The Effects of Brand Name on Consumer Buying Behavior of Food Products

By

Amran Harun
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

Poh Yee sim
Universiti Malaysia Sabah

Norzaini Binti Saupi
Kolej Universiti Yayasan Sabah

Nabsiah Abdul Wahid
Universiti Sains Malaysia

Abstract

With the increasing number of small and medium enterprises in industrial food establishments, many similar food products with different brand names are available in markets. Commoditization and globalization increase the intense competition in local food products markets like Malaysia. Under this circumstance, the brand names of food products play an essential role as they are used as a prominent differentiation among similar products and help consumers infer preference. The main objective of this paper is to examine to what extent a brand name of food products may influence consumer buying behavior towards food products. Brand name variables tested in this study are marketing and linguistic components. The linguistics components comprise phonetic, morphological, and trendy semantic requirements. 200 hypermarket and supermarket shoppers volunteered to participate in this study. The findings show consumers pay significant importance to the marketing component and trendy semantic requirements of a brand name when deciding to buy food products. Marketers can use the findings of this study as initial knowledge of the brand naming process and guidelines for strengthening their branding strategy.

Keywords: brand name, phonetics, semantic, morphology, marketing components, food product

Introduction

Commoditization and globalization cause more similar food products to be produced and marketed. This also led to intense competition among food manufacturers in the market, especially in Malaysia. However, under this circumstance, a brand name is commonly used among producers as a prominent differentiation of similar products and to help consumers infer preferred products (Jiang, 2004). Therefore, understanding how a brand name affects consumer buying behavior may help firms and companies create brand naming. Selecting a good brand name will help increase the acceptance of the new product among consumers; thus, it can be used to help manufacturers overcome market barriers (Harun et al. l, 2011).

Using the brand name as a marketing tool, especially advertising, has been an exciting topic for researchers in the past few decades. All those studies that had been carried out previously focused on the effect of different brand name characteristics. For example, the

composition of the brand name (Gontijo et al., 2002), the connotation or the meaning of the brand name (Zinkhan and Martin, 1987), the relevance between product and brand name (Zaichkowsky et al., 1993), the distinctiveness image offered by the brand name (Meyers-Levy et al., 1994), the ease of memorization of the brand name (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Keller et al., 1998), and the pronunciation and spelling of the brand name on consumer judgments (Yorkston and Menon, 2004; Chan and Huang, 1997; Harun et al., 2011). Most of these studies were conducted at least nine or ten years ago, whereas recent studies mainly focused on brand names' linguistic characteristics. Furthermore, Zinkhan and Martin (1987) suggested that brand names' influence on attitudes should be tracked from time to time. Thus, this study is carried out to fill the time gap in the theoretical base to empirically test the influence of brand names, especially brand name linguistics, on consumer purchase behavior. In short, this study examines how brand name components (marketing and linguistics components) affect consumer buying behavior for food products.

Literature Review

Consumer Buying Behavior

Consumer buying behavior is the decision-making process of selecting, seeking, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products or services (Hoyer et al., 2008). Traditionally, there are three perspectives: rational, behavioral, and cognitive (Pachauri, 2002). Firstly, the rational perspective views consumer buying behavior as a single transaction based on conscious economic calculation and personal preference. However, the later behavior perspective emphasizes the external environment, which affects consumer buying behavior. At the same time, the cognitive perspective focuses on the information and the consumer's decision-making process. Besides these developed models, theories and concepts, consumer buying behavior can be further categorized into two categories: personal aspect behavior and group aspect behavior (Pachauri, 2002). Personal aspects of behavior are focused on the consumer's personality and the individual wants and needs, which can be clarified using Maslow's hierarchy. In contrast, group aspects of behavior are referred to as cultural and socio-culture influence.

Marketing Component of a Brand Name

According to the three-component brand naming system that Chan and Huang developed (1997), the marketing component of a brand name is the component that was used as a marketing tool to influence consumers in the market. The marketing component of a good brand name should enable the consumer to distinguish it from other brand names easily. Thus it has to be different, imply the benefits of the product or service, easy to recognize, easy to be memorized or recall by a consumer, can arouse consumer interest, and be persuasive.

