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**THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BRAND ATTRIBUTES
AND WORD OF MOUTH ON BRAND IDENTITY AND
BRAND IMAGE**

HAZEM MOHAMAD ABD AL GHANY AL KASASSBH



UUM
Universiti Utara Malaysia

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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**THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BRAND ATTRIBUTES AND
WORD OF MOUTH ON BRAND IDENTITY AND BRAND IMAGE**

By

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Universiti Utara Malaysia

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Abstract

Companies all around the world have to deal with issues relating to brand image development and maintenance because brand image can affect their brand performance. Based on the attribution theory, this research examined the impact of the components of brand attributes, namely brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness and word of mouth (WOM) of brand image. This study also evaluated the mediating influence of brand identity on the relationship between the brand attribute components, WOM and brand image. Insufficient empirical attention, particularly in relation to the attribution theory, was the driving force for the current study to be undertaken. Two hundred and fifty-four travellers via two airports located in the northern region of Malaysia participated in this study. A cross-sectional survey approach and the quota sampling technique were adopted to select the participants, and PLS algorithm and bootstrapping techniques were deployed to test the hypothesized relationships. The PLS path modelling reported significant results of the major hypotheses; brand sustainability was the only variable not significantly related to brand image. It was found that brand identity mediated significantly the relationship between brand attributes, WOM and brand image. Overall, the results provide support for the attribution theory in that brand attributes, namely brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness and word of mouth can help shape consumers' perceptions which ultimately result in harnessing brand image. Finally, the study's implications for theory and practice, limitations, conclusions as well as directions for future research are provided and discussed.

Keywords: brand image, brand attributes, word of mouth, brand identity, Malaysia Airlines (MAS)

Abstrak

Syarikat-syarikat di seluruh dunia perlu menangani isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan pembangunan imej jenama dan penyelenggaraan kerana imej jenama boleh mempengaruhi prestasi jenama. Berdasarkan teori atribusi, kajian ini menyelidik kesan komponen atribut jenama yang terdiri daripada kaitan jenama, ketekalan jenama, kemampanan jenama, kredibiliti jenama, keunikan jenama dan penyampaian dari mulut ke mulut (WOM) bagi imej jenama. Kajian ini juga menilai pengaruh pengantaraan identiti jenama dalam hubungan antara komponen atribut jenama, WOM dan imej jenama. Penggerak utama untuk menjalankan kajian ini adalah kerana perkara ini kurang diberikan perhatian yang empirikal terutamanya yang berhubung dengan teori atribusi. Dua ratus lima puluh empat orang pelancong di dua lapangan terbang yang terletak di wilayah utara Malaysia mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Pendekatan kaji selidik keratan rentas dan teknik pensampelan kuota digunakan untuk memilih peserta kajian. Teknik algoritma dan pengikat but (*bootstrapping*) PLS pula digunakan untuk menguji hubungan hipotesis. Pemodelan laluan PLS melaporkan keputusan yang signifikan bagi hipotesis utama, dan kemampanan jenama pula merupakan satu-satunya pemboleh ubah yang tidak berkaitan secara signifikan dengan imej jenama. Identiti jenama didapati dapat mengantarkan hubungan antara atribut jenama, WOM dan imej jenama secara signifikan. Secara keseluruhannya, dapatan kajian menyokong teori atribusi bagi atribut-atribut jenama tersebut iaitu kaitan jenama, ketekalan jenama, kemampanan jenama, kredibiliti jenama, keunikan jenama dan penyampaian dari mulut ke mulut dapat membantu dalam membentuk persepsi pengguna yang pada akhirnya akan menghasilkan imej jenama. Akhir sekali, implikasi kajian bagi teori dan amalan, batasan kajian, kesimpulan serta arah tuju bagi penyelidikan pada masa hadapan turut disediakan dan dibincangkan.

Kata kunci: imej jenama, atribut jenama, penyampaian dari mulut ke mulut, identiti jenama, Syarikat Penerbangan Malaysia (MAS).

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Excerpts of Fiducial

(يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ).

آل عمران (200)

(فَسْتَذَكِّرُونَ مَا أَقُولَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَأَفُوضُ أَمْرِي إِلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ).

غافر (44)

(أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ وَيُخَوِّفُونَكَ بِالَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ (36) وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُضِلٍّ ۚ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِعَزِيزٍ ذِي انْتِقَامٍ).

الزمر (37-36)

(وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ ۖ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ).

البقرة (281)

(يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَنْ تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ).

الحجرات (6)

(دَعُ مَا يَرْيَبُكَ إِلَىٰ مَا لَا يَرْيَبُكَ ، فَإِنَّ الصَّدَقَ طَمَئِنَّةٌ ، وَإِنَّ الْكُذِبَ رَيْبَةٌ)

سنن الترمذي والنسائي

(من إعتد على مائة .. (قل), وعلى سلطنة .. (ذل), وعلى علة .. (ضل), وعلى علة .. (اختل), وعلى الناس .. (مل), ومن إعتد على الله فلا .. قل ولا ذل ولا ضل ولا إختل ولا مل).

الامام علي بن أبي طالب

(البر لا يبلى، والذنب لا ينسى، والديان لا يموت، اعمل ما شئت، كما تدين تدان).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	The Term
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
AOR	Sultan Abdul Halim Airport
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BR ATT	Brand Attributes
BR CO	Brand Consistency
BR CR	Brand Credibility
B ID	Brand Identity
BR IM	Brand Image
BR RE	Brand Relevance
BR SUS	Brand Sustainability
BR UNI	Brand Uniqueness
CBBE	Customer Based Brand Equity
CB-SEM	Covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling
CCA	Canonical Correlation Analysis
CMV	Common Method Variance
CI	Confidence Interval
COB	College of Business Management
f^2	Effect Size
GoF	Goodness-of-Fit
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communication

ABBREVIATION	The Term
MAHB	Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad
MAS	Malaysia Airline
LL	Lower Limit
PC	Composite Reliability
PEN	Penang International Airport
PAF	PAF Principal Axis Factoring
PBUH	PBUH Peace Be Upon Him
PhD	Ph.D. Doctor of Philosophy
PLS	PLS Partial Least Squares
Q_2	Construct Cross-validated Redundancy
R_2	R-squared values
SBM	School of Business Management
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
STDV	Standard Deviation
SWT	Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala.
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UL	Upper limit
VIF	Variance Inflated Factor
WOM	Word of Mouth

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Research Background

Means of travelling have become an important aspect of everyday life (Gilbert & Morris, 1995). People have been travelling to cities, countries, and continents since the ancient time (Button, 2008). The growing innovation and technological advancements have helped us reach a point where travelling has become highly frequent and convenient (Amato, 2004; Bardi, Coyle, & Novack, 2006; Tiernan, Rhoades, & Waguespack, 2008), and for this, the credit goes to the airline industry. According to Morrison and Winston (2010), the airline industry has expanded to such a great extent that for many economies it is one of the biggest sectors regarding contributions towards annual GDP.

The global air transport industry supports 63 million jobs worldwide and contributes \$2.7 trillion (3.5%) to global GDP (International Air Transport Association, 2014). Advanced transportation is considered critical for promoting trade and boosting human socialisation and economic growth (Browning, 2003). The success of an airline carrier in a highly competitive market relies on the services it provides to customers (Button, 2008), which ultimately defines how the company maintains its overall brand (Chong, 2007). The choice of airlines much depends on customer preferences and perceptions of the brand image of a specific brand (Button, 2008; Nel, 2014). In this regard, a brand image emerges from brand

reputation, affecting the prosperity of airlines (Button, 2008; Hodgson, Al Haddad, Al Zaabi & Abdulrahim, 2015).

The airline industry of Malaysia existed on 2nd of April 1947 with 97 national carriers (MAS, 2015). Malaysia was the 18th largest civil aviation market in the world regarding air passenger traffic as of 2014 of around 0.5% of GDP. It constituted around 1.5% of the world's air passenger traffic. The segment grew at a CAGR of 4% during 2007-2014. While the airline industry was in operation before Independence, the current Malaysia Airline (MAS) was established on 1st of October 1972, (MAS, 2015; O'Connell & Williams, 2005). MAS connects to nearly 100 destinations worldwide. The company had been ranked among the top seven five-star airlines and received stellar marks for service and comfort from the airline rating agency Skytrax in 2013 (MAS, 2015).

MAS was also classified amongst the airlines that offered full package services which strengthened its brand image (O'Connell & Williams, 2005; Wong & Musa, 2011). The competitive nature of the industry has pushed it to focus on strengthening its brand and service features (Muturi, Jackline, Sagwe, & Namukasa, 2013). However, recently the Malaysian Airlines faced issues of brand image as a result of two fatal incidents involving its aircraft, MH370 and MH17 in 2014 (Abeyratne, 2014; Chossudovsky, 2014; Gosling, & Ayres, 2015; Hodgson, et al., 2015; Kaiser, 2014; Mujeebu, 2015; Nel, 2014; Sing, Loon, & Wei, 2014; Smith & Marks, 2014; Tiwari & Kainth, 2014). The two incidents happened less than five months apart, exacerbating the airline's financial troubles and leading

to the renationalization of the airline even though before 2014, MAS had one of the world's best safety records (Kaiser, 2014; Zhang, 2014).

Due to the incidents, scholars began to predict changes in customer's perspective toward a brand image of the Malaysian Airline which may affect the entire industry (Hodgson et al., 2015; Mujeebu, 2015; Smith & Marks, 2014). As a result of the twin incidents, MAS was struggling to improve its brand image (Hodgson et al., 2015; Lee & Han, 2014). The airline passengers had been expressing credibility issue of the brand which is highly essential for maintaining a brand image, which, if not resolved, can cause greater damage to the company in the long run (Hodgson et al., 2015; Lee & Han, 2014). Due to the short time frame between the two incidents, MAS was unable to absorb the shock and deal effectively with a wide range of issues related to their clients (Herald, 2014; Hodgson et al., 2015; Lee & Han, 2014).

MAS was also unable to predict consumers' reactions to sudden situations (Herald, 2014; Lee & Han, 2014), rendering many doubting minds about the viability of the airline, which prompted the need for research. Following this, in 2014, a survey was conducted to detect people's view of the image of Malaysia Airline in a larger community (Hodgson et al., 2015). Also, MAS seems to have issues in addressing passenger expectations and taking any additional measures to harness their brand prospects. As a result, a serious situation has arisen concerning MAS's brand image (Lee & Han, 2014; Herald, 2014). Moreover, the brand position has also been seriously affected which is ideally not very healthy for an airline (King et al., 2015; Gerzema, Lebar, Sussman, & Gaikowski, 2007).

According to Hodgson et al., (2015), MAS strived to restore the confidence of those who patronise it by offering attractive rates and made additional provision for excess load. Sadly, these attempts have barely brought any positive change in its brand position of passenger figures (Hodgson et al., 2015), affecting its potential of carrying out the business in a competitive manner. Scholars found that passengers were willing to spend their money when the brand sustainability was found to be favourable (Gupta & Kumar, 2013; Trudel & Cotte, 2009). How consumers perceive a product or services on the basis of its distinctive characteristics is another important aspect in the brand uniqueness (Aaker, 1997; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Netemeyer, Krishnan, Pullig, Wang, Yagci, Dean, & Wirth, 2004). The fear evoked in passengers' minds after the twin incidents of MAS aircraft created doubts as for whether or not the company still can be considered safe to fly with (Hodgson et al., 2015).

The situation became worse due to the loss of patronage to other competitors of Singapore Airlines and Air Asia (Hodgson et al., 2015). Simultaneously, a lack of information and communication had caused bad word of mouth for the airline, which seriously affected its reputation (Hodgson et al., 2015). The company lost 40 percent of its clients in the first incident and 45 percent of consumers after the second incident (Hodgson et al., 2015; Nel, 2014; RT, 2014), which led to a cumulative 75 percent lost in profits during the second quarter of 2014 with 33 percent decrease in an average weekly bookings during the same period (Hodgson et al., 2015). The recent fatal incidents experienced by Malaysia Airline prompted customer anxiety about the viability of the airline. Also, studies

mostly outlined passengers' expressing weak brand perceptions about the airline (Hodgson et al., 2015).

Realising the need to restore its lost glory, the company pushed its marketing team to launch various campaigns (Harjani, 2014). The company kept experiencing flight cancellations and calls for ticket refunds. Nel (2014) proposed that Malaysian Airline also suffered due to its lack of attention towards passenger needs and preferences, which could otherwise have had helped the company to restore its lost image. The twin incidents also pushed the company to see its stock prices declined to the lowest levels (Herald, 2014; Nel, 2014). However, many scholars argued that the source of the financial downturn was the result of brand reputation and brand image (Cret & Brodie, 2007; Hodgson et al., 2015; Lee & Han, 2014).

