

Social Media Marketing Communication and Consumer-Based Brand Equity: An Account of Automotive Brands in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Achieving brand equity are top priorities for many organizations because brand is one of the most prized assets of any organization. As such, the academia continues to exert considerable efforts on understanding the factors that influence the development of brand equity. For instance, previous studies have demonstrated that social media communication has significant impact on Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), however, researchers have not really focused on the relationships of several types of marketing communications anchored by different social media platforms for brand equity. As such, the objective of this study is to examine the relationships between the social media marketing communications, specifically, user-generated type (Social Media Word-of-Mouth) and firm created types (Social Media Advertising, Social Media Promotion and Social Media Interactive Marketing); and the CBBE of automotive brands in Malaysia. Subsequently, 800 samples were selected through cluster samplings from five cities in five geographical regions across Malaysia. Survey questionnaires were administered to users of four types of automotive brands, namely; *PROTON*, *PERODUA*, *TOYOTA* and *HONDA*. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and multiple regressions in SPSS 22. The findings revealed that, the selected automotive brands have notable presence on *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram* and *Twitter*. Furthermore, it was found that, social media advertising, social media promotions and social media word-of-mouth have positive relationships with the CBBE of automotive brands. However, social media interactive marketing has an insignificant role in the CBBE. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: *Consumer-Based brand equity, marketing communications, social media, automotive brands, Malaysia.*

INTRODUCTION

Developing and managing brand equity are essential to many organizations because brands are one of the most invaluable assets to organizations (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016; Keller & Lehman, 2006). In view of the importance of brand equity, the academia continues to exert significant efforts on understanding the factors that influence the development of brand equity, especially from the consumers' perspective (Williams & Soutar, 2009). According to Keller (1993), there are three different approaches to studying brand equity. Brand equity is either studied through customer perspective, organizational perspective or financial perspective (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). CBBE is one the derivatives of brand equity, which embodies the customer perspective into the conception of brand equity (Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016). The importance of consumer perceptiveness to the management and the development of CBBE goes beyond monetary profits,

rather, it reflects the general effectiveness of marketing activities (such as; advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing and so forth) in developing brand knowledge (Keller & Lehman, 2006). Thus, influencing consumers' perception and consumers' behavior (Tuominen, 1999; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

In the context of studying the relationship between social media communication and CBBE, different approaches have been employed by numerous researchers which have yielded some insightful conclusions about the importance of marketing activities and communications that are devolved through social media. For instance, social media communications have been studied as either firm-created content (Bruhn et al., 2012; Khadim, Younis, Mahmood & Khalid, 2015; Schivinski, 2011); users-generated content (Bonhomme, Christodoulides, & Jevons, 2010; Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012); social media marketing efforts or activities (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014; Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012); electronic word of mouth (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Severi, Ling, & Nasermodeli, 2014); social media engagement (Zailskaite-jakste & Kuvykaite, 2012); or social media advertising (Hanaysha, 2016). However, researchers have yet to consider examining the differential effects of the various types of social media marketing communications on CBBE (Yazdanparast, Joseph & Muniz, 2016). Keller (2009) has argued that, advertising might have been the dominant type of marketing communications that are disseminated on social media; however, it is certainly not the only marketing communications. Also, it is hard to say if advertising is the most important type of marketing communications, especially in this era of predominant usage of social media. Therefore, there is a gap of knowledge in understanding the differential effects of various types of marketing communications such as social media advertising, social media sales promotion, social media interactive marketing and social media word-of-mouth on CBBE (Kapoor & Kulshrestha, 2013). As such, this paper sets out to examine the differential effects of the social media marketing communications including firm-created contents in terms of social media advertising, social media promotion, social media interactive marketing and user-generated contents such as social media word-of-mouth on CBBE.

This study is motivated by the increasing competition in the automotive industry (Thiripurasundari & Natarajan, 2011; Fetscherin & Toncar, 2009; Brunello 2015). This competition is reflected through the complexity of decision-making process of automotive consumers. Automotive consumers have become extra-ordinarily active and highly involved in making purchase decisions (Mahfooz, 2015). Several factors are seriously taken into consideration in the process and most importantly, consumers rely on brand attributes and other brand assets of automotive brands to simplify their decision-making process (Hsieh, 2004). Thus, strong and successful brand equity becomes an important factor for automotive brands to differentiate themselves from competitors, ensure uniqueness and remain a tool for evoking purchase (Santoso & Cahyadi, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative to understand how CBBE can be enhanced through marketing communication efforts exerted through social media platforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of CBBE