In Zaichkowsky's study (1993), the researcher argued that brand name influences consumer perception. The descriptive brand name is considered well-accepted and preferred by consumers. A descriptive brand name is perceived as better quality, more effective, and more positive than a non-descriptive brand name among low-involvement products (Zaichkowsky, 1993). However, this phenomenon only occurred for low-involvement products. In terms of recall level, a descriptive brand name's recall level is higher than the non-descriptive brand name in both low-involvement products and commercial products (Zaichkowsky, 1993). While a suggestive brand name implying product benefits has a higher advertising recall than a non-suggestive brand name. A suggestive brand name that does not imply product benefits have lower advertising recall than a non-suggestive brand name that does not imply product benefits (Keller et al., 1998). People always prefer things that they are

familiar with (Chan and Huang, 1997). Thus a brand name that contributes to a high recall level will help increase brand awareness and thus increase the acceptance of a brand among consumers. This indicates that the marketing component of a brand name influences consumer buying behavior.

Linguistic Component of a Brand Name.

The linguistic component of brand names consists of phonetic, morphological, and semantic requirements (Chan and Huang, 1997). Many studies focused on the linguistic component of brand names in recent decades as it is an interesting topic and an essential element in the concept of cultural brand origin. Due to globalization and internationalization, the brand name's language and linguistic uniqueness have become essential factors affecting brand preferences and buying decisions. This is because a brand's language and linguistic components are the cultural characteristics attached to a brand (Amran Harun et al., 2011). Previous studies proposed that culture can influence the consumer's attitude toward a brand and buying behavior. In a previous study, the linguistic component of a brand name was found to influence consumers' perceptions (Yorkston and Menon, 2004). The linguistic component of a brand name will generate symbolic information through verbal pronunciation and wording that contribute to semantic memory and thus influence consumer buying behavior. The variables categorized under the linguistic component of a brand name are phonetic, morphological, and semantic requirements.

Phonetic Requirements

Phonetic requirements refer to the sound and pronunciation of the brand name. Consonant-vowel and consonant-vowel-consonant is the most commonly used syllabus structure that easily pronounces a brand name. Other phonetic requirements for a brand name are that the brand name must sound pleasing and pronounced in only one way in all languages (Chan and Huang, 1997). Yorkston and Menon conducted a study to examine the brand name's phonetic effects on consumer perception in 2004. The study found that the sound symbolism of the brand name will affect the product's value and attributes that consumers evaluate or perceive. This indicates that phonetic requirements will affect consumer buying behavior. However, this study also pointed out that sound symbolism in brand perception is not fully controlled by an individual. Furthermore, most consumers are unaware that sound symbolism will affect their evaluation of a brand, product, or service. Thus, it is hard to measure this variable as it cannot sufficiently control as people do not realize its involvement in the judgment process.

Morphological Requirements

The structure of the brand name is the central core of the morphological requirements of a brand name. A brand name's structure must be simple and short (Chan and Huang, 1997). Besides, a brand name can behave like a word or nonword or as a combination of number and word (Gontijo et al., 2002). In a study by Gontijo et al. in 2002, which studied a proper name, noun, and length of the brand name, it was found that brand name behaves more closely to the common noun than nonwords. However, the findings also revealed that length and capitalization affect brand naming.

A study about the morphology of Chinese brand names was conducted in 1997 by Chan and Huang. Consumers evaluated a few compound structures of a brand name. These compound structures of brand names are noun-noun compound, adjective-noun compound, number-noun compound, verb-noun, and other combinations. The study showed that the noun-noun compound is consumers' most preferred compound brand name structure. Besides, one of the generalized linguistic principles used in Chinese brand naming states that an excellent

Chinese brand name should be a two-syllable compound. As the morphological requirement of a brand name influences consumer preference, it will also impact consumer buying behavior. Therefore morphological requirements are considered to influence consumer buying behavior.

Semantic Requirements

Semantic requirements refer to the meaning and connotation of the brand name itself (Chan and Huang, 1997). The brand name is usually carrying a positive meaning or a neutral one. A negative brand name is seldom used in the brand naming process. The characteristic of semantic requirements is that they must have a positive connotation, be always timely, and be easy to understand and memorize. As stated in the generalized linguistic principles of Chinese brand naming, one of the principles indicates that the compound of a brand should have a positive connotation (Chan and Huang, 2001). This is because the Chinese believed that positive connotations symbolic would bring luck and fortunes. Besides that, McDonald and Roberts (2007) also advised marketers to study folklore, taboos, and interpretation of numbers across language and religion in Asia to avoid negative connotations, as the positive connotation is much more well-accepted and preferred by consumers. In research that Zinkhan and Martin (1987) conducted, the typical brand name was found to have more benefits than the atypical brand name on the consumer's attitude toward the new brand name. The authors found that based on the respondents' experience, consumers preferred a familiar new brand name over an atypical new brand name as an inferential belief based on a brand is formed based on personal experiences. Thus typical brand name will benefit from the transference of a positive attitude.