According to some scholars, brand image has a significant influence on consumers' perceptions of service quality, that potentially affects purchase decision making (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Geuens, 2009). A brand image delivers a unified meaning of the brand which supports the brand's position in the consumers' minds (Doyle, 1989; Kapferer, Moingeon & Soenen, 2002). As a result, consumers play an important role in brand image development and maintenance through continuous feedback (Bivainienė, 2007). Conversely, a lack of focus on the brand image may damage consumers' perceptions about the brand. Hence, airlines that do not focus on such elements may lose out in a fierce competition in the market (Button, 2008; Hodgson et al., 2015).

The above issues have been considerably highlighted by the press and electronic media globally (Herald, 2014; Hilderbrandt, 2014). Despite the responses towards the crisis, MAS has a big challenge to prove distinctiveness and stability in its brand image (Hilderbrandt, 2014; Hodgson et al., 2015; Kaiser, 2014; Mujeebu, 2015; Nel, 2014). The challenge heightened due to conflicting reports, misleading news, poor coordination, and backtracking from statements (Hilderbrandt, 2014; Nel, 2014). In response to its brand image issues resulting in financial crisis, MAS terminated 30 percent of its workforce which further induced anger and frustration of the general public toward the airline (Iyengar, 2015). Subsequently, the reputation and image of MAS became deplorable (Hodgson et al., 2015; Mao, 2015).

Taken together, it is obvious that there is no shortcut in developing a good brand image. However, positively harnessing consumers' minds is a good way to go (Richardson, Dick, & Jain, 1994; Wang & Tsai, 2014; Zeithaml, 1988). A brand image can influence consumers' purchase of products or services. A positive brand image also enhances a company's overall reputation and eliminates the risk of losing competitive advantage (Akaah, & Korgaonkar, 1988; Rao & Monroe, 1988). Notably, the brand image also helps increase the actual value to consumers (Aghekyan et al., 2012; Fredericks & Salter, 1998; Loudon & Della, 1993; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2003; Wang & Tsai, 2014). So, brand owners need to transform the negative perception of customers towards the products or services (Schmidt, 2014) to revive the brand image (Nel, 2014). By boosting the brand image, MAS could revive its lost fame, target audience, profits and market share.

1.1 Problem Statement

The marketing literature indicates a lack of agreement on how to measure brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). For this reason, in this study, brand image was measured and examined by other dimensions using a different subject (MAS image) and product categories (Low et al., 2000; Park, 2009). Since a brand image influences consumers' purchase of products or services (Akaah, & Korgaonkar, 1988; Rao & Monroe, 1988) and increases the actual value to the consumers (Aghekyan et al., 2012; Fredericks & Salter, 1998; Loudon & Della, 1993; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2000; Wang & Tsai, 2014), the need to explore the role of brand image is extremely important. Scholars argue that brand image is an impression that affects consumers' perceptions of brand attributes (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012).

Notably, brand attributes are a set of features that distinguish brand characteristics in consumer's minds (Myers & Shocker 1981; Keller, 1993). Scholars like Martinko et al. (2006) were of the opinion that brand attributes could play a vital role in shaping individual behaviours. Brand attributes are important when they are compared with other competitors, and they are argued to be the final reason for purchase decisions (Carpenter et al., 1994; Yagci, 2000). Accordingly, Keller (1998) clarified that brand attributes are connected with different prospects and hence develop a consumer's perception of a brand image (Keller, 1993; Myers & Shocker 1981). In this regard, brand attributes can reflect the brand image (Keller, 1998).

The literature suggests a strong connection between brand image and brand attributes. Recall that after the disappearance of MH370, MAS administrators notified the families through SMS (Iyengar, 2015). Such practice apparently did not sit well with the families, further eroding the MAS's brand image. As brand image is formed as a result of as a wide-range of experiences about a product by consumers (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012; Kapferer et al., 2002), there is a need to investigate the association between brand image and brand attributes in the context of the crises experienced by MAS. In this study, brand image was measured by brand attributes/features composed of five brand features, namely brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, and brand uniqueness.

Brand relevance is an important concept that measures consumer reactions toward a brand image (Gerzema, Lebar, Sussman & Gaikowski, 2007; Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2014). According to Chan et al. (2012), brand relevance is driven from additive properties of essential products such as additive innovations to create presentations that determine new classes or subsets (Aaker, 2012). Thus, specific features of the brand can contribute towards making the brand distinguishable based on its relevance (Chan et al., 2012). In the context of MAS, the families who lost their loved ones in the crash of MH17 aircraft protested at the Malaysian Embassy seeking more information and response to what happened to their beloved (Raven, 2014). In this regard, brand relevance measures the personal reactions of consumers and the change in the brand positioning (Gerzema et al., 2007). The way MAS communicated with the families and ignored the standards compliance with the

sudden situation (Gosling & Ayres, 2015; Hodgson et al., 2015; Kaiser, 2014) encouraged this study to adopt brand relevance.

The previous literature has addressed brand relevance from different perspectives (Bauer, Albrecht, Haber & Neumann, 2007; Beverland, Wilner, & Micheli, 2015; Jin-Song, & Liuning, 2016; Judson, Devasagayam, & Buff, 2012). However, the majority of the previous studies provided no evidence of the impact of brand relevance on the brand image (Albrecht et al., 2011; Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003; Bauer et al., 2007; Gomes, Fernandes, & Brandão, 2016; Yanhui, & Calantone, 2016). Most of the recent research also failed to recommend further research on the direct relationship between brand image and brand relevance. However, Gomes, Fernandes, and Brandão (2016) recommended that further research on brand relevance consider different categories of brand. Also, it was recommended that future studies explore brand relevance with more specific variables and factors.

Brand consistency is an important tool used by marketers to maintain the relationship between consumers and the brand (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). According to Keller (2003) and Matthiesen and Phau (2005), a positive brand image can be achieved through brand consistency. A brand image is a clear set of connection of components that define the brand, and it could be realised through brand consistency (Biel, 1992; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999). Consistency helps achieve a better understanding and awareness of the brand by consumers which result in a better perception (Park et al., 1991). Conversely, inconsistency in the brand leads to the volatility of

perceptions by consumers, especially in international markets (existence of differences in advertisement and brand value in the globe), which can severely affect brand image (Matthiesen & Phau, 2005). On the other hand, brand consistency has a positive effect on a brand in that consistency increases the demand for a specific brand (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi 1990). The crises that happened to MAS have not been addressed well, resulting in more complications with the passage of time, suggesting inadequacy of brand consistency (Hilderbrandt, 2014; Nel, 2014).

Previous studies have examined brand consistency and consumer activity or advertisement, employee behavior, brand management, brand performance, brand success, brand promise, brand promotion (Beverland, Wilner, & Micheli, 2015; Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Kenyon, Manoli, & Bodet, 2016; Liu, Li, Chen, & Balachander, 2016; Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; Posavac, Sanbonmatsu & Ho, 2002; Singh, Dhamija, & Singh, 2015). However, there is a lack of the studies on a direct relationship between brand consistency and brand image (Beverland, Wilner, & Micheli, 2015; Liu, Li, Chen, & Balachander, 2016; Saxton, 2011; Van, Vermeir & Geuens, 2011). Several authors, such as Singh, Dhamija, and Singh (2015) suggested that to enhance a brand, consumers' perception of the brand image must be changed, which suggests the role of the basis of brand consistency. Kenyon, Manoli, and Bodet (2016) asserted that a consistent brand perception to achieve coherent identity and preserve brand identity-image link.

Brand sustainability indicates a special add value to the brand, enabling companies to build a brand image and distinguish it from the competitors (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Meffert, Rauch & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011). For that reason, brand sustainability helps consumers form positive perceptions of the brand (Hay, 2010; killer, 1993; Luchs, Naylor, Irwin & Raghunathan, 2010; Rossi, Pinto, Herter, & Gonçalves, 2016), leading to enhanced brand image (Hay, 2010; Lin, Lai, & Chen, 2015; Luchs, Naylor, Irwin & Raghunathan, 2010). Killer (1993) and Luchs et al., (2010) demonstrated that brand sustainability was established on the basis of benefits (one component of the brand image). Brand image and brand sustainability are interconnected because brand sustainability helps consumers understand the brand image (Hay, 2010; Killer, 1993; Luchs et al., 2010). Consumers prefer brands that have better sustainability (Trudel & Cotte, 2009; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006), it was considered in this study.

Previous literature have examined brand sustainability in the context of corporate financial services (Ogrizek, 2002), consumer participation in production (Radford & Simpson, 2009), tourism (Chen et al., 2011), brand loyalty and brand preference (Schultz & Block, 2015), brand strength and brand knowledge (Rossi et al., 2016), sustainable production in the manufacturing enterprises (MEs) and social enterprises (SEs) (Tam, 2016). However, there is limited evidence on the influence of brand sustainability on brand image (Chen et al., 2011; Kang & Hur, 2012; Lin, Lai, & Chen, 2015; Luchs et al., 2010; Ogrizek, 2002; Radford & Simpson, 2009; Rossi, Pinto, Herter, & Gonçalves, 2016; Schultz, & Block, 2015; Tam, 2016). In

this regard, Schultz and Block (2015), recommended further studies to include brand sustainability for the sake of branding development.

Brand credibility is the reliable information contained in the brand position, which provides what it promises (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Leischnig et al., 2012). According to Tirole (1990) and Leischnig et al. (2012), one of the important features of brand attributes is its credibility. Baek, Kim, and Yu (2010), Bhat and Reddy (2001), and Lau and Phau (2007) suggested that brand credibility can facilitate in achieving a higher position with regards to brand image. This is because credible information is an important component highlighting a brand position (Erdem & Swait, 2004), and brand image can be responsively enhanced by making it credible amongst its consumers (Doyle, 1989; Laforet, 2010). Erdem and Swait (2004), and Swait and Erdem (2007) contended that brand credibility affects consumers' choice of a particular brand. In short, effectiveness could be measured by credibility (Leischnig et al., 2012).

The recovery plan of the MH370 published after five months of the aircraft's disappearance (MAS, 2014) and the discrepancy in the reports given to the public (Gosling, & Ayres, 2015; Hodgson, et al., 2015; Sing, Loon, & Wei, 2014; Smith & Marks, 2014) did not correspond with brand credibility standards. In contrast, brand credibility stands in a position of accountability (Hilderbrandt, 2014) because the credibility of the brand is the afforded confidence level in the brand based on what it promised (Swait & Erdem 2007; Hovland et al., 1953; McGuire 1985; Ohanian, 1990). The confidence represents the validity of the information in the brand's position (Laforet, 2010; Rueckert et al., 1994;

Wemerfelt, 1988). Hence, MAS has lost the most significant element (point of strength) in the eyes of the public, which is brand credibility, which is fatal for any airline (Hilderbrandt, 2014).

Past studies have examined brand credibility with different subjects (Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010; Balmer, 2012; Bougoure, Russell-Bennett, Fazal-E-Hasan, & Mortimer, 2016; Eagar, 2009; Eisend, 2010; Haig, 2015; Jeng, 2016; Jin, Lee, & Jun, 2015; Lee, Kim, & Chan, 2011; Mileti, Prete, & Guido, 2013; Mathew, Thomas & Injodey, 2012). Even though Wang and Yang (2010) recommended further research on the relationship between brand credibility and brand image, such research which is still lacking even in recent years (Bougoure et al., 2016; Haig, 2015; Jeng, 2016; Jin, Lee, & Jun, 2015; Sheeraz, Khattak, Mahmood, & Iqbal, 2016).

Brand uniqueness is the differentiation between competing brands and superiority of a specific brand over another through the differences in the technical attributes (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Brand uniqueness helps distinguish competing brands in a consumer's mind (Netemeyer, Krishnan, Pullig, Wang, Yagci, Dean, & Wirth, 2004). According to Keller (2003) and Park (2009), brand uniqueness contributes positively to activating a brand image. Thus, a brand image can be examined through brand uniqueness (Park, 2009). Similarly, according to Albrecht et al. (2011) and Tian et al. (2001), brand uniqueness appears clearly in purchase decisions, properties and consumption method by consumers. Hence, consumers need to understand the unique character of a brand; the differences between the brands make it easier for consumers to categorise the brand (Laczniak et al., 2001).

In the context of MAS, because of the doubts that consumers had about whether MAS will be safe to fly with in the future, many of them turned towards its competitors (Hodgson et al., 2015). As a result, the MAS brand was no longer unique (Hodgson et al., 2015; Mao, 2015).

