

Exploring Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Food Packaging as A Touchpoint to Promote Nation Branding at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA)

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Abstract

Today, nation branding is emerging field of competitive marketing. The aim of this study is to explore the potential of the national identity to be promoted by Malaysian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through its food packaging. Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) is selected because of its potential as an outbound shopping to trigger consumer's impulsive buying behaviours, especially among international products.

Keywords: Packaging, Brand Personality, Nation Branding, National Identity, Country of Origin (COO), Semiotic.

Introduction

In the competitive environment, Malaysian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is the main contributor towards Malaysian economic growth through their contribution to the country gross domestic product (GDP). It is said that packaging plays an important part in product success (Simms & Trott, 2010), and therefore SMEs put more effort into packaging very effectively. And also branding is a core notion of attention, particularly looking at the possible great future that Malaysia has towards SMEs. According to *Koleksi Arkib Ucapan Ketua Eksekutif* (2005) considered, "branding and packaging are fundamental aspects of a successful business, which large Malaysian companies as well as SMEs must seriously adopt and integrate into their current business practice". Because of SMEs is the principal contributor towards Malaysian economic growth through their contribution to the country gross domestic product (GDP).

In the age, the concept of brand is becoming increasingly influential, which are not limited to companies and their products, but also be applied to the nation. As Chen (2012) stated, being increasingly recognized that national image can be branded. Thus, "nation branding becomes an emerging field of marketing" (Yousaf & Huaibin, 2014). According to Fan (2010), the

description of nation brand is a visual symbol, a slogan or strapline so that it can be easily branded and communicated. Each country has its own unique name and image in the mind of people both inside and outside the country, so a nation does have brands (Fan, 2010).

Moreover, nation branding includes national identity (Scott et al., 2011). According to Reed and Forehand (2016), identity is flexible and dynamic and influenced by memory, emotions or perceived threats. National identity describes the feeling of belonging (Grimson, 2010). Semiotic is a best method to describe national identity on packaging. Semiotics defined as signs and symbols as a shortcut to convey meanings. Semiotics states that a specific product design evokes thoughts, emotions, impressions and associations because they show signs that are consciously and unconsciously interpreted as such (Ares et al., 2011). In this model, the stimuli evoke a series of spontaneous impressions in the consumer, which is subjectively represented in his mind, given a certain context (Oppenrud, 2004). In addition, nation branding can be characterized to country of origin (COO). COO also represents an information element of packaging. COO is not limited to cognitive component, but also as an affective component and forms symbolic and emotional product connotations (Adina et al., 2015). Therefore, brand personality supplemented with nation branding, national identity, semiotics and COO. Brand personality reflects how consumer sees the brand and thereby indicates the relationship between the brand and the consumer (Liu et al., 2016).

In order to promote nation branding effectively, packaging is a good communication to attract consumer's attention at the point of purchase. The importance of packaging has been increased. In regard to food, packaging can influence consumers both during the purchase in form of visual stimuli (Clement et al., 2013). The role of packaging has also been investigated for many different types of foods, from everyday commodities to premium products with own label food brand, with studies reporting that over 70 per cent of the consumers rely on their respective packaging to aid in the purchase decision process (Löfgen et al., 2008; Wells et al., 2007).

Hence, SMEs wish to take this opportunity to promote nation branding through food packaging selling at Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Airport provides a distinct environment which can trigger consumer's impulsive buying behaviour. Almost 60% passengers as impulsive buyers and 27% airport purchase are done on impulse (Geuens et al., 2004; Topping, 2010).

This paper contributes to an aspect important for exploring how SME food packaging as a touchpoint to promote nation branding at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). In the sections that follow we provide a review of the relevant literature explores the packaging, semiotic and branding, particularly of brand personality and nation branding, in particular national identity and country of origin. The objectives of this paper are as follows: (1) examine on packaging design as an important touchpoint, particularly applied Malaysian identity to improve SME brand recognition; (2) identify brand personality that best represents nation identity on Malaysian SME food packaging; (3) explore the kind of elements (semiotic or country of origin) to represent Malaysian identity used in SME food packaging in promoting nation branding. This research was conducted using a qualitative method and conducted fifteen respondents. We explain the methodology used and the analysis of the results the packaging is a good touchpoint to promote nation branding and the combination of semiotic and country of origin is a good component to represent national identity used in SME food packaging in promoting nation branding.