Tuominen (1999) and De Chernatony and Francesca (1998) have argued that, different approaches have been employed to study brand equity. Such differences have resulted in numerous definitions of brand equity that cannot be captured or represented with one concept or idea (Tuominen, 1999). This is evident in the differences of models commonly used by brand equity researchers. The most popular perspectives of studying brand equity are; organization/employee perspective, financial perspective and consumer perspective (Keller & Lehman, 2006; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Keller and Lehman (2006) have explained that, brand equity is an accumulation of values generated from three market levels namely; company, customer and financial markets. Each of these perspectives (market level) has different influence on the definitions, interpretations and dimensions used in measuring brand equity. However, theorists have unanimously defined CBBE as an offshoot of brand equity conceptualized for measuring brand equity in consumer perspectives (Tuominen, 1999; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). This perspective is focused on understanding the consumers' mind, attitude and the process of decision-making as the basis for evaluating and judging the attributes and performance quality of a brand and also, for the purpose of improving marketing activities and communication efforts (Hsieh, 2004).

CBBE mirrors consumers' knowledge of a brand, their experiences acquired while associating with a brand and it represents the consumer mind-set and perception of the brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller 1993; Keller, 2001). Keller (1993) has further explained that, brand knowledge is of two types namely; brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness and brand image are often referred as the structures of consumers' mindset, memory, perceptions and the association with a brand (Christodoulides & Chernatony, 2010; Keller & Lehman, 2006). According to Keller (1993), on the implication of CBBE (brand knowledge), consumer response to marketing activities can be either positive or negative. Christodoulides et al. (2006) have further explained that, positive CBBE occurs when consumers perceived the brand to be strong and unique with favorable image of the brands' image and attributes. Ailawadi et al. (2003) have added that, the underlying purpose of conceptualizing CBBE especially from the organizational perspective is to determine the strength of a brand, to measure the successfulness of marketing decisions, to determine the financial consequence of branding and to develop successful brands. Invariably, developing and managing CBBE is one of the top priorities in both academia and industry (Ailawadi et al., 2003; Baalbaki & Guzmán, 2016; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Christodoulides & Chernatony, 2010; Tuominen, 1999).

Social Media Marketing Communications

Social media marketing communications take different forms and serve different purposes for different consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Piskorski, 2011). For example, advertising is a more creative and entertaining type of marketing communications which is used to disseminate brand related-information, increase awareness and evoke brand purchase. Meanwhile on the contrary, sales promotion refers to offering price discounts, coupons, gifts to enhance product trails (Keller, 2009). Past studies, have shown that consumers evaluate social media communications differently. Also, the essence of social media communication is reflected

through the characteristics of the contents (Kapoor & Kulshrestha, 2013). However, a handful number of studies on social media communications have focused mainly on two types namely; Firm-Created Contents (FCC) and User-Generated Contents (UGC). This paper breaks down and categorized several types of marketing communications based on the two tiers of social media communications namely; FCC and UGC as follows.

Firm-Created Contents (FCC)

The FCC can be explained as types of social media communications such as *Facebook* posts, Tweets, *YouTube* videos that are posted by brand owners on their brand pages, accounts or channels of social media (Bruhn et al., 2012; & Zailskaite-jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013; Gensler et al., 2013). FCC represents a marketing strategy for creating brand awareness in the form of recognition, recall and brand image on social media platforms by brand owners themselves (Sonnenburg, 2012). In addition, Bruhn et al. (2012) and Zailskaite-jakste and Kuvykaite (2013) have asserted that FCCs are the type of social media communications that avail companies and brand managers the opportunity of expanding their brand awareness through the messages disseminated on social media. Furthermore, Malhotra, Malhotra and See (2013) have reviewed that, brand owners have embraced social media as one of the important platforms of engaging their consumers, sharing information and promotional activities with their consumers. Consequently, social media, such as *Facebook* has proven to be a key drive to consumers' engagement among other important functionalities of social media (Rohm, Kaltcheva & Milne, 2013). However, the contents that are posted on social media by brand owners can be categorized into different types of marketing communications as these contents are deployed to serve different purposes (Keller, 2009). Research findings have also shown that, marketing communications have different implications on brand equity development (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000; Buil, de Chernatony, & Martínez, 2013). Therefore, FCC is conceptualized as Social Media Advertising, Social Media Promotions and Social Media Interactive Marketing.