Methodology and Research Framework

This study was conducted via a survey questionnaire. Notably, most Malaysians purchased food products from supermarkets, hypermarkets, and department stores (Brandt and Chuah, 2012). Due to this fact, this study was carried out at supermarkets and hypermarkets. Questionnaires were distributed to consumers of food products when they exited supermarkets or hypermarkets. A total of 200 consumers volunteered to participate in this study, and the data were analyzed using SPSS for factor analysis, reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis. The followings are the hypotheses developed for this research:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the marketing component of brand name and the consumer buying decision towards food products.
H2: There is a significant positive relationship between phonetic requirements and the consumer buying decision toward food products.
H3: There is a significant positive relationship between morphological requirements and the consumer buying decision toward food products
H4: There is a significant positive relationship between semantic requirements and the consumer buying decision towards food products.

Findings

A summary of the respondents' profiles is shown in Table 1 below. The respondents' key profiles are gender, marital status, age, education level, and income. Through the analysis, it shows that there is 41 percent of the respondents are male, while the remaining 118 respondents are female. Of these 200 respondents, 38.5 percent of them married, while the remaining 61.5 percent are single. As for age, 51.5 percent of the respondents in this study are 20 to 29 years old. Or in other words, more than half of this study's respondents are

between the ages of 20 to 29 years old. The percentages of respondents who are between 30 to 39 years old are 30 percent, or equal to 60 persons. As for the 40 to 49 years old and 50 to 59 years old categories, 12.5 percent and 6 percent of respondents are in these categories, respectively.

Regarding education level, the respondents' information shows that 22 respondents, or 11 percent, had SPM or fewer qualifications. Thirty-five respondents obtained STPM or College Diploma qualification. Most of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree qualification, where this category makes up 65 percent of the total amount of respondents. As for Master's degree qualification and above, 13 respondents fall in this category. There are four categories for respondents' monthly income: RM 2500 and below, RM 2500 to RM 4999, RM 5000 to RM 7499, and RM 7500 and above. The information shows that 55.5 percent of respondents earn RM 2500 and below, 28 percent earn between RM 2500 to RM 4999, 9 percent earn between RM 5000 to RM 7499, and only 7.5 percent earn RM 7500 and above.

Table 1: *Profile of Respondents*

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	41.0
	Female	118	59.0
Marital Status	Single	123	61.5
	Married	77	38.5
Age	20 to 29 years old	103	51.5
	30 to 39 years old	60	30.0
	40 to 49 years old	25	12.5
	50 to 59 years old	12	6.0
Education Level	SPM and below	22	11
	STPM/College Diploma	35	17.5
	Bachelor's Degree	130	65.0
	Master's Degree and above	13	6.5
Income	Up to RM2499	111	55.5
	RM2500 – RM 4999	56	28.0
	RM5000 – RM 7499	18	9.0
	RM 7500 and above	15	7.5

There are two independent variables which are the marketing component and linguistic components. However, the linguistic component is further divided into three sub-components: phonetic requirements, morphological requirements, and semantic requirements. There are 11 items for independent variables. The final run of the factor analysis produced four factors with Eigen values above one. The Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin value was 0.682, and the Bartlett test of sphericity was 805.582, significant at 0.000. Anti-image correlation for the entire independent variables was greater than 0.5. Table 2 indicates the results of the factor analysis. The communalities of the remaining 11 items ranged from 0.706 to 0.860. The factor loading for the 11 items of independent variables was in the range of 0.706 to 0.860. Overall, all the variables were loaded significantly and formed four factors.

Table 2: *Factor Analysis and Cronbach Alpha on Marketing and Linguistic Components of Brand Name*

	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha
F1	**Marketing Component**		
1.	Brand X should be advertisable.	0.860	0.782
2.	Brand X should be persuasive.	0.837	
3.	Brand X should be promotable.	0.760	
F2	**Semantic Requirements**		
1.	Brand X should be always timely.	0.813	0.747
2.	Brand X should be contemporary.	0.801	
3.	Brand X should be modern.	0.783	
F3	**Morphological Requirements**		
1.	Brand X should be short.	0.800	0.677
2.	Brand X should be simple.	0.707	
3.	Brand X could be words.	0.706	
F4	**Phonetic Requirements**		
1.	Brand X should be pronounceable in only one way.	0.837	0.628
2.	Brand X should be pronounceable in all languages for goods to be exported.	0.750	

There are three items for the dependent variable. The final run of factor analysis for the consumer buying behavior toward food products' items produced only one factor with an Eigenvalue of 2.145 and explained 71.500 percent of the total variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin value was 0.690, and the Bartlett test of sphericity was 193.873, significant at 0.000. These results indicate that these items were correlated and suitable for factor analysis. The commonalities of these three items ranged from 0.643 to 0.776, and factor loadings ranged from 0.802 to 0.881. Table 3 shows the factor loadings of the items measuring the consumer buying behavior towards food products.