Literature Review

Packaging

Today, packaging has a strong potential influence on customers' decision making. Over 70% of buying decision is made right in front of the shelf, and consumers spend approximately three to five seconds examining a product on the shelf of supermarkets, since packaging of product is the first thing that a consumer see, it plays a vital role in differentiating a brand from other competitors (Clement, 2007; Nawaz et al., 2012; Moutaftsi Ms & Kyratsis Dr, 2016). By reason of consumers are exposed to more than 20,000 products choices with a 30 minutes shopping session (Keller, 2008). Moreover, 90% of consumers decide on a product based only on its front image, hence packaging, without ever attempting a physical contact (Clement, 2007). Packaging helps companies differentiate the product from the other brand on the shelves (Zekiri & Hasani, 2015).

Packaging has additional functions which are one of the most powerful marketing equipment for promoting products. Packaging can be as a promotional tool, which is what attracts a person to a product when it is first viewed in an aisle or point of sale (Jerzyk, 2016; Hurley et al., 2016). As Kotler and Keller (2012) and Shimp (2010), packaging called "five second advertising of product" or a "silent salesman on shelf". For example, the function of silent salesman on the shelf is communicated between a product and the final consumer at the point of sale (Borishade et al., 2015). Consumer perceives the subjective entity of a product through communication elements conveyed by the package that can influence the choice and is the key factor for successful marketing strategies (Silayoi et al. 2007; Gofman et al., 2010).

Brand Personality

In today's global consumer markets, brand personality influences key consumer behaviour variables, particularly of creating and developing a strong bond between a consumer and the company, and also consumer-brand relationship (Aaker et al., 2004; Jafarnejad et al., 2012; Tong et al., 2018). Especially for consumer-brand relationship such as satisfaction, trust and loyalty was influenced by brand personality (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). Aaker (1997) believed that brand personality is "the set of human characteristic associated with brand". Consumer's personality plays a major role in their buying decision making. As Onu and Garvey (2014) pointed out, people buy may reflect their personalities. Brand personality represents an important role, particularly from a managerial perspective. As a number of studies stated, brand personality is not only to make company able to communicate with their customer about brand more successfully, but it also is one of the most influential role in advertising and promotional (Plummer, 1985; Batra et al., 1993; Aaker, 1996).

Nation Branding

The purpose of nation branding is the identity and reputation of whole countries by applying persons, symbols, colours and slogans to create unique personality (Barr, 2012). According to Fan (2010), nation brand is described as a visual symbol, a slogan or strapline so that it can be easily branded and communicated. Nation branding is an essential ingredient for brand or co-brand (Fan, 2010). Nation branding aims to define every country is different and yet able to show these distinctive characteristics through a systemic process (Aronczyk, 2013). Nation branding is playing crucial to present country image on the global level. As Fan (2010) state clearly that nation branding interested in "a country's whole image on the international stage, covering political, economic and cultural dimensions". Nation branding, image and reputation are most important because of perception of trust and customer satisfaction built by them

(Barr, 2012). Nation branding is “foreign people’s perceptions towards the state as a whole” (Zeybek & Ünlü, 2016). The perception composes of people, places, cultural language, history, national cuisine, fashion, celebrities, world brand and so forth (Zeybek & Ünlü, 2016).

Nation branding is a part of the most important process in order to promote nation’s identity and image on the global level and positioned in the mind of foreign people. Researchers define nation branding is “a process is consciously initiated and implemented in order to make a positive effect on the popularity, image and reliability of the country in the minds of foreign people” (Zeybek & Ünlü, 2016). In addition, nation branding is mainly concerned with promotion of the different aspect of nation’s identity to attract foreign people and direct investors by applying nation’s image, products and attractiveness (Mihalache & Vukman, 2005; De Vicente, 2004).

National Identity

National identity is the main role, particularly in the process of evaluating a product. National identity is not only defined as culture sharing, it also described the feeling of belonging (Grimson, 2010). According to Reed and Forehand (2016) classified identity into flexible and dynamic and influenced by memory, emotions or perceived threats.