User-Generated Contents (UGC)

Schivinski, (2011) has described UGC as all kinds of communication that are generated from and between consumers on social media. Fundamentally, UGC is the type of content about a brand which is created by some consumers for other consumers' consumption. This is possible because social media offer consumers the opportunity to publish and share self-generated content between a multitude of friends and social media followers. The possibility of generating and sharing content about brands, affirms the active and influential role of consumers in the realm of managing brands on social media pages (Zailskaite-jakste & Kuvykaite, 2012). The pervasiveness of social media as marketing communication channel has practically created room for consumers' voice to be heard about a brand. Consumers can now integrate their anecdotal comments, thoughts and perception of a brand into the brand stories beyond what the brand owners of a brand can ignore or prevent (Gensler et al., 2013). Consumers' comments about a brand can be in either negative (consumers' complaints) or in positive form (consumers' homage). However, both the negative and positive comments have implications on brand image (Gensler et al., 2013).

The review of past studies has revealed that, Word-of-Mouth (WOM) has become the most important surrogate for discussing UGC, among other typologies include; online review, WOM and blogging (Chen et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, this study adopts social media WOM as a major form of UGC. Justifiably, social media WOM has been one of the most predominant types of marketing communication especially since the advent of social media. This is because social media offer consumers a limitless opportunity which facilitate WOM communications (Chen et al., 2011). Social Media WOM is pertinent to social media platforms such as *Facebook* comments, *YouTube* comments and Blog reviews. In essence, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube* are practical platforms for sharing consumers' evaluations, reviews and usage experiences of a product to a multitude of customers (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009; Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia, & Bell, 2014; Smith et al., 2012).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The conceptual framework proposed in this study is presented in Figure 1. Relying on previous studies such as (Bruno & Dabrowski, 2014; Schivinski, 2011; Bruhn et al., 2012; Zailskaite-jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013;Khadim et al., 2015; Khadim, Zafar, Younis, & Nadeem, 2014) on the roles of social media and marketing communications in developing the CBBE. This study proposed that, social media marketing communications in terms of FCC (social media advertising, social media sales promotion and social media interactive marketing) and UGC (social media WOM) have significant positive effects on CBBE. The framework has explained how social media marketing communications can significantly influence and enhance social media users' perception and mindset. Consumers' mindset is otherwise known as CBBE (Keller, 2009; Bruhn et al., 2012; Bruno & Dabrowski, 2014). Subsequently, the underlying objective of this present study is to establish the connection between consumers and brands through social media marketing communications and CBBE.

The development of the conceptual framework and the formulation of hypotheses are theoretically guided by the Consumer Stimulus-Response Model (CSRМ). The model explains how marketing stimuli evoke certain attitudes and responses from consumers. In other words, marketing communications such as social media advertising, promotions, interactive marketing and word-of-mouth exemplify marketing stimuli. According to the CSRМ model, there are several types of marketing stimuli which include marketing communications, market environments and consumer characteristics; however, this study focused on marketing communication among other marketing stimuli. This is because, majority of consumers who are users of social media today are exposed to numerous types of marketing communications (Keller, 2009). As such, consumers are expected to filter the information received from those marketing messages in their brain, to retain the relevant information and to secure the information in their memory for future use. This information, in other words, is referred to as brand knowledge. According to Aaker (1997) and Keller (1999), consumers filter the information they receive from marketing communications based on their psychological factors. Consumer psychological factors include their perception and mindset which is present in consumers' subconscious mind and have strong influence on their actions and reactions to products (Kotler & Keller, 2012). This is the premise that guided the developments of CBBE models (Keller, 1999).

CBBE models in other words, represent consumers' perception and mindsets (Aaker 1991). As such, according to the stimulus-response model, CBBE is the product of psychological evaluations or reactions that are stimulated by marketing stimuli; in this case, social media marketing communications. Thus, when consumers' are convinced or successfully persuaded by marketing communications, their perceptions of brands will be positive and favorable. According to Kotler and Keller (2012) perception is a process which is used by individuals to select, organize and interpret information. Hence, perception is what determines marketing reality.