Past studies have examined brand uniqueness and quality evaluation, preferences, and brand and branding (Chan, Berger & Van, 2012; Gürhan, 2003; Irmak, Vallen & Sen, 2010; Lynn & Harris, 1997; Liang & He, 2012; Lin, Huang, & Lin, 2015; Southworth, Southworth, Ha-Brookshire, & Ha-Brookshire, 2016; Vieceli, 2011). However, past studies did not give much intention to examining the effect of brand uniqueness on brand image (Berger & Heath, 2008; Hsieh, 2002; Knight & Young 2007; Lin, Huang, & Lin, 2015; Ruvio, 2008; Southworth et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2001). Knight and Young (2007) indicated the need for further research to include brand uniqueness in the study of brand perceptions such as a brand image. However, to date, such call was neglected, motivating the present study to respond to it.

Word of mouth (WOM) can be considered a source of credibility (Brooks, 1957; Martensson, 2009; Richins, 1983). WOM can cause a fundamental change in the opinion and behaviours of consumers (Alexander, 2006; Brooks, 1957). It is important to understand that when WOM is compared with other communication elements, individuals become susceptible to be convinced, especially when the information comes from other consumers of the same brand (Kaikati, 2010). It should be noted that such communication modes can be highly critical for any brand regarding its image which led to the dysfunction the companies' activities

(Laczniak et al., 2001; Richins, 1984; Weinberger et al., 1981). According to Kim and Morrison (2005) and Martensson (2009), WOM is a communication tool with the potential to bring positive as well as negative influence. Similarly, Escalas and Bettman (2005) and Jang (2007) emphasised that consumers use a brand image which is compatible with their WOM reference groups to influence individual perceptions and purchase decisions.

In the case of MAS, a lack of information caused a wide spread of word of mouth for MAS (Hodgson et al., 2015), causing a series of events (Hodgson et al., 2015; Nel, 2014; RT, 2014). In due course, the company lost 40 percent of its clients in the first incident and 45 percent after the second incident (Hodgson et al., 2015; Nel, 2014; RT, 2014). This led to a cumulative 85 percent lost in profits during the second quarter of 2014 with 33 percent decrease in average weekly bookings during the same period (Hodgson et al., 2015). Previous literature has included WOM in brand research (Alexander, 2006; Jalilvand, Samiei, Dimi, & Manzari, 2012; Kaikati, 2010; Lovett et al., 2013; Yoo, Kim, & Sanders, 2015; You, Vadakkepatt, & Joshi, 2015). However, few studies have examined WOM and brand image together (Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz, & Feldhaus, 2015; Herold, Sipilä, Tarkiainen, & Sundqvist, 2016; Lovett et al., 2013; Jalilvand et al., 2012). Therefore, the present research aimed at investigating the impact of WOM on brand image.

Companies use branding for the purpose of identification and raising awareness of their brands (Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009; Meenaghan, 1995). Brand identity is a process which involves designing and delivering brands by companies (Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009). According to Bosch, Venter, Han

and Boshoff (2006), Konecnik and Go (2008) and Nandan (2005) brand identity and brand image provide conclusive evidence of an integrated system. Similarly, Shirazi, Lorestani, and Mazidi (2013) underlined that brand identity has several common advantages that brand attributes share and provide about communicating regarding the brand. Likewise, Nandan (2005) and Mårtensson (2009), noted that brand identity and WOM relate to the same function (i.e., Communication). In the case of an unexpected crisis, an airline company needs to restore its brand identity and image so that consumers' negative perception can be effectively transformed (Nel, 2014; Schmidt, 2014; Subedi, 2012). On this note, it can be asserted that brand identity is important because it can help airlines facing aircraft crash incidents to regain their brand image (Button, 2008; Hodgson et al., 2015; Nel, 2014; Shao et al., 2013; Subedi, 2012; Zhao et al., 2015).

Past studies have examined the relationship between brand identity and brand image (Bivainienė, 2007; Blomkvist, Johansson, & Lindeberg, 2012; Bosch et al., 2006; Farhana, 2014; Hatch, & Schultz, 1997; Janonis, Dovalienė, & Virvilaitė, 2007; Nandan, 2005). However, past studies did not examine brand identity as a mediator between brand attributes composed of brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and WOM on brand image. (Blombäck & Ramírez, 2012; Christodoulides & Jevons, 2011; Choi & Winterich, 2013; Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan & McDonald, 2005).

The effect of brand relevance has been examined on brand identity (Keller, 1998). Brand relevance can measure consumers' reactions and self-awareness of a brand image (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). Chan

et al. (2012) were of the view that specific features of brand attributes contribute to distinguishing brand identity such as brand relevance. However, previous literature provides no evidence on the impact of brand relevance on the brand image via brand identity (Albrecht et al., 2011; Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003; Bauer et al., 2007). Therefore, using brand relevance fills a gap of the need to study what contributes to brand image and brand identity directly and to test the mediating effect of brand identity on brand relevance and brand image for a better understanding of the relationships.

According to McEnally and de Chernatony (1999), one of the important elements in brand identity is the consistency of brands, which requires them being compatible and consistent in their propagation of identity, leading to confirm the meaning and values that are incorporated into the brand image. Brand consistency extends the understanding and awareness of the brand which in turn help achieve a better perception of consumers (Park et al., 1991). However, there has been a lack of study on the relationship between brand consistency and brand image in a brand identity-mediated model. In this regard, Kenyon, Manoli, and Bodet (2016) asserted that the variety of brand perception must be reduced to one consistent form to achieve a coherent identity and preserve a brand identity-image link. Therefore, the current study filled this gap by testing the mediating effect of brand identity on the relationship between brand consistency and brand image.

Sustainable consumption within societies helps develop an individual self-sustainability identity (Soror, 2010). A sustainability feature of a brand is therefore considered a healthy tool for distinguishing a brand from the competitors'.

However, past studies provide limited evidence on the influence of brand sustainability. As sustainable consumption within societies focuses on the choices that facilitate the procedures of sustaining a self-identity (Soror, 2010), there is a legitimate reason to examine brand sustainability in current research regarding social benefits the consumers will get from brand differentiation. Therefore, the current study contributes to the body of knowledge by testing the mediating effect of brand identity on the relationship between brand sustainability and brand image.

According to Haley (1985) and Ruth (2001), brand credibility is considered the most significant characteristic in identifying a brand. According to Laczniak and Ramaswami (2001), a brand identity can be achieved through clarity of brand uniqueness. Based on the previous discussion, using brand identity as a mediator of the relationship between brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and brand image in the current research is necessary. On a different note, consumers use brands that are compatible with their WOM reference groups. Even though WOM originates from brand identity (Martensson, 2009), the major empirical focus has remained confined to consumer attitudes/behaviours (East, Hammond & Lomax, 2008; Eckman, 2004; Jang, 2007; Laczniak et al., 2001; Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013). Therefore, to address these critical gaps, the present study examined the mediation of brand identity in the relationship between brand attributes, WOM, and brand image.

From theoretical perspectives, researchers have employed countless theories to understand and demonstrate consumer perceptions of the brand image (Petrauskaite, 2014). To date, some of these theories that have been used to

highlight this matter include grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), principal-Agent (Agency) theory (Eisenhardt, 1989), A theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943), congruity theory (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955), commitment-trust theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), information integration theory (Anderson 1981), and theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975), among others. Furthermore, other studies had been used communication theories to understand consumer attitudes, behaviors and perspectives toward brand image include agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), and correspondent inference theory (Jones, & Davis, 1965), among others. The reasons behind using different theories in the previous studies due to the complex nature of human behavior and the multiplicity nature of previous studies. Notably, the employed theory suitably corresponds with the unique nature of this study.

Brand image is the feelings or emotions of consumers about a particular brand of which they evaluate the quality of the products and services to make decisions (Gardner, 1965; Musante, 2000). Hence, the brand image gives consumers the ability to identify their needs and make brand decisions accordingly (Park et al., 1986). Notably, it also helps them differentiate the brand from its competitors (DiMingo, 1988; Reynolds & Gutman, 1984). Perceptions of an airline company's image are determined by how the company facilitates its consumers, ranging from flight booking, destination options, to in-flight services (Hodgson et al., 2015). These elements help consumers build commitment with them and also measure the level of brand attributes (Mizik & Jacobson, 2008). Tragedies that

occur to airlines seriously affect their brand image (Hodgson et al., 2015). According to Park (2009) and Roth (1992), the effective strategy regarding brand image can strengthen a brand's position in a competitive market.

Studies on airline companies and MAS, in particular, have looked at such components as suitability, price, comfort, safety, and consumer perceptions in understanding brand image (Agres & Dubitsky, 1996; Judson et al., 2012). However, past studies on MAS or airline companies in general have not specifically investigated brand features and consumer perceptions (Abeyratne, 2014; Chossudovsky, 2014; Gosling & Ayres, 2015; Harjani, 2014; Hodgson et al., 2015; Kaiser, 2014; Lee & Han, 2014; Mujeebu, 2015; Nel, 2014; Sing, Loon, & Wei, 2014; Smith & Marks, 2014; Tiwari & Kainth, 2014; Verrinder, 2014). In particular, there is a lack of research on brand attributes and WOM as a communication tool, brand identity, and brand image in a single research (Albrecht, et al., 2011; Alexander, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007; Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Berger & Heath, 2008; Bosch et al., 2006; Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003; Gerzema, Lebar, Sussman, & Gaikowski, 2007; Hodgson et al., 2015; Hsieh, 2002; Judson et al. 2012; Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012; Kaikati, 2010; Kang & Hur, 2012; Knight & Young 2007; Lovett et al., 2013; Luchs et al., 2010; Luo, Kannan & Ratchford, 2008; Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005; Nel, 2014; Netzer & Srinivasan, 2011; Raggio, Leone & Black, 2014; Saxton, 2011; Tian et al., 2001; Ruvio, 2008; Van, Vermeir, & Geuens, 2011; Wang & Yang 2010). Some scholars have recommended examining new variables in the case of MAS Airline (Hodgson et al. 2015; Nel, 2014; Zhao, Yuan, & Zhao, 2015).

Several studies have outlined the importance of brand image for airline businesses (Cretu & Brodie, 2007). Studies have also underlined the significance of catastrophes and brand position (Hodgson et al., 2015; Nel, 2014) and consumer preferences of a specific brand of an airline (Button, 2008; Shao, Chang, & Chen, 2013; Zhao, Yuan, & Zhao, 2015). Authors have also outlined that bad brand reputation weakens a brand image causing a decline in travellers' bookings (Hodgson et al., 2015; Nel, 2014). These propositions have outlined opportunities for further investigation, which this study sought to confirm. That is, the present research aimed at seeking an understanding of how the brand image could be measured by new conceptions.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the problem above mentioned, the present research aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ₁: Do brand attributes and WOM significantly influence brand image?

RQ₂: Do brand attributes and WOM significantly influence brand identity?

RQ₃: Does brand identity has a positive relationship with brand image?

RQ₄: Does brand identity mediate the relationships between brand attributes, WOM, and brand image?

1.3 Research Objectives.

Based on the research questions that was mentioned above, the general objective of the present study is to examine the influences of brand attributes and WOM indirectly by brand identity on the brand image and directly on the brand image (In the case of MAS as a brand). Specifically, the objectives of the present research can be deduced as follow;

RO₁: To examine the relationships between brand attributes, WOM and brand Image.

RO₂: To examine the relationships between brand attributes, WOM and brand identity.

RO₃: To assess the relationship between brand identity and brand image.

RO₄: To assess the mediating effect of brand identity on the relationship between brand attributes, WOM and brand image.

1.4 Scope of Research

The present research focused on brand image by examining the major causes that can trigger consumer perceptions. The study, while critically addressing the brand image issue recently faced by MAS, tested the constructs by involving travellers via two airports in the northern region of Malaysia, namely, Sultan Abdul Halim Airport (AOR) and Penang International Airport (PEN). Based on the Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad's annual report 2015, 6,977,785 passengers travelled

from these airports. Hence, conducting a survey at these airports of passengers travelling via MAS and other airlines was justified.

Also, it was expected that MAS passengers would be willing to share their experience and were capable of recalling their recent travel memories to gain insight into airline passengers in general and MAS customers in particular. Also, those who have not travelled with MAS could express their views about the MAS airline as prospective customers. Hence, these two airports were selected as the best choice to conduct the survey due to the overcrowding of passengers (i.e., local and international travellers) from different destinations given that Penang and Kedah are among the most visited places in Malaysia (Goh, 2015).

