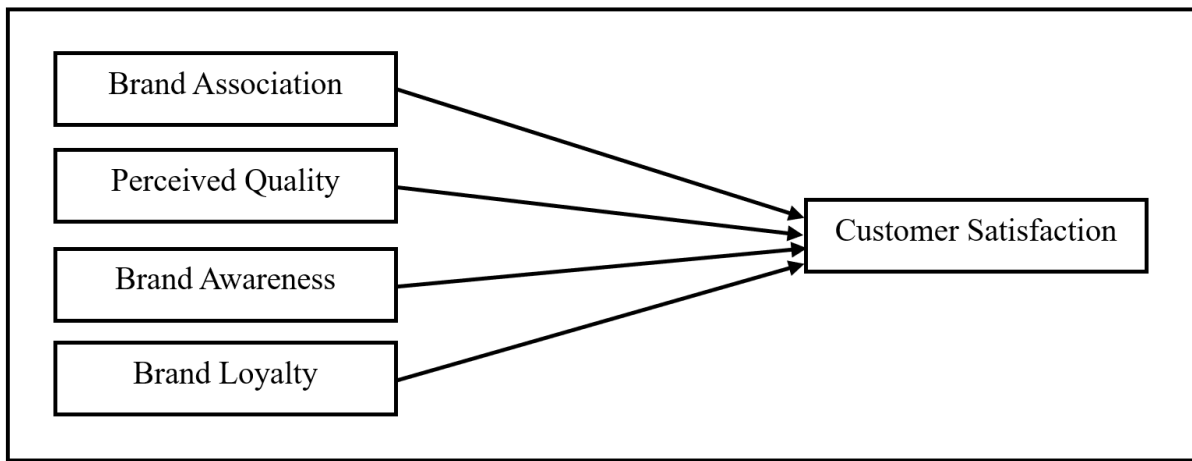
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. This approach allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and relationships between the variables of interest. Furthermore, this study can be classified as correlational type of research because it aims to determine the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction. A survey questionnaire was administered to 109 mobile phone users in Malaysia to gather data on their perceptions of brand equity dimensions and their levels of customer satisfaction. The questionnaire items were adapted from previously validated scales to ensure content validity and reliability (Ong & Salleh, 2015). The questionnaire consisted of multiple sections measuring different aspects of brand equity and customer satisfaction. Section A collected demographic information of the respondents, while Section B measured brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction. Likert scales were employed to measure the level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements related to each dimension. Convenience sampling technique was employed to select participants based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. G-Power software was used to determine the sample size (Marmaya et al., 2019). The sample size was deemed adequate for detecting statistically significant relationships between the variables. The data collection process took place over a period of one month. SPSS software was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, while multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationships between brand equity dimensions and customer satisfaction.

RESULTS

This section discusses the results of the data analysis. A total of 109 responses were collected from mobile phone users in Malaysia. The analysis involved computing descriptive statistics and conducting multiple regression analysis to test the study hypotheses.

Table 1: Demographic Information

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	28	25.7%
	Female	81	74.3%
Age	18-25	92	84.4%
	26-35	9	8.3%
	36-45	2	1.8%
	46-60	6	5.5%

The results of the demographic analysis showed that the male respondents accounted for 25.7% of the sample, while the female respondents accounted for 74.3%. The age group of 18-25 accounted for 84.4% of the sample, 26-35 age group accounted for 8.3%, 36-45 age group accounted for 1.8% and 46-60 age group accounted for 5.5%.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Internal Consistency
Brand association	0.878	Good
Perceived quality	0.812	Good
Brand awareness	0.864	Good
Brand loyalty	0.804	Good
Customer satisfaction	0.938	Excellent

The above table illustrates the reliability analysis for each variable. The results showed that all variables had Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and reliability. Specifically, customer satisfaction had the highest Cronbach's alpha value of 0.938, followed by brand association (0.878), brand awareness (0.864), perceived quality (0.812), and brand loyalty (0.804).

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Quality	Brand Awareness	Brand Association	Customer Satisfaction
Brand Loyalty	1				
Perceived Quality	0.635	1			
Brand Awareness	0.522	0.641	1		
Brand Association	0.681	0.693	0.703	1	
Customer Satisfaction	0.610	0.718	0.682	0.772	1

The above table presents the correlation coefficients between brand equity dimensions and customer satisfaction. The findings revealed significant positive correlations between all brand equity dimensions and customer satisfaction, suggesting that higher levels of brand equity are associated with higher levels of customer satisfaction. Other than that, brand association had the strongest correlation with customer satisfaction ($r = 0.772$), followed by perceived quality ($r = 0.718$), brand awareness ($r = 0.682$), and brand loyalty ($r = 0.610$).