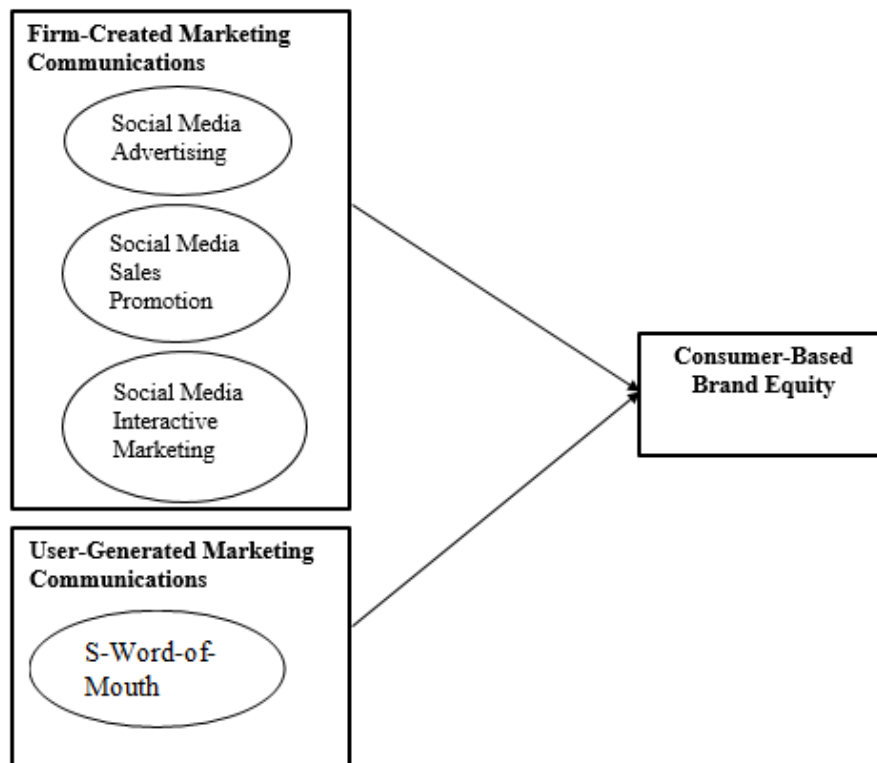


Figure 1: The proposed conceptual framework

Relationship between Social Media Advertising and CBBE

Social media advertising is the type of contents that are disseminated on social media platforms with the primary aim of persuading and increasing awareness (Hanaysha, 2016). Researchers have demonstrated that, the essence of advertising is entrenched in its ability to develop brand equity in so many ways which include perceived quality, perceived satisfaction, brand awareness, brand image and overall brand equity. Advertising contents can help consumers recognize and recall a brand, especially during purchase or when thinking about brand's categories (Raza, Bakar, & Mohamad, 2017). Similarly, the appeals in advertising can increase positive brand associations which can yield favorable behavioral reactions (Cobb-Walgreen et al., 1995). Empirical findings have also shown that, higher spending on advertising (Bravo Gil, Fraj Andrés, & Martinez Salinas, 2007; Yoo et al., 2000), consumers' attitude and experiences lead to an increase in brand equity. Since the surge of social media popularity, scores of studies

have delved on how social media and marketing activities contribute to the development of brand equity. However, not so many studies have focused on examining the importance of social media marketing communications on CBBE. Therefore, the following hypothesis are formulated;

H₁: *Social media advertising has a positive relationship with consumer-based brand equity of automotive brands*

Relationship between Social Media Promotion and CBBE

The literature has unanimously depicted sales promotion as the next most important marketing communication effort after advertising used in evoking sales (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000). However, many arguments have been generated in determining the impact of sales promotion on brand equity especially in the consumer perspective (Villarejo-Ramos & Sánchez-Franco, 2005). There are studies which have demonstrated a negative relationship between sales promotion and brand equity (Winer, 1986; Martínez et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2000). The logic behind such assertion was that the primary essence of developing brand equity is to strategically influence consumers to pay a premium price, hence, if a product has favorable and successful brand equity, there should be no need for employing sales promotions such as price deals (Villarejo-Ramos & Sánchez-Franco, 2005). This is because consumers use price as the basis for judging product quality (Agarwal & Teas, 2002).

Contrarily, a handful of other researchers has also revealed that, a positive relationship exists between brand equity and sales promotion. These studies imply that, sales promotions can also be used to create positive brand associations between consumers and brands. Thus, the real effect of sales promotion on CBBE is unknown (Buil, de Chernatony, et al., 2013; Chu & Keh, 2006; Demangeot & Broderick, 2010). In addition to that, studies have shown that, sales promotions are part of the marketing activities that are anchored on social media (Shen & Bissell, 2013; Taecharunroj, 2016). In spite of this development, many studies have not really delved on determining the effect of sale promotion on social media platforms on CBBE. Subsequent to the above, this study formulates the following hypothesis.