The study focused on the significance of changing perceptions towards brand image (Smith & Marks, 2014; Hodgson et al., 2015). The study offers critical prospects for the MAS airline on how to harness brand attributes and create a positive word of mouth. Accordingly, the study provides valuable implications for MAS concerning the importance of brand identity and how it can be capitalised to enhance brand image. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge and empirical evidence on the MAS airline to help address its brand image issue (Harjani, 2014), and hence to strengthen the market share, competitive position and financial position. By examining consumer perceptions, the current research strived to outline travellers' views about brand image of the MAS Airline.

1.5 Significance of Research

The present research offers significant contributions to theory and practice to the body knowledge of brand image. Specifically, the study does so by deploying attribution theory by Fritz Heider (1958) in outlining consumer perceptions about brand attributes and word of mouth in relation to brand image followed by the mediation of brand identity. Categorically, the significance is as follows:

1.5.1 Theoretical Contribution

The present research offers theoretical contributions to the existing body of knowledge, particularly to branding and brand image. The empirical evidence showed a positive influence of brand attributes and WOM on brand image and brand identity, thereby enriching the existing literature and knowledge. Despite the extant research on brand image (Aaker, 1996, 1997; Alwi & Kitchen, 2014; Batra & Homer, 2004; Biel, 1991; Bivainienė, 2007; De Chernatony et al., 2011; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Kapferer et al., 2002; Keller, 1998, 2003; Kotler et al., 2009; Magid et al., 2006; Mehta, 2012; Park, 2009; Romaniuk et al. 2012; Tu et al., 2013; Virvilaite & Dailydiene, 2012; Yoo et al., 2000), there is still a lack of research on the variables that could help restore and revive the lost image, brand worth, consumer perceptions, brand comparison, and purchase decisions. Past research, in short, did not give much attention to examining the association of brand image with other brand features (brand attributes) or WOM. Hence, the present research attempted to address a wider gap by incorporating brand attributes and WOM that have never been tested previously particularly in the case of the MAS airline crisis.

Accordingly, the present research also offers a new contribution to a wider theoretical conceptualization.

Moreover, the empirical evidence revealed that the positive relationship between brand attributes and WOM on brand identity could be explained by attribution theory (Heider, 1958). This theory proposes that individual perceptions can affect brand attributes (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2010) and help boost brand image. Attribution theory was also used in the current study to understand individual decision-making process based on their internal tendencies and/or external circumstantial attributes. Attribution theory obliges the correspondence between motivations and behaviours of individuals (Jones & Davis, 1965). Brand image represents a consumer's perceptions, which in turn affects brand attributes (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012). On the other hand, according to Harrison-Walker (2001), WOM comprises informally transmitted information from one person to another. Hence, WOM is relevant to attribution theory as an expression of individual attitudes, reactions and activities.

The applicability of attribution theory in this study is principally based on communication theories (Griffin, 2006, 2008) whereby brand identity and brand image can be seen as connected in an integrated communication system. Brand identity notably is the cornerstone of all communication activities (Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005) while WOM offers communication effectiveness (Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005). In a nutshell, all these relationships are assessed within the communication perspective (Griffin, 2006, 2008; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009;

Nandan, 2005). In perspective, attribution theory provides a systematic understanding of consumer attitudes (travellers) toward the MAS airline. Accordingly, it facilitates in outlining the relationship between brand attributes, word of mouth, brand identity, and brand image. It also supports the linkage between the variables directly and indirectly via brand identity. Notably, the study also provides support for the notion of brand reinforcement, consistent with the research by Jones and Davis (1965).

1.5.2 Practical Contribution

The present research provides a significant contribution by offering empirical support to the MAS airline brand issue in specific. The findings showed that airline businesses could help boost their brand image by focusing on brand attributes. The present study pointed out that these attributes are important for many companies including MAS to maintain their consumer base and/or regain its image. By harnessing consumer perceptions about the different features of a brand, a business can considerably enhance its brand image. This is also a highly important aspect of branding for airline businesses in particular. Secondly, the study validated the critical role of brand identity in the airline business. The findings showed that brand identity and brand attributes are important to develop a brand image.

Notably, the present study also provided evidence on the role of word of mouth. The findings suggested that individuals as consumers take a much greater influence from the information and knowledge that they receive from their social groups or people with prior experience of using the product or service. The finding

outlined that similar to other sectors and occupational settings, word of mouth can also influence and help boost brand image in the airline sector. By addressing the critical research gaps, the current study has a practical value for companies that aim to enhance or revive their brand image for better organisational outcomes.

The study provides evidence for airline companies to focus on brand features for the development, enhancement, and maintenance of their brand identity and brand image. The findings highlighted that MAS and other similar airline businesses could create a positive word of mouth for their services and brand to help keep their market share and returns intact. Likewise, WOM can play an important role for the MAS airline by evoking consumer perceptions and psychologically influencing them (Martenson, 2009; Nandan, 2005) to regain their lost consumer base and brand image.

Furthermore, brand attributes including brand relevance, brand consistency, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and WOM were found to affect brand image of MAS as perceived by travellers and MAS consumers in specific. The findings will help the MAS airline to understand and plan strategies for regaining the lost brand image. Button, (2008) outlined that competitive airlines depend on consumer preferences of specific brands. Hodgson et al. (2015) underscored some issues related to the MAS image such as safety as a necessity, brand reputation, consumer perspectives, and intention to fly with it. Similarly, Nel (2014) covered the aspects of brand image, revival of the lost reputation, and methods for handling unexpected crises to address the tragic incidents MAS experienced in 2014. The current study is a notable stride to address this issue empirically for the MAS airline. The study

also offers an understanding of how brand attributes, brand identity, and word of mouth can be capitalised to enhance brand image and manage issues related to it.

The results of this research would enable airlines to take appropriate measures to enhance their brand image by planning relevant strategies through identifying specific attributes of branding and converting the WOM among consumers to serve a company's interests.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter addressed Background of the study, problem statement, research questions and objectives along with scope of Research, significance and major theoretical and practical contributions on the topic. Chapter two talks about brand attributes, brand identity, WOM and brand image in detail through critical appraisal of the relevant literature. The chapter also mentions hypothesis and framework of the present study. Research methodology has been discussed in the third chapter wherein, research philosophy, and research design. Operational definitions, sampling, measurement scales and results of the preliminary tests are elaborated in detail. Following this, chapter four talks about data analysis and empirical findings extracted from the structural equation modeling. Lastly, chapter five provides discussion and concluding remarks on the findings of the current study. Particularly, the chapter also connects and compares the findings with prior studies to outline limitations and significance of the present study and recommendations pertaining to scope for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses previous literature related to the topic of the present research. The chapter starts with the explanation of the concept of brand image followed by history and its prospects. The chapter also offers critical appraisal of the important concepts and issues related to brand image. In addition, the review of this literature also discusses gaps for further empirical attention. Subsequently, empirical studies that explain the relationships between criterion, mediator, and predictor variables tested in the present study are also underscored in detail in the current chapter.

2.1 Definition and conceptualization of Brand Image

Brand as a concept has received a considerable attention in the marketing domain and has enriched the knowledge of marketing science and brand management (De Chernatony, et al., 2011). Brand has been previously examined through numerous organizational and work prospects (Aaker, 1996; Bivainienė, 2007; De Chernatony et al. 2011; Keller, 2003) whereby, researchers have paid much attention to the idea of brand image (Virvilaite & Dailydiene, 2012). The concept of the brand image has been studied for past six decades, considering its importance within the subject of marketing (Gardner & Levy, 1955). According to Gardner (1965) and Musante

(2000), brand image concerns with the feelings or emotions of consumers that evaluate the quality of the products to explain the best and worst ideas. The brand image is composed of the combined influence of the brand associations (Biel, 1991; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Keller, 1998, 2003; Park, 2009; Yoo et al. 2000). Aaker (1991) explains that brand association is connected with everything in consumer memory that relates to the brands. Keller (1993), Kuo (2012), and Park (2009) have outlined brand image as a perception about a brand which refers to brand associations preserved in consumer memory. Similarly, Kotler et al. (2009) defines the concept of brand image in terms of the approach that centered on the consumer issues.

Furthermore, brand image was considered as a collection of assets and liabilities that are associated with the brand name and value through the increase or decrease of the products or services (Magid et al., 2006; Mehta, 2012; Tu et al., 2013). Brand image is associated consumers' psychological perceptions regarding a specific brand (Batra & Homer, 2004). So, in order to form a brand image in consumers' minds these associations must be very healthy and strong (Keller, 1993). Thus, when the brand image is developed properly, the products of the brand exceeds the functional quality to a higher level of inference which allows the brands to be highly prestigious and ethical (Aaker, 1997; Batra & Homer, 2004; Finlay, 2012). Generally, consumers respond to different brand image depending on their previous experience with the brand (Bird et al., 1970). Companies depend on consumer reactions to the brand image in order to predict the future, therefore,

marketers are required to measure the expected level of the brand image through consumer response based on their previous usage (Romaniuk et al. 2012).

Additionally, brand image gives consumers the ability to identify their needs of the favorite brands (Park et al., 1986), thus, differentiate the brands from competitors (DiMingo, 1988; Reynolds & Gutman, 1984). For this reason, brand image, associations, attributes, identity, and personality differ from the conceptual point of view, yet they use the same description somehow (Alwi, & Kitchen, 2014; Franzen & Bouwman, 2001) Thus, powerful brand image gives numerous strategic advantages for companies (Park et al., 1986; Roth, 1992; Young, 1972). Generally, the development of brand image strategy within marketplace gives a life to the new product, therefore, brand image was successful and relevant to consumers' lives (Meenaghan, 1995). Nevertheless, the relationship between image and brand symbol are not visible, thus they relate to the image and symbols through benefit from needs, values, and lifestyles of consumers. This gives additional meaning and value, which distinguish the brand than the others (Broadbent & Cooper, 1987; Meenaghan, 1995).

Moreover, previous literature has provided a number of theoretical and practical evidences on the brand image by examining associations, features, and attribute of the brand image (Nandan, 2005). Systematic researches that assigned to shape brand image were logically seeking to determine brand image in a multidimensional way (Kapferer, et al., 2002). Hence, brand image is catered as a wide-range of experiences about a product by the consumers (Kapferer et al., 2002). Therefore, brand image has been studied by numerous researchers within different

subjects over the past decades. Forthcoming sections in a summarized form, explain multiple studies and the transformation in the domain of brand image since the early 1950s until the recent years.

During the 50s Boulding (1956) conducted a research to identify the criteria that could generate a positive brand image through management science theory (i.e. scheme theory search) in consumers' minds. A few years later during the 60s, research conducted by Herzog (1963), whereby, scrutiny in the behavioral sciences was performed to specify the sum total of impressions that consumers receive (i.e. Brand image) from many sources which result in the prominence (consumers behaviour), all of which combine to form A brand personality. Followed by study of Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), an overview of studies (summarized for previous research) was forwarded. It principally catered to the consumer behavior theory within a model (theoretical approach on individuals' behavior) and how they are related to the image represented on the basis of self-concept. While Dolich (1969) examined the similarities between brand image and self-image (i.e. what brands preferred by consumers) to determine the highest brands comparing to the lowest according to consumers' assessment (i.e. the relationships between real self-image and ideal self-image) for certain brands.

During the 80s Sirgy (1982), conducting an examination about the relationship between consumers' behavior (i.e. Self-concept) and brand personality (i.e. an element that affecting brand image), in providing assistance that will increase consumers' preference and their use for the brands. An ambiguous inquiry summarized in a title of 'What's in an image' conducted by Ditcher (1985) described

the brand image as the overall impression in the consumers' minds and also as the description of the products characteristics (i.e. not individual traits). Belk (1988) investigated the ability of brand personality in encouraging consumers to express themselves through their possessions of the brand, and what is the role of brand associations in that. Heading toward the 90s; Biel (1992) discussed the capabilities of the brand image through brand associations by connecting consumers with brands equity (in other words, consumer perceptions about brands are stimulated by a group of associations to connect them with the brands equity).

Furthermore, from a most familiar and extended research during the 90s; namely conceptualizing, measuring, and managing (CBBE) by Keller (1993), this study presented a conceptual model that explained the concept of brand equity and its measurement tools (i.e., CBBE) through brand associations. It also discussed how everything associated in the consumers' minds as a perspective towards a perception (i.e., brand image), which can be called 'The Attribute Levels'. Whilst Mosmans (1996), diving into through theoretical approach, in an attempt to link between the best tools which can be selected from marketing communications to promote the brand image by analyzing brand associations and the characteristics of the brand image. Also, Fournier (1998) argued on the validity of the relationships theory (i.e. the consumers within brand context) including a debate about the legitimacy of brand relationships as partners; an empirical support within consumers' commitment toward brands image, and provide a basis for brands differentiation. After six years of the previous study of CBBE, Keller (1999), came with different principles in respect of organizations procedures to create a unique

position for the brands in consumer minds (i.e. brand image). Accordingly, a brand mantra which is established to coincide with brand position (i.e. the organizations follows the mental bonding within this relation through its standards).