Table 3: *Results of Factor Analysis on Consumer Buying Behavior towards Food Products*

	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha
1.	I pay attention to buy food products based on the brand name that I like.	0.881	0.800
2.	The brand name of the food products enhances my buying decision.	0.852	
3.	When buying food product for the first time I select brand name that I like.	0.802	
	Eigen Value	2.145	
	Total Variance Explained 71.500		
	Measure of Sampling Adequacy 0.690		
	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity 193.873		
	Significant 0.000		

As indicated in the table above, the value of Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.628 to 0.800. Marketing components, semantic requirements, morphological requirements, phonetic requirements, and consumer buying behavior towards food products have the value of Cronbach's alpha which is higher than 0.600, which indicates that the items have an acceptable internal consistency.

Positive correlations were found among all variables. Table 4 shows that most of these variables are weakly correlated, as the Pearson correlation coefficients are primarily below 0.30. Besides that, the correlation between the marketing component with trendy semantic requirements, the marketing component with connotation semantic requirements, trendy semantic requirements with connotation semantic requirements, and trendy semantic requirements with phonetic requirements is not significant. Overall, the results of correlation coefficient analysis show that the correlations between the independent and dependent variables are most significant and positive.

Table 4: *Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables*

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Marketing component	1					
2.	Trendy semantic requirements	0.083	1				
3.	Morphological requirements	0.218**	0.170*	1			
4	Phonetic requirements	0.213**	0.130	0.263**	1		
5	Consumer buying behavior toward food products	0.214**	0.293**	0.234**	0.230**	1	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The results of multiple regression analysis were summarized and shown in Table 5. According to the result, 31.7% variances in consumer buying behavior towards food products can be explained by the brand name's marketing and linguistic components (R^2=0.317, p<0.01). Based on the result of the regression analysis, there is a significant positive relationship between marketing components of brand name with consumer buying behavior towards food products (r=0.163, P< 0.01). Therefore, the first hypothesis, H1, of this study was accepted. H4: semantic requirements (r=0.268, P< 0.01) has a significant positive relationship with consumer buying behavior towards food products. Therefore, hypotheses H1 and H4 were accepted, while hypotheses H2 and H3 were rejected.

Table 5: *Multiple Regression Analysis of Marketing Component and Linguistic Components of Brand Name with Consumer Buying Behavior toward Food Products.*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Std. Coefficient Beta (β)
Consumer buying behavior towards food products	Marketing component	0.163*
	Linguistic component	
	Semantic requirements	0.268**
	Morphological requirements	0.075
	R^2	0.317
	Adjust R^2	0.295
	Sig. F	14.245**

Note: Significant levels: **p< 0.01, *p< 0.05

Discussion

According to the findings of this study, the marketing component of brand names influences consumer buying behavior toward food products. As a result, hypothesis H1 was accepted. A food brand name that is persuasive, promotable, and advertisable are essential elements that can influence consumer buying behavior. Few previous studies support this finding. For example, researchers found that suggestive brand names that imply product benefits have higher advertising recall than non-suggestive ones that imply product benefits. However, a suggestive brand name that does not imply product benefits has lower advertising recall than a non-suggestive brand name that does not indicate product benefits (Keller et al., 1998). This finding indicates that a good brand name that is promotable or advertisable depends on the characteristic of the brand name. It has a significant impact on advertising recall. As people prefer things they are familiar with or have a better understanding (Chan and Huang, 1997), high advertising recall will increase consumer acceptance of the brand name. Thus, the marketing component of the brand name will influence a consumer's decision-making process while purchasing food products. Therefore it shows consumers prefer food products with a brand name that are persuasive, promotable, and advertisable. They are familiar with these brands through advertising recall and brand awareness.

The second research question of this study is to investigate the effect of the linguistic component of brand names on consumer buying behavior toward food products. The findings of this study indicated that only semantic requirements of the linguistic component of the brand name have a significant effect on consumer buying behavior towards food products. However, phonetic and morphological requirements of the linguistic component of brand names do not significantly affect consumer buying behavior ($p>0.05$). Based on the findings, phonetic requirements of the linguistic component of brand name has no significant effect on consumer buying behavior towards food products. The findings of this study are varied from the previous studies. This study revealed that consumers do not attach importance to how a food product's brand name is pronounced. However, previous studies pointed out that brand-name pronunciation is considered essential to a product's success in Asia Pacific, especially in China. McDonald and Roberts' (2007) use the scenario in Hong Kong, where foreign brand wine that was hard to pronoun has fewer sales than the local brand or easier pronounced foreign brand's wine. This effect is due to the embarrassing moment experienced by consumers when they cannot pronounce the brand name well.