H₂: *Social media promotion has a positive relationship with consumer-based brand equity of automotive brands*

Relationship between Social Media Interactive Marketing and CBBE

Interactive marketing is a type of marketing communication that is particularly relevant to social media and other digital platforms (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, & Hansen, 2009). This is especially true because, the interactivity of social media is among the primary reason of using it for marketing communication channel. According to Keller (2009), interactivity is one of the noticeable differences of digital and traditional marketing communications. Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) have defined interactivity as the ability to communicate and interact with little or no hindrances of long distances and time differences. Applying this definition of interactivity to marketing, interactive marketing allows marketers to get direct and interactive connection between their customers and brands. Social media is extraordinarily a suitable and

relevant platform for this type of marketing. The practical examples of the interactive feature of social media include linking social media pages with official websites, giving a pictorial experience of a brand and ensuring a direct link with brands. Kotler et al. (2009) have opined that interactivity, customization, personalization, timely information, traceability and accountability are the major attributes of interactive marketing. Similarly, these attributes are akin to the attributes of social media marketing activities (Alhadid & Abu-RAhman, 2014; Godey et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2012; Pham & Gammoh, 2015; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Few past studies have managed to establish relationship between interactive marketing and CBBE dimensions (Keller, 2010; Shankar & Balasubramanian, 2009). In view of this, the study formulates the following hypothesis;

H₃: *Social media interactive marketing has a positive relationship with consumer-based brand equity of automotive brands*

Relationship between Social Media Word-of-Mouth and CBBE

Arguably, determining the role of consumers is the underlying motivations of most previous studies that have focused on how social media is affecting brand equity development (Langaro et al., 2015). Most of these studies have taken different approaches to analyze the role of users of social media in building strong brand equity. Determining the effect of WOM on CBBE has continued to receive significant attention from researchers. In spite of that, little is known about how exactly social media WOM is affecting consumers' perception of brands. In the context of social media, majority of extant studies have focused on the effects of consumers' involvements, and engagements and creation of WOM on different dimensions of CBBE (Abzari et al., 2014; Bonhommer et al., 2010; Bruhn et al., 2012; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Karman, 2015; Karpińska-Krakowiak, 2016; Schivinski, 2011; 2015 Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014, 2015; Severi et al., 2014; Zailskaite-jakste & Kuvykaite, 2012). However, far little has considered the outcome of WOM reviews on CBBE especially in the context of high involvement products like automotive brands (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012). In light of the above arguments; the following hypothesis is presented;

H₄: *Social media word-of-mouth has a positive relationship with consumer-based brand equity of automotive brands*

METHOD

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected in this study through survey questionnaires administered to 800 automotive brand users in Malaysia. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents who are the followers of either *PROTON*, *PERODUA*, *TOYOTA* or *HONDA* on social media. The four automotive brands are selected because they are the market leaders and the most popular automotive brands in Malaysia over the years (Ghani, 2012). Furthermore, Kormin and Baharun (2016) justified that these four selected brands have the most predominant presence on various social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram* and *Twitter* in Malaysia. The selection of multiple brands in this study was based on relevance and variance criteria

which have been the common approach among previous studies with similar objectives as the method for “reflecting reality more precisely” (Bruhn et al., 2012). A question (on which of the following social media platforms do you follow Brand X?) was set to screen respondents who are not followers of the aforementioned automotive brands from the study. This was done to ensure that the respondents have actually seen/read/watched any forms of firm created content on social media and have commented/posted/liked user-generated contents. A cluster sampling technique was employed to select one city from each of the five geographical regions in Malaysia. As such, one major city was selected to represent each cluster/region depending on the cosmopolitan characteristics of the city. Accordingly, Penang was selected to represent the Northern Region, the Central Region was represented by Kuala Lumpur in this study, the Southern Region was represented by Johor Bahru and Kuantan represented the East Coast while Kuching represented the Borneo Islands. To ensure randomness in the sample selection, a random sampling selection technique is employed to determine the number of samples from each of the selected cities. The random sampling procedure recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) was employed in this study. This was done by listing down the 5 cities (Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Kuantan and Kuching) on a separate sheet of paper which were then folded and placed in a bowl. The names of the cities were shuffled and picked for 800 times. The number of times a city was picked, was then recorded and therefore was the total number of samples that was drawn from the cities. Subsequently, Table 1 presents the number of samples that was drawn from each city across the geographical regions of Malaysia. A total of 615 valid questionnaires was returned back from the respondents.