During the Millennium Yagci (2000) underscored the role of comparative advertising in consumers' responses (based on the persuasion knowledge model and the Characterization-Correction model). Therein, the mediator role of brand image and attribute relevance was also tested on the impact of advertising believability. From the historical and conceptual perspective, Nandan (2005) discussed the concepts of brand identity and brand image from a communications perspective (what the motivations to select products by consumers). Derived from the primary motivation in terms of communications role (i.e. unifying brand identity and brand image), communications contribute to the provision of brand identity (by organizations) to promote the brand image (to consumers). Likewise, Bivainienė, (2007) outlined coherence between brand image and marketing communications after theoretical literature analysis. Therein, he explored the brands impact on the largest number of users and the compatibility extent with the brand share; (i.e. "CBBE" must be High, because low share in 'CBBE' will cause decrease in brand share with fewer users). In line with historical approaches, Park (2009) based on the Keller "CBBE" model, outlined studies related to brand image that also relate to the present study (antecedents and Consequences of Brand Image: Based on Keller's CBBE) as well, clarified the consequences of these studies.

In the recent years, modern research can be outlined on brand image. Sonnier and Ainslie (2011) investigated the overall features of the brand image and

its impact on consumer evaluate (using a bayesian model "simulate selection-factor") the brand image value (willingness of consumers to pay more for brand image associations). The researchers found that there is great value for the specified dimensions for the brand image by controlling the overall brand effect with a higher order of factor decomposition. Whilst, Bravo, Montaner and Pina (2012) focused on the role of marketing communications in promoting the concept of brand image (construct, analyzing by corporations), also consumer approach (associations that influence consumer behavior), to determining the brand image for financial corporate. The results confirm that consumer perceptions relied on brand knowledge, non-fixed communication, and, to a less extent, advertise. The outcome image will be a precedent for the global position of the company, directly and indirectly.

In addition, Dolnicar et al. (2012), investigated the reasons that weakens the stability in the brand image studies (stems from the indiscriminate choice of the measurable instrument, and non-systematic) which affects customers' judgment to give a true feedback about the correct associations. The authors found that the stable brand-attributees are in fact found to be much higher (70%), thus outperforming the measures commonly used in industry (Pike- any 41%) and the academic community (scale of 7 points, 59%). Under optimum simulation conditions, the binary option makes a forced choice to stabilize 90% of the brand association attribute, so it is recommended as the optimal answer form for brand image studies. With a different point of views, Kuo (2012) examined the factors that impact the brand image (influenced by consumers from their value perception, self-brand connection, and

brand trust) and green brand loyalty (technological products) through the relationship between green brand image, brand identity, perceived value and brand loyalty. The study results indicated that brand products that have a positive image associated with environmental apprehension can promote perception of brand value. Also, brand identity has the mediation effect to activate the contact between the green brand image with brand loyalty.

A promotion represented by advertisements take a place in the research conducted by Mehta (2012) tested the comparative influence (by ten advertisements) of communication in ads on the perceived brand image from consumers' perspective (using Logistic regression analysis) in India. The results indicate a relationship between the nature of the communication and the image of the brand. The purpose of comparative advertising is to seek the superiority that indicates individual values, selfishness and low-context communications. The research of Yu-TeTu et al., (2013) focused on the scrutiny of the identical services for the brand image, and its extension, as well brand salience on the mutual image (customer commitment and loyalty), finally; performance of the brand associations (through automobile sector in Taiwan). The results showed that corporate brand image greatly affects customers perceived value, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. The value of perceived customers has a powerful impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty to the sample. Customer satisfaction greatly affects customer loyalty.

The corporate image is yet to be examined and studied though, which was to a certain extent addressed by Alwi, and Kitchen (2014). They examined the projection of the corporate brand image on the behavioral response (positive

recommendations 'word of mouth' about corporate brands) within business schools through cognitive brand attributes (services or education quality attributes) or emotional features (personal attributes of corporate brands). The findings discovered that both components of cognitive and emotional attitudes are equally important in shaping the image of a corporate brand. Moreover, when the influence of mediation is investigated, the positive recommendations of students to schools largely depend on their emotional (adventurous, prestigious, empathetic and efficient) rather than on the characteristics of cognitive brand attributes.

Another interesting study conducted by Ya-Hui and Cing-Fen (2014) examined the relationship between brand image and purchase intention. In specific the study investigated about the relationships that can affect brand image (i.e. perceived quality, perceived risk, perceived value, and purchase intention) an adoption case of the Mutual Funds), as well as to examined the effects of demographic variables on this five dimension. Research results show considerable relationships between brand image, perceived value, perceived quality, and intent of purchase. the brand image actually increases investors buy intentions. Buying intent is mainly influenced by perceived quality, not from perceived risk. Fashion-related brands another topic was covered by Cho and Fiore (2015), this study focused on the brand image conceptualization and highlighting its comprehensive nature, the researchers implemented their methodology on the basis of industry and academic literature evaluation, therefore, the analysis was from qualitative records from depth interviews.

Sasmita, and Mohd Suki, (2015), addressed several categories in the brand area, namely 'brand association, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand image' in order to review their effects on brand equity. Which were found to be highly interrelated. In a parallel period of time Suryonaningsih, Paramita, and Hasiholan, (2016), enquired if the product brand performance meets consumers' expectations, where the main focus of this study was to consumer satisfaction and buying decision as intervening based on different factors, specifically the effect of brand image and price of the brand product. Customer satisfaction largely depends on the performance of the brand compared to the price which in turn boosts purchasing decision. Last but not the least, Evaluations of brand image and country of manufacture (COM) is from recent studies conducted by Allman, Fenik, Hewett and Morgan, (2016), the researchers examine on how country of manufacture, brand concept, and vertical line extension (VLE), in an interactive manner can affect the evaluations of brand image in case that the brands introduce another product in their current product categories, the study build on schema congruity theory in order to develop a theoretical framework and approve it using experimental methods.

Based on past studies it can be concluded that there had been several studies (e.g., Allman, Fenik, Hewett and Morgan, 2016; Alwi, & Kitchen, 2014; Bivainienė, 2007; Bravo, Montaner & Pina, 2012; Cho and Fiore 2015; Keller, 1993; 1999; Nandan, 2005; Park, 2009; Suryonaningsih, Paramita, and Hasiholan, 2016), on the influence of different individual and organizational factors that could

influence brand image. This gave the present research an opportunity of conducting and implementing brand attributes, WOM on the brand image.

2.2 The Importance of brand image

Marketing literature has focused on brand image from consumers' perspective, which is found within a concept of consumers absorb (i.e., a phenomenon of self-cognitive) that generated from consumers' interpretations whether it's emotional or intellectual (Bivainienė, 2007). Scholars have defined brand image differently. Aaker (1991) defines brand image as a set of systematic methodological associations in a meaningful manner. Park et al. (1986) mentioned brand image as a comprehension of the consumer's proceedings of the organizations (business activities). Also, brand image is described as a position in the marketplace which is formulated clearly in consumer's minds (Nandan, 2005). Brand image was formed based on consumer awareness through remembering of the brand associations (Nandan, 2005).

In view of the foregoing, consumers become familiar with brand association. Keller (1993) determined three components that create brand associations which includes attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Thus, brand image is composed of several influences of the brand associations (Biel, 1991; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Keller, 1998, 2003; Park, 2009; Yoo, et al., 2000). Likewise, Aaker (1991) have illustrated brand associations as everything that relates to the consumer memory on brands, in accordance with three components of brand associations which include attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Keller, 1993). Similarly,

Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) explained that attitude is a willingness to behave favorably or unfavorably under a normal circumstance towards an entity or something. Moreover, the brand attitude has been examined repeatedly by several researchers (Blomkvist et al., 2012; Chen, 2001).

Moreover, the brand attitude has been examined repeatedly by several researchers (Blomkvist et al., 2012; Chen, 2001). Other researchers like Dobni and Zinkhan, (1990) were of the opinion that consumers perceive the brand image not equally based on their differences in understanding and previous experiences. Therefore, attitudes have consisted three components which were cognitive (knowledge of the consumers or their beliefs about the brand), affective (emotions and feelings) and contrive, (the tendency of consumers to take certain actions), regarding brands. So, attitudes have a direct effect on the brand image (Faircloth, et al., 2001).

Furthermore, brand images are designed with a concept of symbolism which links an individual with desirable groups (term of the desired self-image) and brands with the pictorial representation that facilitate communication with individuals (Nandan, 2005). Ultimately, brand image is a group of multi-functional advantages (both tangible and intangible) which enables consumers to recognize brands 'products and services' (Bivainienė, 2007). This implies that brand image is associated with consumers in terms of attitudes and values, company and customer (Bivainienė, 2007). In view of this, it can be noticed that, MAS as the national carrier of Malaysian airlines has lost its reputation and image mainly due to the two incidents of 2014 (Iyengar, 2015; Kaiser, 2014). Those incidents severely affected

the Malaysian sovereign wealth fund and the entire Asian region (Hodgson et al., 2015). Therefore, the remediation and revival of the MAS image contributes in identifying the emotional needs and preferences of its consumers (Nel, 2014).

Subsequent to the two fatal incidents, MAS holds no department to handle crisis of this magnitude, rather it was handled by the central administrators of (MAS) which issues that heats the disappearance of the plane (MH-370) was handled by non-professional through flopping and cruelty way of informing the families who lost their loved ones via 'SMS' (Iyengar, 2015; Kaiser, 2014; Mujeebu, 2015; Sing, Loon, & Wei, 2014; Tiwari, & Kainth, 2014). Similarly, MAS did not provide any information to the press, committed confidentiality which does not comply with crisis management, even after one year of the disaster; the secrecy still surrounded the lost plane (Iyengar, 2015). Furthermore, after the crash of the aircraft (MH-17), many concerns were raised about the decline in the stock price for MAS, prompted the international press, writers, and bloggers to launch specific concepts in order to determine the economic responses about the crash, this global response covered the perspectives of humanity, political aspects, and the consideration of international relations (Abeyratne, 2014; Chossudovsky, 2014; Gosling, & Ayres, 2015; Hodgson et al., 2015; Mao, 2015; Nel, 2014; Tiwari, & Kainth, 2014).

In addition, the communication process between MAS, Airforce, and the government was uncoordinated. Hence, such uncoordinated responses to the crisis became a crisis in itself, and further damaged the band image (Hilderbrandt, 2014; Nel, 2014). Another frustrating issue on this matter was that the recovery plan was

not made public until August 2014 (Gosling, & Ayres, 2015; Kaiser, 2014; MAS Recovery Plan, 2014; Sing, Loon, & Wei, 2014). As a result, MAS lost significant elements (point of strength) in the eyes of the public such as brand credibility which is vital for any airline (Hilderbrandt, 2014). Despite numerous pronouncements by the airline management, emphasizing that passenger safety is their top priority regardless of everything yet the passengers still entertain fears in their minds and doubts whether the company will be safe to fly with in the future. Such efforts hardly improved passengers' views and perceptions and consequently caused a change in the financial situation, as figures indicate that MAS lost most of its customers to the benefit of its competitors such as Singapore Airlines and Air Asia (Hodgson et al., 2015).

Sadly, another floppy step by MAS administration was that it reduced its staff by 30 percent equivalent to 6000 employees out of approximately 20,000 employees, as part of its plan for financial rescue and reform, which was estimated at \$ 1.7 billion, which have also reflects bad reputation on it (Iyengar, 2015). Subsequent to this, the reputation and image of MAS Airline became deplorable as a result of these incidents (Hodgson et al., 2015; Mao, 2015). However, the financial report of Malaysian Airlines (2014) stated a net deficit of \$ 433 million in lost during the first quarter 2014 compared to a deficit of \$ 279 million in 2013 as in the same period. Well, about \$ 576.11 million was lost as at the end of the third quarter of 2014 compared to a loss of \$ 375 million in 2013 during the same period of time (Hodgson et al., 2015). These deficits led to the shrink in profit and the airline was reported to have losses \$ 1.6 million on daily basis daily, leading

towards the shortage of cash resources by the end of 2015, All were as a result of lost in the brand image (Herald, 2014; Nel, 2014; Verrender, 2014).