Table 4: Multiple Regression

Hypothesis	Beta	t	Sig.	Decision
Brand Association (H1)	0.409	4.29	0.00	Supported
Perceived Quality (H2)	0.278	3.28	0.00	Supported
Brand Awareness (H3)	0.186	2.26	0.02	Supported
Brand Loyalty (H4)	0.058	0.729	0.46	Not Supported

The above table summarizes the results of the multiple regression analysis, which examined the relationships between brand equity dimensions and customer satisfaction. The findings revealed that brand association, perceived quality, and brand awareness had significant positive effects on customer satisfaction. However,

brand loyalty did not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction. The strongest predictor of customer satisfaction was brand association, followed by perceived quality, and brand awareness.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section will discuss the major findings of this study, interpret the results in light of previous research, and highlight the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. The current study's findings corroborate previous research indicating that customer satisfaction can be achieved through perceived quality, brand awareness and brand association. However, brand loyalty was found to be not a significant predictor of customer satisfaction. Perceived quality was found to be a significant predictor of customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. This finding is consistent with previous research that has demonstrated the importance of perceived quality in shaping customer satisfaction by mobile telecommunication services (Olatokun & Ojo, 2014). Mobile phone users who perceive their devices to be of high quality are more likely to be satisfied with their overall experience. This highlights the importance of providing reliable, durable, and feature-rich mobile phones to meet customer expectations and enhance satisfaction. Brand awareness was also found to be a significant predictor of customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. This is in line with previous studies that have shown that brand awareness plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchase decisions. Mobile phone users who are familiar with a particular brand and its offerings are more likely to be satisfied with their devices (Nguyen et al., 2019). These findings demonstrate the importance of building strong brand awareness through effective marketing communications and brand-building activities to foster customer satisfaction. In addition, the findings also indicated that brand association was found to be a significant predictor of customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. This is consistent with the notion that positive brand associations can enhance customer satisfaction. Mobile phone users who associate a particular brand with positive attributes, such as innovation, style, or social responsibility, are more likely to be satisfied with their devices (Hussain et al., 2014). This signifies that the importance of creating and maintaining positive brand associations to cultivate customer satisfaction. On the other hand, brand loyalty was found to be not a significant predictor of customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia, which is quite contrary to some of the studies. This suggests that, in the context of the mobile phone industry in Malaysia, brand loyalty may not necessarily translate into higher levels of customer satisfaction. This could be due to several factors, such as the availability of alternative brands, changing consumer preferences, or the influence of external factors such as marketing promotions (Isa et al., 2020). Another reason could be that mobile phone users are less loyal to a particular brand and more willing to switch to other brands. (Dergol-Dery, 2017). Further research is needed to explore the underlying reasons for this finding and to examine the factors that may moderate the relationship between brand loyalty and customer satisfaction in the mobile phone industry in Malaysia (Selvarajah, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides valuable insights into the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia. The findings of this study have several practical implications for mobile phone marketers and brand managers in Malaysia. By focusing on enhancing perceived quality, building brand awareness, and cultivating positive brand associations, companies can effectively improve customer satisfaction and strengthen their competitive position in the market. It is timely for mobile phone companies to invest in product development, marketing communications, and brand-building activities to create a strong and positive brand image in the minds of consumers. The mobile phone company can focus on brand experience and positive emotion on consumer-brand relationship (Ryoo, 2015). In the theoretical context of this study, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on brand equity and customer satisfaction by providing empirical evidence from the context of the mobile phone industry in Malaysia. Future research could extend this study by examining the moderating role of demographic factors, such as age, gender, and income, on the relationships between brand equity dimensions and customer satisfaction. Future studies could explore the role of other factors, such as customer service, price, and social influence, in shaping customer satisfaction in the mobile phone industry (Gupta & Sahu, 2015; Selvarajah, 2018). Moreover, future studies could adopt a longitudinal research design to examine the long-term effects of brand equity on customer satisfaction and loyalty. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, the study

was conducted in a specific geographical location (Malaysia), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other countries or regions. Second, the study relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could use a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction. Future research could also explore the role of cultural factors in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences in the mobile phone industry (Kushwaha & Agrawal, 2016; Rahman & Saidin, 2021; Tan et al., 2016; Ting et al., 2019). Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between brand equity and customer satisfaction among mobile phone users in Malaysia, offering practical implications for marketers and brand managers.

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