Table 1: List of samples across Malaysian states

S/N	Regions	City Selected	Number of Samples
1	North	Penang	233
2	Central	Kuala Lumpur	210
3	South	Johor Bahru	187
4	East	Kuantan	100
5	Borneo	Kuching	70
Total			800

Measurement Procedure

The study employs the Churchill (1979) multi-stage approach of scale development and validity technique to validate the measurement scales used in this study. The multi-stage approach involves series of assessments which was initiated by adopting items from previous studies of marketing communication and CBBE. To be specific, social media advertising is measured with 12 items adopted from Bronner and Neijens (2006) and Buil, de Chernatony, et al. (2013). 7 items were adopted from Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000), Keller (2009) and Buil, de Chernatony, et al. (2013) and proposed to measure social media promotions. Social media interactive marketing was measured with 8 items adopted from Keller (2009) and Kim & Ko (2012). Social Media Word-of-Mouth is measured with 9 items adopted from Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) and Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia, & Bell, (2014). Furthermore, 69 items were adopted to measure the four dimensions of Automotive CBBE which include 7 items for brand awareness from Yoo et al. (2000), Hanaysha and Hilman (2015) and Mahfooz (2015); 22 items adopted from Bruhn,

Schoenmueller and Schafer (2012), Verhoef, Langerak and Donkers (2007), Baalbaki and Guzman (2016) and Brunello (2015) for hedonic brand image of automotive brands. 34 items were adopted from Baalbaki and Guzman (2016), Verhoef, Langerak and Donkers (2007), Kartono and Rao (2005); and Fetscherin and Toncar (2009) for functional brand image. Finally, 6 items were proposed to measure brand sustainability as adopted from Baalbaki and Guzman (2016). The scale that was used to record the respondents' agreement or disagreement with the statements in the survey based on the values of 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-not sure, 4-agree and 5-strongly agree.

Subsequently, these scales were purified and validated through a semi-structured interview conducted among 10 informants who were either brand managers of an automotive brand or automotive brand users (DeVellis, 2003). The content validity and face validity of the items and the scales were examined by calculating the CVI of both the items-level and the scale-level CVIs from the ratings of seven (7) experts in the disciplines of Marketing Communication and Research Methodology (Polit & Beck, 2006).

Furthermore, to examine the reliability and validity of the scales, a pilot study was conducted among a convenient sample of 200 respondents who are users of four different automotive brands namely *PROTON*, *PERODUA*, *TOYOTA* and *HONDA*. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis and varimax rotation was conducted. An eigenvalue greater than 1 and a cumulative percentage of variance explained greater than 60 percent were used as criteria in determining the number of factors. To determine the adequacy of sample size, the KMO and Bartlett tests were first applied. The results indicated that the KMO value for the Automotive CBBE is 0.921 and Social Media Marketing Communications is 0.881 respectively, indicated a meritorious level of sample adequacy (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Of the 69 items that measured the Automotive CBBE, 47 items have a factor loading above 0.50. Furthermore, out of the 34 items that measured the social media marketing communication variables, a total of factors loading above 0.50 is 28 items.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data analysis was initiated with the use of SPSS 22 to generate the demographic information of the respondents, to examine and to replace missing data; and to assess normality and outliers. These processes reduced the number of respondents to 544 valid and usable respondents with 68% response rate after eliminating outliers at the univariate, bivariate and multivariate levels. The second phase of the analysis entailed descriptive analysis of the constructs, correlations and multiple regressions. The descriptive analyses of the respondents' information showed that the majority of the respondents were users of *PROTON* followed by *PERODUA*, *TOYOTA* and *HONDA*. It is also revealed that, there were more female than male among the respondents. Other information of the respondents ranging from age, level of education and ethnicity was revealed. Most importantly, the majority of the respondents (88.7) followed one of the automotive brands on *Facebook*, followed by 40% of the respondents who declared that, they have seen/read/watch or commented on the marketing communications of the selected automotive brands on *YouTube*, *Instagram* (30.7%) and *Twitter* (16.2%). The types of marketing communications that the respondents in this study have seen, read and watched on social

media, ranging in a descending order from advertising (80%), promotions (51%), word-of-mouth (31.8%) and interactive marketing (23%).