It should be obvious to note that there is no shortcut in a realistic way with regards to improving the brand image in terms of (techniques, characteristics, and attributes of the product or service), but it can be done through promotion of what is in the consumers' minds about this product or service (Richardson et al., 1994; Wang & Tsai, 2014; Zeithaml, 1988). Likewise, brand image has been examined in different studies which covers measure and classified by many researchers, without the existence of a specific agreement or scale to measure brand image (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). For this reason, the brand image was measured and examined through other dimensions in different subjects (MAS image), product categories or its cultivars (Low et al., 2000; Park, 2009). Brand image influences the turnout of consumers to buy products or services that are associated with the positive brand image. This is because the positive brand image has a positive impact of low potential risk to consumers (Akaah, & Korgaonkar, 1988; Rao & Monroe, 1988). It also increases the actual value to the consumers (Aghekyan et al., 2012; Fredericks & Salter, 1998; Loudon & Della, 1993; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2000; Wang & Tsai, 2014).

2.3 General factors that influence brand image

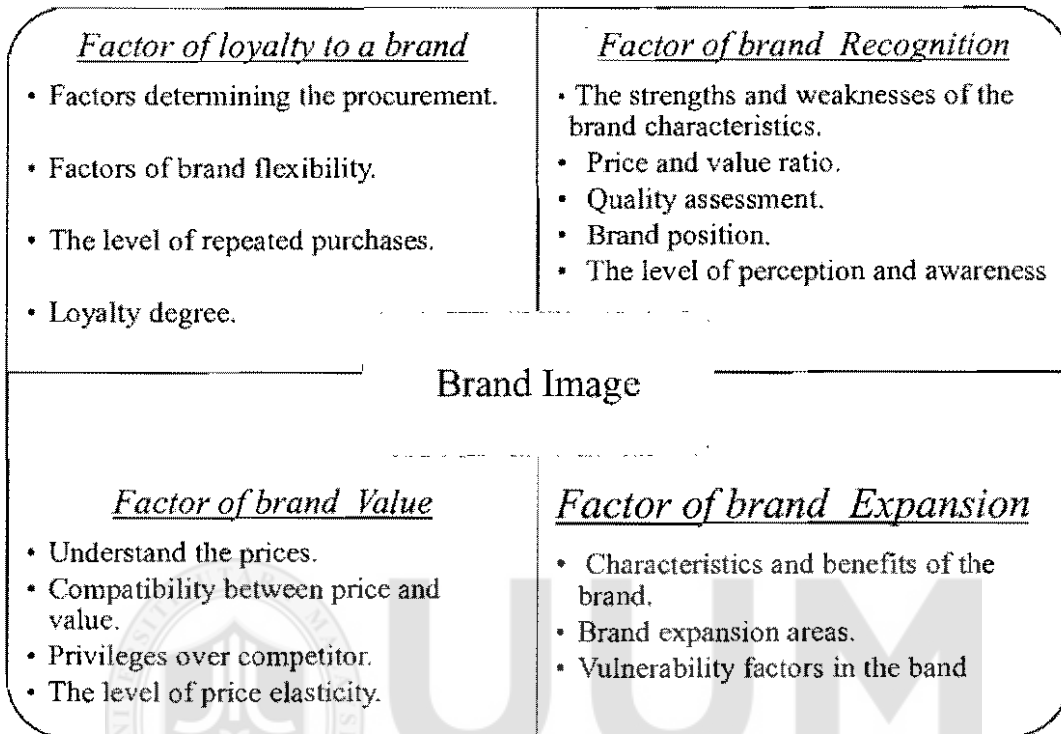
Fundamentals factors that determine the targeted markets are the elements that affect the image have been categorized in to external and internal factors.

2.3.1 External Factor

The external factors are aimed at scrutinizing the consumer's perspective towards brand image. (Scott, 2001) has asserted that brand image consisted of four factors which are loyalty, recognition, value, and expands. Figure 2.1 indicates how each of these elements impacts the consumer depending on the organizations plan (Scott, 2001). The first aspect has focused on loyalty which explains about an increase in the level of consumers re-purchases to specific brands. Therefore, the brand has become part of the key attributes of communication (factors determining the procurement, factors of brand flexibility, the level of repeated purchases, loyalty degree). The second aspect is recognition, which concerns with maintaining the relationship with consumers to measure the degree of awareness and perception toward a brand image in consumers' minds; (The strengths and weaknesses of the brand characteristics, price and value ratio, quality assessment, brand position, the level of perception and awareness).

The third aspect was resting on values which focuses on the advantages of goods and services in comparison with the competing brands, price proportionate to consumer's purchasing power and the degree of benefit accruing from goods and services compared to the paid price. (understand the prices, compatibility between price and value, privileges over competitor and the level of price elasticity). While the fourth aspect outlines brand expansion in terms of the brand characteristics and its benefits to consumers; market share for brands and the strengths and weaknesses of these brands. (Characteristics and benefits of the brand, brand expansion areas, vulnerability factors in the band).

Figure 2.1 External Factors Affecting the Brand Image



Source: Scott, (2001)

These four elements in principle are catered as organizational activities which provides the ability to maintain a relationship with consumers, which was considered through brand image and it reveals measurable characteristics. These elements are a combination of both tangible (physical) and intangible (emotional) elements.

2.3.2 Internal Factor

The internal factors relate to the core components of the brand image which includes, brand associations (Park, 2009). Thus, brand image is formed based on the joint effect of the brand association (Biel, 1991; Dobni, & Zinkhan, 1990;

Keller, 1998, 2003; Park, 2009; Yoo et al. 2000), and coherent systems (Farquhar & Herr, 1993). This system forms a link in consumers' memory which represents the concepts (brand associations and objects, such as brand or attributes). Such a link represents the relationships between these concepts as either active or passive, weak or strong (Keller, 1998; 2003). According to Park (2009) brand association is informational joint related to a brand joint that is installed with the brand concept in the consumer mind. While, Aaker (1991) has indicated that, brand associations include 'assets and liabilities' that are linked with the consumers' memory regarding the brand. Likewise, Keller (1998) observed three categories of brand associations (strength, favorability, and uniqueness).

Therein, the first is connected with attributes that are further divided into two parts. The first was related to product attributes (components and features), while the second related to product attributes (price, user imagination, usage imagination, emotions, experiences and personality). The second category is connected with benefits which were also divided into two parts; (1) functional advantages (health benefits) and (2) symbolic (fashion abilities). While the third category is connected with attitudes where the consumer made a full assessment of positive brand image, created by the organization's strategies combine with favorable, unique, and powerful associations. However, these brands reflect upon consumers' memory (Keller, 2003; Park, 2009). The third category is attached to brand associations which is divided into marketers and consumers for the purpose of distinguishing, extending, and positioning the brands (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995),

whereas the consumers retrieve information from the memory and assistance in the purchase decision (Aaker, 1991; Low & Lamb Jr, 2000; Vieceli, 2011).

The second part has to do with brand personality which explain that, brand image elements express the brand personality, as a result of this brand personality can be labelled as (youthful, colorful, and gentle), these attributes arise as a result of the basic conclusions about primary user or usage situation (Keller, 1993). Similarly, brand personality attributes reflect the emotions and feeling (consumer action) energized by the brand (Keller, 1993; Plummer, 1985; Raaijmakers & Shiffrin, 1981). Moreover, Keller (1993) has pointed that brand associations are formed through brand information and historical experience of the marketers or from other sources of influence (Jean, 2008). Another important aspect is brand personality which refers as the level of strength and character based on the image, historical consistency, and brand ability (Aaker, 1996; Yagci, 2000).

The third aspect is to examine the brand identity where previous literature addresses brand image and brand identity individually or collectively (Nandan, 2005). Which they both, used to give similar meaning (Ind, 1990). Therefore, brand identities are methods and means used by the companies to identify and raise the awareness of their products, image dealt with the results of companies' efforts to consumers to describe their products or brands (Blomkvist et al., 2012). Furthermore, consumers have become more aware of the nature of products and overall brands (Margulies, 1977). For these, companies have focused on brand identity to enhance brand image among consumers (Blomkvist, et al. 2012). Summarily, companies send their messages (identity) and consumers receive these

messages (image), meaning that what is sent (Causes) will be the effect (Results). These ideas between image and identity were considered acceptable with every standard of the brand image (Meenaghan, 1995). The fourth aspect is the brand name and majority of consumers' resorts to brand name as reference information in their assessment of the product quality (Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986). So brand name alone contains detailed information about the products. This information comes through the promotion, word of mouth, and accumulated experience from using the products brand which contributes in consolidating brand image to the consumers (Jacoby & Olson, 1985; Porter, & Claycomb, 1997; Stokes, 1974).

2.4 General Overview of Brand Attributes.

Brand appears as a multi-attributed component which represents a set of characteristics associated with benefits and preferential desires for consumers (Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973). Consequently, brand attributes are formed within several models that handle strengths and weak points and requires the variables to determine several questions such as how much the effectiveness of these attributes reflects in the models? This together required formulation of the model in line with awareness and understanding of the attitudes and their structure (Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973). Thus, attributes are surrounded by individuals and processes which are related to regulatory marks (Harvey et al., 2014). In this regard, Martinko et al. (2006) was of the opinion that brand attributes lead an important role in the basic behavior in institutional psychology (i.e., individual differences and interactions between leaders and members) (Harvey et al., 2014).

According to Dillon et al. (2001) consumers rely on the original source in brand, but with the increase of experience, consumers' have mainly relied on attributes that were characterized by several features including, meaningful, relevant, and valuable to individuals it becomes different with other competitors especially in the expensive products (Raggio et al., 2014). In other words, when brands are different from other competitors and its characteristics are irrelevant, the hidden benefits will make consumers perceive the brands negatively on the basis of these attributes, as a result of non-independent thinking and avoid the cognitive effort (Carpenter et al., 1994; Yagci, 2000).

Moreover, consumers are classifying the brands according to their attributes which may be incompatible with the concept of behavioral processes, which were accomplished in accordance with what has been conceived in the memory (Dillon et al., 2001). Conversely, Anderson (1983) explains that, memory is composed of a network of node and linkages between these contracts, the 'Nodes' represent the concepts (brand associations and objects, such as brand or attributes), while the 'links' represent the relationships between these concepts whether it is active or passive, weak or strong for the purpose of the brand. Therefore, consumers have a brand node with a diversity in an association related to these nodes; such as, attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Keller, 1998).

In addition, consumers were generally exposed to several brand names through various means of advertisement, which affect their choice on the suitability of the brand. Therefore, the effect will be through the mechanisms of memory measurement of recall and recognition (Chung, 2001). This has been evidently

reported in cognitive psychology that "individuals are acting unconsciously sometimes due to the implicit effects on behavior and memory" based on a particular pattern of information (Chung, 2001; Jacoby, & Kelley, 1987). Moreover, Mitchell (1982) has explained that work attributes comprises of a certain minimum proportion of variation within the causal explanations. While Lord (1995) has underlined that, attributes theory does not depend on upon the rational information process, but rather relies on individual's perspective by a cognitive process, and hidden assumptions through their causality perceptions (Harvey et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Carpenter et al. (1994) has pointed out that the principle of informative in communication theories describes how consumers estimate the value of irrelevant information. For that reason, irrelevant attribute makes a selection decision more easily for consumers (Griffin, 2008; Kalra & Goodstein, 1998; Yagci, 2000). In view of that, MacInnis and Nakamoto (1991) confirmed the importance of brand-specific attributes when consumers evaluate brands and its extensions on the basis of similarity among products. Consequently, consumers residing brand-specific attributes and parent brand's image based on the suitable brand extension and product-based likeness (Bhat, 1992). Scholars have argued that brand image considered as an impression that affects consumers' perceptions and beliefs, which were affected by brand attributes (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012;).

Previous studies have addressed brand image with numerous factors (Aaker, 1991; Bivainienė, 2007; De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; De Chernatony &

Dall'Olmo, 1998; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1999). It is important to mention that, the brand image was driven by the joint effect of the brand association (Park, 2009). Hence, brand associations contain different components of the brand image. These include relevant product attributes which are essential components for products or services brand to perform the function required by the consumers. Second, irrelevant product attributes which are external environment factors that relates to goods or services in regards to their purchase and consumption (Keller, 2003). Also, it is important to consider that, brand associations are of three main categories: attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Keller, 1998).

However, there are many forms of differences that were found within these categories based on the quality nature of their association (Keller, 1998). These are specific, attributes that describe the features that distinguish a product or service brand from one another (Myers & Shocker, 1981). Therefore, the users' imagery attributes are built through consumer experience regarding the market perception, brand communication, or word of mouth (Keller, 1993; Varey, 2002). The brand image and attribute association consists joint effect towards attributes, which reflects the value estimated by the consumers for each specific attribute. In other words, the effect of attribute in emotional impression permeates the brands - which gives a classification with specific dimensions (Dillon et al., 2001; Sommer & Ainslie, 2011).