However, Yorkston and Menon (2004) pointed out that although the sound symbolic or phonetic effect influences consumers' perceptions. Most people do not realize that they judge a product based on the pronunciation of the brand name. Therefore, this indicates that this variable cannot reasonably control as people do not realize this variable's involvement in the judgment process. However, according to Shum et al. (2012), the pronunciation of brand names across languages will influence consumer preferences toward the brand regardless of language proficiency. Yet, the pronunciation of the brand name will influence consumer preferences towards the brand due to the mismatch between phonetic symbolism and the product attributes. This finding indicates that phonetic requirements are always closely related to the semantic requirements of brand names and are hard to measure separately.

Besides that, there can be an exception for Malaysian consumers as they do not attach importance to how a food product's brand name is pronounced since Malaysia is a multi-racial nation with a different language and cultural background from other countries. Therefore, it can cause differences in this study's findings from previous studies.

As for morphological requirements, the findings show that there is no significant relationship between morphological requirements of brand name on consumer buying behavior towards food products. A proper name, word, or noun is more suitable to behave as a brand name than a nonword (Gontijo et al., 2002). Researchers in the previous study argued this statement. While in a study by Zinkhan and Martin (1987), these researchers argued that a familiar brand name should be short. They found that a familiar brand name is more well-accepted than a non-typical brand. Through accumulated personal experience, consumers will form a strong attitude toward a particular brand; thus when these people are exposed to a new product with a specific brand name, the acceptance of the product will be higher than the atypical brand name. However, some researchers claim it is difficult to define typical and atypical brand names.

Besides, some products with an atypical brand name still do well in the market. For example, a wine product named "If You See Kay" was launched in the United States. The brand name of this wine product is considered atypical in the wine industry; the brand name do not behave like words but like a sentence, yet this wine was one of the best sellers in New Hampshire. The morphological requirements do not influence consumer buying behavior. Although one of the Chinese's generalized linguistic principles states that a good Chinese brand name should be a two-syllable compound, Chan and Huang (2001) encouraged marketers to be more creative in brand naming. They found some brand names lack creativity and differentiation. Food products can succeed in the market regardless of whether they have a familiar name or otherwise. There is more critical for a brand name to show its creativity and differentiation than its morphological requirements. That is why consumers in Malaysia do not attach importance to the morphological requirements of a brand name.

Based on this study's finding, semantic requirements positively influence consumer buying behavior toward food products ($p<0.01$). This study revealed that consumers prefer food products with trendy semantic brand names. Brand name plays a vital role in helping consumers infer preference for a product (Jiang, 2004). It should be trendy to ensure it matches the new products. For instance, a novel or newly developed product needs a trendy brand name to show that this product will bring a new experience for consumers, which was not found in the past. A trendy brand name can also be prominent that the product is highly involved with current technology. Therefore it is crucial to make sure the brand name is always timely, contemporary, and modern to match the attribute of the product. This argument is supported by Shum et al. (2012), who believe consumers prefer a product with a brand name that matches the product attribute.

Besides that, a traditional brand name may be less preferred by consumers as consumers are unfamiliar with out-of-date brands. People prefer things they are familiar with or understand better (Chan and Huang, 1997). Therefore, a contemporary brand name will have more benefits than a traditional one and will be preferred by consumers. As the trendy brand name will be more suited for new food products' attributes, a contemporary brand name is more familiar to consumers. This explains that Malaysian consumers prefer food products with a trendy brand name.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to understand the effect of brand names on consumer buying behavior toward food products. The findings that were revealed in this study can be helpful for processed food manufacturers to have a better understanding of the brand naming process.

Consumers preferred a brand name that was advertisable, persuasive, promotable, timely, contemporary, modern, not obscene, not offensive, and had a positive connotation. Thus small and medium enterprises can use this information as guidelines in brand name selection or brand naming. As the cultural background of consumers may affect consumer preferences for a brand name, the findings of this study may help local marketers to develop their general branding principles for food products in Malaysia. In short, this study revealed four variables of brand name which have a significant positive relationship with consumer buying behavior towards food products: the marketing component of brand name, trendy semantic requirements, connotation semantic requirement, and combination requirements of linguistic component of a brand name. It is suggested that future researchers focus more specifically on a single food product category since food products have a broad range that can be divided into many categories.

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