National identity is success to bond with people within a community. As Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2010) proven a type of collective identification with the aim of binding people together within a community, giving them a feeling about membership of cultural or ethnic group. Moreover, national identity is basically “irrational psychological bond that binds fellow nationals together and which is supposed to constitute the essence of national identity” (Fan, 2010).

Country of Origin (COO)

Country of origin (COO) is becoming increasingly important factors, especially in the modern marketplace. COO is “the overall perception consumers form of products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country’s production and marketing strengths and weaknesses” (Roth & Romeo, 1992).

COO is “made in” concept to relate the product is originally made (Yeong et al., 2007). COO is an important tool in a few fields. It is a tool to leverage strong country images for products, particularly in marketing (Tseng & Balabanis, 2011). Several researchers proven that consumer purchase preferences towards the country in which the product is made seem significant compared with manufacturing company’s national origin (Kamaruddin et al., 2012).

COO is one of the most influential cues in consumers’ evaluation domestic as well as foreign products. COO is a cognitive component which defines a product as a group of cues and differentiates two cues that included intrinsic cues and extrinsic cues (Godey et al., 2012). Intrinsic cues are directly connected with the product (physical characteristics, such as colour, smell, taste, size, design, material, performance) and extrinsic cues is more intangible (warrant terms, brand, price or type of distribution channel, store reputation, COO) (Manrai et al., 1998; Godey et al., 2012).

Apart from cognitive component, COO also is an affective component and forms symbolic and emotional product connotations, providing benefits such as status or pride (Adina et al., 2015). Sohail and Sahin (2010) claimed that consumers use the COO cue symbolically such as an associative link. COO has a huge amount of influence on consumer’s perception and behaviour towards products. Poh Chuin and Mohamad (2012) believed that consumers more

likely to develop the image of the products through familiarity with a specific country. Various countries have acquired unique images in consumers' mind in particular product categories (Nagashima 1970, 1977).

Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols as a shortcut to convey meanings to target audiences. Recently, a number of experts have proven that semiotic is better understand how the visual aspect such as logo, brand or packaging creates meaning for consumers (Ares et al., 2011; Piqueras-Fizman et al., 2011). In commercial world, semiotics start to be successful and provided huge value in the sphere of brand packaging. Semiotics plays a vital tool for companies to assist them in the design of their package. For achieving the differentiation of a product or brand, the package is the extremely important role of success in the marketplace, particularly in food packaging. In the process of designing packaging, semiotics can be defined as a crucial factor act as differentiate or to motive consumer purchase, it also help to understand and interpret consumers' associations and expectations (Shahidi & Alasalvar, 2016; Ares et al., 2011). A semiotic analysis is playing an importance role of food package which help to understand and interpret consumers' associations and expectations of the content, and hence to design packages that arouse specific reactions to the consumers (Ares et al., 2011).

Airport

Today airports provide a unique environment that includes outbound shopping. Outbound shopping is a most popular activity for passenger that can trigger theirs' impulsive buying behaviours. Almost 60% passengers as impulsive buyers and 27% airport purchase are done on impulse (Geuens et al., 2004; Topping, 2010). For instance, after passengers receiving their boarding passes, their tension is relieved replaced by excitement, referred to as a "happy hour" (Scholvinck, 2000; Thomas, 1997). Additionally, outbound shopping also has a role to satisfy human need that includes enjoyment and leisure (Timothy & Butler, 1995).