The fundamental attributes are physical properties of the product brand such as product compatibility, durability, features, performance, and reliability (Zeithaml, 1988). On the other hand, these attributes were considered as an external

cause of the product 'brand image, and company reputation' (Ya-Hui & Cing-Fen, 2014). Similarly, the responses of the brand image association can be determined when it is higher than expected (Romaniuk et al., 2012). Otherwise, they tend to get misunderstood and mis represented thus, affecting the marketing effectiveness (Castleberry & Ehrenberg, 1990; Keller, 1993; Romaniuk et al., 2012; Romaniuk & Sharp 2000). In due course, brand attributes or features that differentiate the brand's characteristics in consumers' minds (Keller, 1993; Myers & Shocker 1981). According to Keller (1998), the brand attributes can be classified and addressed in different subjects (brand identity and brand image).

Noticeably, previous literature examined brand attributes under various topics, such as systematic analysis on the multi-attribute, attitude within the brands, categories in the marketing competitiveness environment, conducted by (Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973). Similarly, a model that includes a hypothetical extension of various brands can be used to determine the role of attributes brand parent in measuring the initial consumers' assessment of brand extension, tested by (Bhat, 1992). Brand attributes and brand identity share the same function both are originates from companies, a brand identity can be expressed by brand attributes; because brand attributes or features differentiate the brand's characteristics in consumers' minds, where investigated by Keller, (1993) and Myers & Shocker (1981).

Previous studies that were conducted on marketing research highlighted in formations that associate consumers' preferences to a particular brand or brand attributes (Sonnier & Ainslie, 2011). Whereas, Luo et al. (2008) have explained in

their model that the effect of self-perceptions of product attributes which is relevant to specific functions. In addition, Swait, Erdem, Louviere, and Dubelaar, (1993) in their study focused on the measurement of brand equity on the basis of consumer behaviour theory. Specifically, they developed a choice experiments which account for product attributes, brand name, and brand image that built upon time by product experiences and advertising, brand perceptions of consumers and preferences. Conclusively, their study developed an expression on how to choose between the total benefit of brand attributes and self-brand image. Several researches proposes that consumers are capable of interpreting the significance of the brand attribute (Gilbride et al. 2005; Netzer & Srinivasan, 2011; Sonnier & Ainslie, 2011). Subsequently, previous studies have addressed brand image with different factors (Aaker, 1991; Bivainienė, 2007; De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo, 1998; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 1999). It should not be over-emphasized to mention that, the brand image was driven by the joint effect of the brand association (Park, 2009).

Hence, brand associations contain different components of brand image comprises of relevant as well as irrelevant product attributes (Keller, 2003). Brand attributes and brand identity share the same function as both originates from company's brand identity and are expressed by brand attributes. (Keller, 1993; Myers & Shocker 1981). In view of Zeithaml, (1988) the fundamental attributes are physical properties of the product brand such as (product compatibility, durability, features, performance, and reliability). In parallel, Keller (1998), explains that brand attribute can be classified and addressed in different subjects, such as brand

identity and brand image. Therefore, the hypothesized interrelationships between brand attribute and brand image and brand identity are as follows:

Yogic (2000), used two types of advertisement methods to compare the moderating effect between brand images and attribute relevance which can also be used for underlining mediating effect between advertisement belief and experience. Thus, determining the influence of brand names on the attitude and brand name on brand extension can be examined; as indicated in the research by (Chung, 2001). These types examine the impact of moral attributes on brand, personality and test the relationship between consumers and brands through the uses of two marketing concepts developed by Jean-Ruel, (2008), Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998). Thus, address the functional relationships in the marketing environment and examine the structural relations between store image attributes and consumer satisfaction groups, where addressed by (Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009). These, measure the predictive ability of attributes in an organizational context (Individual response to the organizations inquiry) through meta-analysis of attribution theory, implemented by (Harvey et al., 2014). Subsequently, researchers have examined how consumers use the brand attributes' information and relevance development possibility over time, based on Dillon's expectations, as revealed from previous study (Raggio et al., 2014).

Despite these theoretical and empirical attempts, previous literature has not considered examining the influence brand features and attributes on the brand identity or on the brand image. (e.g., Bivainienė, 2007; Blomkvist, Johansson & Lindeberg, 2012; Bravo, Montaner & Pina, 2012; Dolnicar, Rossiter, & Grün,

2012; Mehta, 2012; Mosmans, 1996). Furthermore, according to Nandan (2005), even if there is a research on the features of brand attributes, brand identity, and brand image, the scholars have not strived to study all of them together in one research (e.g., Gerzema, Lebar, Sussman, & Gaikowski, 2007; Luo, Kannan & Ratchford, 2008; Netzer & Srinivasan, 2011; Raggio, Leone & Black, 2014). Hence, for a better understanding of these relationship, the present research intended to assess the relation of certain features of brand attributes (i.e., brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, and brand uniqueness) with brand image and brand identity directly, and to test the mediating effect of brand identity between brand attributes features and brand image. On the other hand, through a comprehensive review of literatures, a weak bonding was outlined amongst these relationships (e.g., Bhat, 1992; Chung, 2001; Harvey et al., 2014; Jean-Ruel, 2008; Keller, 1993; Myers & Shocker 1981; Raggio et al., 2014; Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009; Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973; Yogie, 2000).

2.5 The Influential variables (Endogenous)

2.5.1 Brand Relevance

Companies are generally distinguished based on their brand features when compared with their rivals. Brands which do not fulfill this criterion of the presence objective became irrelevant (Bauer et al., 2007). These attributes are different when product performance was not important and attributes were irrelevant (Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003; Carpenter et al., 1994). Hence, the irrelevant attributes within the brand contribute in increasing consumers' attention and perception in other

brands (Bauer et al., 2007). In due course, brands are promoted through communication which concentrates on differences in attributes (Albrecht et al., 2011). Therefore, performance attributes are classified as more significant on dimensions that are related to associations of brand name (Albrecht et al., 2011; Wänke et al., 2007). In a broader aspect, the strategy of brand relevance composed from additive properties of essential products such as additive innovations, to create presentations that determine new classes or subset (Aaker, 2012). Hence, brand relevance is an important instrument that measures consumers' reactions toward a particular brand (Gerzema, Lebar, Sussman & Gaikowski, 2007; Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2014).

Furthermore, brand relevance was found through competitive successes, which highlights the irrelevant competitor's products (Aaker & Jacobson, 2001). In addition, it underlines the ability of brands to be meaningful in order to get consumer acceptance (Agres & Dubitsky, 1996). Also, it has the ability to measure consumer reactions and to measure consumer self-awareness regarding the brand image (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). This in turn affect each brand attributes due to the brand image as a source of consumers' perceptions about the brand (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012). In addition to this, the BAV model by young and Rubicam (2000) was developed with five dimensions which includes relevance; which is consumer estimation on brand as it relates to the marketplace, penetration and strength (Gerzema et al., 2007; Mizik & Jacobson, 2008). Moreover, the value of brand attitude was not assessed through previous research in high-tech markets (Aaker & Jacobson, 2001). The

fundamental strategy of brand relevance was developed to determine the concepts that can be able to determine a new category or a subset (Aaker, 2012).

Previous literatures have discussed brand relevance in different ways through evaluation of brand attitude as an attribute of value relevance on the brand equity; the study was conducted through computer companies by (Aaker & Jacobson, 2001). Another research aimed to examine the effect of irrelevant attribute on brand communication, unique brand, fair price, and consumers' intention to buy the brand, tested by (Bauer et al., 2007). In the next research, that examined how to attribute of communications effectiveness in marketing can influence consumer perceptions in their assessment of distinguishing the brands (Albrecht et al., 2011). Tracking the progress of research, a search was focused on how to win competitive advantage through the association of the brand relevance over the rivals through functional benefits, innovation, and creativity in the brand; and to create common interests between consumers by inventor of ideas (Aaker, 2012). It will also consider the importance of self-perception by consumers with regards to brand relevance and its effect on satisfaction with social communication (brand, brand community). It was established that, there is an impact on brand image, marketing communications, and comprehensive marketing strategies by (Judson et al., 2012) .

In recent years; another interested study combined between consistency and relevance conducted by Beverland, Wilner and Micheli (2015), as this research revealed that the growth of brand equity depends on rational judgments of brand managements thru maintaining the existing brand identity across consistency under

a condition of maintaining relevance, as a consequence, a change must be done on the innovation. The researchers interested in showing how design thinking activate brand ambidexterity thru the three-stage procedure and identifying eight practices in order to observe how designers allow brand managers to handling the tensions between enduring consistency-relevance in seek of reviving the brand without weakening its essence. One year after; Gomes, Fernandes, and Brandão (2016), search within the factors that determined brand relevance in the context of service purchasing in a B₂B. Specifically, the main discussion focused on the significant role of brands as a key factor in the competitive advantage in regards to purchasing decisions, the researcher gave a major intention to analyze the brand relevance in (B₂B) in terms of key determinants and its purchase setting. At a subsequent date, Jin-Song, and Liuning (2016), conducted an investigation on the negative impact of brand relevance and brand familiarity and their ability to influence viral advertisements. The authors confirmed that brand relevance and brand familiarity act as negative components for forwarding the viral advertisements and the people are more willing to do that, only under one condition of low in the brand relevance and brand familiarity.

In spite of these theoretical and empirical studies, previous literature indicates that there is an impairment that has over-looked at the influence of the brand relevance on the brand image through the mediating effect of brand identity (e.g., Albrecht et al., 2011; Bauer et al., 2007; Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003; Jin-Song, & Liuning, 2016). Since previous research was limited on just mention these relations without testing it or examining them together. Hence, for a better

understanding, the present research intended to assess the relation of brand relevance with brand image and brand identity directly as well as the mediating effect of the brand identity between brand relevance and brand image. On the other hand, through a comprehensive review of literature; a weakness in bonding a connection between these relationships was notified (e.g., Aaker, 2012; Aaker & Jacobson, 2001; Albrecht et al., 2011; Bauer et al., 2007; Beverland, Wilner, & Micheli, 2015; Gomes, Fernandes, & Brandão, 2016; Jin-Song, & Liuning, 2016; Judson et al., 2012).

2.5.2 Brand Consistency

Marketers used brand consistency to maintain relationship between consumers and brands (Van-Kerckhove et al. 2011), marketing actions were aimed to change consumer's attitudes toward some brands. So the positive outcome of this stimulus will lead to an increase in sales and attitude-consistency in purchasing behavior (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). Other scholars like Posavac et al. (2002) have pointed out in their study that, brand selection process occurs due a set of alternative selections which affect attitude-behavior consistency. However, Coates et al., (2004) have also noted that the process of selecting a specific brand may affect the brand consideration relatively than affecting brand choice. Generally, consumers decide on selecting for a specific brand than another based on what came first in their minds and as a result of miss-attributes salient of the appropriate brand (Van-Kerckhove, et al., 2011; Zajonc, 1980).

Moreover, consistency among components of a marketing mix indicates the brand level of harmony, integration, and inactive attribute level that carries long periods of time (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Therefore, it is assumed that the meaning of each attribute is being invariable to individuals in their assessment of alternative concepts (Gensch, & Golob, 1975). In addition, the attributes are independent values and preferences, which constitute the preferences (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Hence, evaluation or interpretation of attributes requires certain adjustments of questions on how to restore attribute consistency in essence or requires an experimental design to present in different questionnaires for multiple market segments (Gensch & Golob, 1975).

Furthermore, an extensive product depends on a particular concept of the brand name on the basis of consumers' expectations and perceptions about the relevant concept of brand associations (Park et al., 1991). Thus, perceptions of consistency concept depend on the product's capability to extend the comprehension of the brand concept (Park et al., 1991). Nevertheless, consumers do not adapt with the inconsistencies in fundamental concepts of brands through international markets (existence of differences in advertisement and brand value in the globe). Therefore, it is worth to note that, the inconsistencies in brand image can affect brand reputation negatively (Matthiesen & Phau, 2005). In due course, Keller (2003) determined the basic standard for brands in terms of value-added position. Thus, the positive brand image can be accomplished through consistent maintenance of brand identity that generated through excellent companies' communications (Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; Taylor, & Smith, 2011).