The findings presented in Table 2 show the descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha and correlation analysis of the variables understudied in this study. The descriptive statistics have demonstrated that the respondents have mean values ranging from 3.62 to 3.95 which indicate a moderate acceptance and agreement with measurement of the variables in this study. The values of Cronbach's alpha also range from 0.838 to 0.970 which have affirmed that, there are internal consistencies between the items measuring the variables of this study. The Cronbach's alpha values exceed the minimum acceptable level of 0.70 (Rauf, Hamid, & Ishak, 2016). Hence, the scales used for measuring the variables are reliable. Furthermore, Table 2 also presents the correlation analysis between the variables. The findings show significant and positive correlations between the constructs.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, cronbach's alpha and correlation analysis

Variables	Means	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	CBBE	SMA	SMP	SMIM	SWOM
Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)	3.95	.482	0.970	1				
Social Media Advertising (SMA)	3.78	.608	0.889	.686**	1			
Social Media Promotions (SMP)	3.62	.639	0.890	.614**	.704**	1		
Social Media Interactive Marketing (SMIM)	3.83	.598	0.838	.556**	.674**	.659**	1	
Social Media Word-of-Mouth (SWOM)	3.77	.604	0.868	.604**	.672**	.661**	.556**	1

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

Table 3 shows the result of multiple regression which is used to assess the relationships between social media marketing communications and CBBE. The table reveals the result of multiple regression which can be represented as ($F = 160.599$, $P < 0.05$). This indicates that, the model developed in this study is statistically significant. Furthermore, the R^2 value ($R^2 = 0.525$) also indicates that, the model is fit and statistically acceptable. The result implies that, social media marketing communications (Social Media Advertising, Social Media Promotions, Social Media Interactive Marketing and Social Media Word-of-Mouth) collectively explain 52.5% of the variation in CBBE. Hence, there is a significant and positive relationship between social media marketing communications and CBBE development. Furthermore, the result presented in Table 3 reveals that, Social Media Advertising has the highest and significant contribution among other social media marketing communications ($\beta = 0.407$, $t = 8.901$, $Sig = 0.000$) explaining 40.7% of the variation in CBBE of automotive brands. This is followed by Social Media Word-of-Mouth ($\beta = 0.185$, $t = 4.331$, $Sig = .000$) with a significant and positive contribution, the variable explains 18.5% of the variation in CBBE. In addition, Social Media Promotion ($\beta = 0.174$, $t = 3.906$, $Sig = .000$) has a significant contribution by explaining 17.4% of the variation in CBBE. However, Social Media Interactive Marketing ($\beta = 0.048$, $t = 1.136$, $Sig = .256$) has a insignificant but positive contribution by explaining just 4.8% of the variation in CBBE. With regards to the

highlighted objectives of this study, the results presented in Table 3 also discuss the analysis of the hypotheses formulated in this study. The following are the discussions of findings with regards to the four hypotheses.

Table 3: Multiple regression between social media marketing communications and CBBE

Model	Coeff.(B)	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig	Decisions
(Constant)	1.419	.102		13.918	1.419	
Social Media Advertising > CBBE	.340	.038	.407	8.901	.000**	Supported
Social Media Promotion > CBBE	.140	.036	.174	3.906	.000**	Supported
Social Media Interactive Marketing >CBBE	.040	.036	.048	1.136	.256	Not Supported
Social Media Word-of-Mouth >CBBE	.150	.035	.185	4.331	.000**	Supported
R²					.525	Supported
Adjusted R²					.521	
F Change					160.599	
Sig					.000**	

** P < 0.05

Hypothesis 1: Social media advertising has positive relationship with consumer-based brand equity of automotive brands

The result presented in Table 3 shows social media advertising ($\beta = 0.407$, $p < 0.05$). The result demonstrates that there is a positive and significant relationship between social media advertising and CBBE. This implies that, for every increase in Social Media Advertising, there is an expected increase of 40.7% in CBBE of automotive brands ($t = 8.901$). As such, this hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Social media promotion has a positive relationship with consumer-based brand equity of automotive brands

The result presented in Table 3 shows social media promotion ($\beta = 0.174$, $p < 0.05$). This result demonstrates that there is a positive and significant relationship between social media promotions and CBBE. Thus, for every increase in social media promotions, there is an expected increase of 17.4% in CBBE of automotive brands ($t = 3.906$). Therefore, this hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 3: Social media interactive marketing has a positive relationship with consumer-based brand of automotive brands

The result presented in Table 3 reveals Social media interactive marketing ($\beta = 0.048$, $p > 0.05$) has a positive but insignificant relationship with CBBE. This result indicates that, for every increase in Social media interactive marketing, there is an expected increase of 4.8% in CBBE ($t = 1.136$). Therefore, the above hypothesis is not supported.