Conceptual Framework

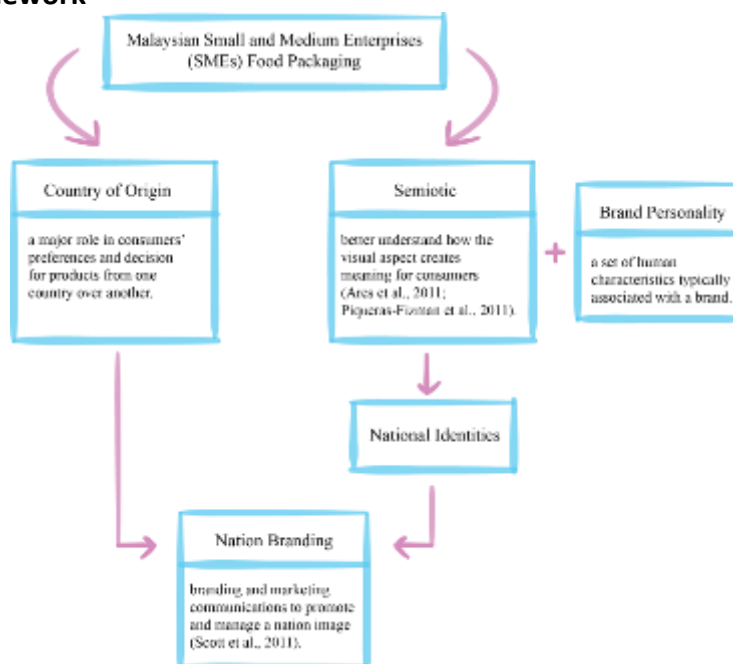


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Nowadays, nation branding is an emerging field of competitive marketing. Nation branding includes national identity (Scott et al., 2011). Malaysian SMEs wish to take this opportunity to promote national identity to foreign tourists through food packaging. National identity is an affective base to evaluate a product (Batra et al., 2000). Semiotic is a best method to describe national identity on packaging. Semiotics states that a specific product design evokes thoughts, emotions, impressions and associations because they show sign that are consciously and unconsciously interpreted as such (Ares et al., 2011). Brand personality is supplementary to semiotic to create consumer-brand relationship. Moreover, COO belongs to nation branding. COO also represents an affective component and forms symbolic and emotional product connotations, providing benefits such as status or pride (Adina et al., 2015).

Methodology

The research objectives were addressed in this study by conducting interviews with fifteen respondents namely, international students, designers and experts. Purposeful sampling was used to select respondents and place for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research question and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview was recorded by audio-taped and then transcribed. NVivo12 qualitative data management software was used to do thematic analysis and coding. A summary of the research tools and method used in this study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of research tools and methods was used

| | |
|--------|-------------------------|
| Tools | Digital audio recording |
| Sof | NVivo12 |
| Method | Theme identification |

Conclusion

From a consumer perspective, a powerful packaging does play a role in the performance of SMEs brand recognition. Packaging can be a silent salesman on the shelf is communicated between a product and the ultimate consumer at the point of sale (Borishade et al., 2015). Thus, SME should seek to collaborate with consumers, especially foreign tourists in order to understand how packaging in promoting nation branding very effectively.

National identity is a part of nation branding and plays an important role in promoting it. Thus, national identity is reinforced by brand personality. Both of them are affective and emotional components. National identity is an affective base to evaluate a product, and described the feeling of belonging (Batra et al., 2000; Grimson, 2010).

Apart from brand personality, it was demonstrated in the practical part of this study, how the effect of country or origin or semiotics of representation in promoting nation branding. Country of origin is the most effective element separately in promoting nation branding to compare semiotics. It is an affective component and forms symbolic and emotional product connotations, providing benefits such as status or pride (Adina et al., 2015). Sohail and Sahin (2010) claimed that consumers use the country of origin cue symbolically such as an associative link. However, the combination of two elements that included country of origin and semiotics also is a success in representing nation identity, especially promoting nation branding on the packaging. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols as a shortcut to convey meanings. Semiotics theory states that a specific product design evokes thoughts, emotions, impressions and associations because they show sign that are consciously and unconsciously interpreted as such (Ares et al., 2011).

The findings in this study have been examined. It is based on these findings that the researcher draws the following conclusions:

- Packaging is not limited as a promotion tool, and also as a communication tool to communicate nation identity with foreign tourists more effectively.
- SMEs make an effort on designing a well packaging.
- Colour is a vital of the visual element of packaging, which is successful in attracting consumer's attention.
- COO is not limited to nation branding, it also a good information element of packaging.
- National identity can manipulate consumer buying behaviour.
- The influence which semiotics and COO have consumer choice and buying behaviour.
- The representation of semiotics and COO is the key to success in presenting national identity.

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