Hypothesis 4: Social media word-of-mouth has positive relationships with consumer-based brand equity of automotive brands

The result depicted in Table 3 demonstrates Social media word-of-mouth ($\beta = 0.185$, $p < 0.05$) has a positive and significant relationship with CBBE. This result indicates that for every increase in Social media word-of-mouth, there is an expected increase of 18.5% in CBBE ($t = 4.331$). As such, these findings provide a proof for supporting the above hypothesis.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATION

The findings of this study revealed that, social media marketing communications in terms of user-generated contents and firm-created contents have significant relationships with developing CBBE of automotive brands. In specifics, a positive and significant relationships was established between social media advertising and social media promotions as the representations of firm-created contents and CBBE of automotive brands. Similarly, social media word-of-mouth was found to be significant in enhancing CBBE of automotive CBBE. Meanwhile, this study could not establish a significant relationship between social media interactive marketing and CBBE. The implications of these findings is that, the marketing communications that were generated on different platforms of social media, including *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram* and *Twitter* have significant impacts on CBBE in terms of brand awareness, hedonic brand image, functional brand image and brand sustainability. The findings of this research are similar to previous studies that examined the implications of marketing communications and social media communications in maintaining and developing brand equity (Bruno & Dabrowski, 2014; Schivinski, 2011; Bruhn et al., 2012; Zailskaite-jakste & Kuvykaite, 2013;Khadim et al., 2015; Khadim, Zafar, Younis, & Nadeem, 2014).

Also, the contents and reviews that are posted on brand pages of social media by consumers as conceptualized by social media word-of-mouth is found to be impactful on the consumers' perception and the mindset of brand equity of automotive brands. Additionally, this research also conforms to the findings of previous researchers, on the positive impacts of user-generated contents in creating and shaping the images and perceptions of brands (Abzari et al., 2014; Bonhommer et al., 2010; Bruhn et al., 2012; Christodoulides et al., 2012; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Karman, 2015).

In general, the findings presented in this research provide insights for brand managers on the importance of different types of marketing communications and the implications of social media as the platforms for disseminating brand-related communications for managing and enhancing the acceptance of their brands. The theoretical implications of this research is that, the findings presented in this paper highlight the significance of social media communications in marketing and brand management. Most important, the study shows how brand-related communications and interactions between brand and consumers can enhance consumers' acceptance, shape consumers' perception and mindset towards a brand. This argument is in line with the observation of Keller (2009) who has maintained that, brand-related communications on social media platforms can have the greatest effect on the perception of a brand, especially when brand managers can ignite involvement and maintain positive engagements with their consumers on social media platforms. Meanwhile, the practical implication of this study is that, this research highlights the significance of social media marketing communications. With regards to the interactive features and the ubiquitous nature of social media platforms, the possibility of a daily and frequent encounter, engagement and

feedback between consumers and brands are increased. These subsequently, increase the level of brand awareness in terms of recall and recognition, improve positive image of the brand and ultimately shape the attitude of the consumers towards the brand (Adetunji, Sabrina, & Sobhi, 2017). Therefore, this study recommends that, brand managers of automotive brands should continue their employment of social media platforms as an important effort for building and maintaining their brand equity. Also, marketing communications, such as advertising, promotions and word-of-mouth should be revered as important communication strategies for improving and enhancing consumers' acceptance and perceptions of their brands.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper determines the differential effects of social media marketing communications on the development of CBBE for automotive brands in Malaysia. Specifically, the study examines the roles of social media advertising, social media promotions, social media interactive marketing and social media word-of-mouth on the development of CBBE. As such, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on social media effect, marketing communications, brand management and consumer behavior. On the other hand, the study also proffers important practical recommendations to marketing communication practitioners, brand managers and marketers in Malaysia to maximize the potentials of social media marketing communications in enhancing the images of their brands. Most specifically because social media's popularity continues to increase among Malaysians (Norsiah, Sobhi & Norhafezah, 2016), marketers and brand managers should take note of the fact that social media advertising such as videos posted on *Facebook* and *YouTube*; social media promotions; offering coupons, discounts and so forth are the most important marketing efforts that can be exerted to enhance their brand equity through social media platforms. Furthermore, social media word-of-mouth, which revolves around consumers' reviews, comments and homages posted on social media constitute a significant part of brand-related communications which can improve how brands are perceived positively and by extension, enhance brand equity.

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