Brand consistency has been mentioned in the past literatures. In specific, according to the study conducted by Gensch and Golob (1975) that the consistency connects the consumers' attitude and behavior. This research has examined the consistency on attribute meaning and application it to companies and government organizations (i.e., in order to measure public perceptions of new products or services to find out their preferences on alternative designs). The research used two sets of psychological techniques to achieve its purposes 'multi-dimensional scaling techniques (MDS) and covariance analysis approach-factor analysis' (Gensch & Golob, 1975). These techniques were used to assess two factors that affect the brand extensions of success or failure and they are 'similarity features in the product and consistency in the brand concept' (Park et al., 1991).

In addition to the foregoing, another study where the researcher tried to examine brand consistency on global communication whereby, consumers were exposed to the international media when they travel to different countries, which cause inconsistencies in the brand identity and perception of brand image' in studying specific brand by Matthiesen & Phau (2005). Similarly, another study was conducted to identify the concept of brand consistency in the pharmaceutical sector and the market functions. The study has also attempted to find out the relations between the similarity of advertising and effectiveness of ads, which were also explored by a work of Saxton (2011). Within recent period, a study explored the impact of selective decisions of consumer based on their memories as a result of the behaviour consistency; as it done by the efforts of Van-Kerckhove et al. (2011).

Not so long ago, Singh, Dhamija, and Singh (2015), addressed in their research several topics, namely; brand consistency, Employee behavior, brand management, brand performance, brand success, brand promise, brand promotion. This study tried to detect the behavior of employee and its role in managing brand consistency in order to enhance the brand performance, in parallel to the market condition especially in regard to the brand promise and consumer requirement to change the perception of the brand image. In nowadays, Liu, Li, Chen, and Balachander (2016), direct their attention to the influence of products' aesthetic design and its relation to the marketing mix effectiveness, and product's physical appearance and its relation to demand which is problematic to quantify, also on the role of prototypical segmentation and brand consistency. In the research, the authors employed morphing technique as a measurement tool to reveal consumer preferences, as a result, consumer preferences achieved middle levels between brand consistency and segment prototypical. More importantly, brand consistency eases price sensitivity and helps to increase advertising effectiveness, while, prototypical segmentation increases price sensitivity.

Ultimately, brand consistency takes a place in the study of Kenyon, Manoli, and Bodet, (2016), drawing upon coherency of brands "i.e. the brand image", the researchers confirmed that brand consistency is a priority in a business environment. The propagation of media facilitated the brand awareness in audience mindset which caused many perceptions that might be present in the brand. Thus, this perception must be reduced to one consistent form in order to achieve coherent identity and to preserve brand identity-image link. Based on foregoing, if brand

consistency is achieved it will have a direct influence on organization's communications campaign effectiveness, financial performance, and brand's market-based.

Based on the existing of theoretical and empirical research, the influence of the brand consistency on the brand image through the mediating effect of brand identity was overlooked by the previous studies (e.g., Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Kenyon, Manoli, & Bodet, 2016; Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; Posavac, Sanbonmatsu & Ho, 2002). Hence, the present research aimed to assess the relation of brand consistency on brand image and brand identity directly, and to test the mediating effect of brand identity between brand consistency and brand image for a better understanding to this relationships. Worth to mention that literature review suggests that there is a weakness in bonding between these relationships together (e.g., Gensch & Golob, 1975; Kenyon, Manoli, and Bodet, 2016; Liu, Li, Chen, & Balachander, 2016; Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; Park et al., 1991; Singh, Dhamija, & Singh, 2015; Saxton, 2011; Van Kerckhove et al., 2011).

2.5.3 Brand Sustainability

Organizations are trying to find out means to achieve sustainability goals, to keep the quality level in harmony with consumer preferences and achieve a competitive advantage whilst maintaining the brand image (Cotte & Trudel, 2009). For that, Cotte and Trudel (2009) have argued that sustainable value could be estimated by

consumers within the same level of brand attributes. In addition to that, Costanza and Patten (1995) explains that sustainable activities represent a continuous maintenance system. Sustainability motivates the consumers to interact within the production process (Radford & Simpson, 2009). On the other hand, Luchs et al., (2010) established that organizations cannot predict consumers' preferences with reference to their sustainability level (Luchs et al., 2010). Therefore, what enhances the sustainability preferences are the benefits and value of the specific product category (Luchs et al. 2010). Thus, consumers are strongly connected with delicate features of the brand more than connected with high ethical products, whether it is high or low (Luchs et al., 2010).

It is important to note that, a wide gap exists between consumer attitudes toward sustainable product brands and their consumption behavior. For that reason, sustainability affects consumer perceptions which leads them to have a positive relationship with fixed sustainability and preference of the product brand (Luchs et al., 2010). In the same manner, killer (1993) was of the opinion that, the benefits are a component of brand association that contributes to creating a brand image. While Luchs et al. (2010) asserted that brand sustainability was established on the basis of benefits. According to Roberts and Urban (1988), consistency process in the attribute levels is considered through different brands (image), which indicates their quality level (Ottman, 2011).

The issue of sustainability constitutes an obsession to both consumers and competing companies to preserve. The following literatures highlights on studies that were conducted on CSR and their impact on corporate, according to Ogrizek,

(2002) which explored about financial services through its sustainability in the public sector. These look into the process of individual choice between different services, clear values in the society which enhance trust, loyalty and contributes to the reduction of expected risk (Ogrizek, 2002). Another issue adopted by the study of Radford and Simpson (2009) that consumer participation in the sustainable production should be based on compatibility and confidence. Which leads the organizations to an issue of worrisome regarding its production, sustainability, and consumption process as well as the ability and willingness to pay more money in order to get sustainability products and/or services by consumers (Radford & Simpson, 2009).

Others like Luchs et al. (2010) contribute in examining the negative effects of the ethical dimensions on the product preference which derives from the sustainable liability that relates to low product attributes. whereas, the study conducted by Soron (2010) focused on the choices that facilitate the procedures of sustaining a self-identity Within another perspective, a different study; were considered the liaisons between tourism enterprises and its competitiveness in sustainable tourism, which measures the perceptions and satisfaction of tourists' on service performance (Chen et al., 2011). In the pattern of sustainable development perspective through brand equity, an exploration was applied to electronic products, which proposed five reliable pillars, namely; green satisfaction, effect, trust, brand loyalty and brand equity (Kang & Hur 2012).

Brand sustainability considered a very important topic comparing to the brand loyalty in the study of Schultz, and Block, (2015), online survey gathered

one million responses, covering brands in 73 product categories in a completed 10-year period. The study arguments concentrated on the conceptualization between brand value and brand awareness, in parallel with consumer brand equity and how to measure brand loyalty. Notably, the measurement of brand sustainability was elucidated and demonstrated clearly. This measure comprises of the brand share of preference which was calculated and compared to the consumer brand preference in each product categories of the brands. Thereafter a conclusion was drafted on the challenging that faced manufacturer brands of no brand preference, accordingly, brand sustainability must be subjected to a development and the best way to be used. In the same year, Lin, Lai, and Chen (2015), examined how customers distinguish store green practices and their perception of the sustainability brand image in the direction of coffee stores. The authors confirmed that brand sustainability concept became indispensable in the foodservice industry.

Furthermore, Rossi, Pinto, Herter, and Gonçalves (2016), as they pointed out that brand strength affects the brand sustainability by consumers' perceptions. According to that, the eco-labels enhance consumers' perceptions about brand sustainability based on brand strength (i.e., to which degree brand knowledge has the effects on consumer response toward the brand). As the authors demonstrate that two studies prove that brand strength can change the effect of eco-labels on consumers' perceptions about brand sustainability in addition to purchase intentions. It obvious that brand sustainability was addressed more in manufacturing enterprises (MEs) or it can be said sustainable production in general, which appears clearly in the study of Tam (2016). The main arguments of this

research focused on how brand sustainability can help in the development of manufacturing enterprises (MEs) also the social enterprises (SEs) by their strategies, systems, and processes. The factors to achieve that depend on the technologies, market conditions, and environment circumstances. Therefore, it's important to recall that consumers have the ability to decode and remember which in consequence reflect upon the values; on this basis, they will react interactively.

Regardless the incorporation of sustainability in previous literature, these literatures did not measure the influence of the brand sustainability on the brand image through the mediating effect of brand identity (e.g., Kang & Hur, 2012; Luchs et al., 2010; Rossi, Pinto, Herter, & Gonçalves, 2016; Schultz, & Block, 2015). In order to obtain a better comprehension of such relationships, the present research contemplates assessing the relation of brand sustainability with the brand identity and the brand image, as well the mediating effect of the brand identity between brand sustainability and brand image. On this basis, the linkages between these variables seemed ambiguous thus, resulting in the need to disclose promptly which previous researches failed to examine responsively (e.g., Chen, et al., 2011; Kang & Hur 2012; Lin, Lai, & Chen, 2015; Luchs et al., 2010; Ogrizek, 2002; Radford & Simpson, 2009; Rossi, Pinto, Herter, & Gonçalves, 2016; Schultz, & Block, 2015; Soron, 2010; Tam, 2016).

2.5.4 Brand Credibility

Historically, the concept of credibility in literature is based on previous behavior which retains the reputation of economic information (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Sweeney & Swait, 2008). In another development, Erdem and Swait, (2004) established that brand credibility becomes elevated if it is compatible with marketing mixture within a continuous period of time. Similarly, brand credibility contributes in increasing consumers' confidence regarding brands, thus reduces the potential risks and costs of searching for the most suitable product brands (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Sweeney & Swait, 2008). Important to note that marketplace is filled with erroneous and non-identifying information, both the companies and consumers will resort to attributes (credibility) and trade activities (Spence, 1973; 1974). It was in the same direction that, Erdem and Swait (2004), and Swait and Erdem (2007), agreed on the fact that, brand credibility affects consumers' choice for a particular brand. As a result of these attributes, effectiveness was measured through credibility (Leischnig, et al., 2012; Tirole, 1990).

Moreover, credibility requires stability of the brand promises with ongoing adjustment due to the fact that loss of credibility affects the brand strength (Balmer, 2012). It would also be judged through marketing activities, previous experiences with product's brands and relationship with the producer (Kim & Ball, 2013). Furthermore, Erdem and Swait (1998; 2004) emphasized that brand credibility were of two dimensions which are trustworthiness and expertise. The term trustworthiness can be referred as the manner in which the brand would fulfill its

promise, whereas the expertise means the capability to fulfil this promise (Mathew et al., 2012). Hence, to achieve this purpose Vanreunen (2005) stated that;

“In order to build a strong brand, there must be an availability of credibility and added value, which offers significant benefits either for consumers or organizations”.

Therefore, the brand credibility becomes an indication of the perceived quality (expected value), impacting on the exerted efforts "low costs" (Baek et al., 2010). Signifying, the companies are aware that communication signals sent effectively as planned (Baek et al., 2010). In addition, the scope of communication has tools that are bifacial messages aims at improving the credible source (Ads) (Eisend, 2007). While credibility was incompatible with a persuasive message (Eisend, 2010; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). Besides that, brand credibility is composed with several components; structural consistency, brand investments, and clarity (Erdem et al., 2006).

Past literatures have covered the area of brand credibility as a result of its outcome on brand effectiveness, which demonstrates that identify effects the brand credibility in the community. Thus, concentrating on the brand hero which are the sources of brand credibility and attractiveness, as explained by (Eagar, 2009). However, identifying the various roles of brand credibility and the prestige it has among consumers would monitor the reflection on brand selection to make a decision on purchases, as highlighted by (Baek et al., 2010). This explains the combined effects, the source of brand credibility as a part of attribution process,

and negative information in non-connected messages through advertisement (Eisend, 2010).

Similarly, various issues have been covered in other researches as following; the consumers' exploration through browsing online to find branded products; while the role of trust and credibility depends on information gathered. Yet the researchers tested the cost-benefit and the trust mechanism to reduce risk (Lee et al., 2011). Whilst, in order to finding the role of brand management through 'guardianship, credibility and calibration' on organization perspective towards brand identity, a search was carried out by Balmer (2012). In the same year, Mathew et al. (2012), investigated the effect of brand credibility obligations (i.e., the mutual relations between the main formative indicators) and the loyalty intention toward brand equity.

Subsequently, a test was made through "SEM" to measure the impact of brand credibility within the service sector on consumers' intentions to re-purchase. Therein, theories of information economics were used (Leischnig et al., 2012). One year later, study of Kim and Ball (2013) examined on how trust and credibility can affect brand attitudes by consumers' perceptions in the pharmaceutical manufacturers, with consideration to other factors like (trust manufacture, corporate credibility, and brand credibility). Afterwards, Mileti et al., (2013) studied the emotions of consumers that can extracted of the brand credibility. In other word, the effect of mixed feelings by consumers on the brand positioning, and does consumers intend to purchase product brands relevant with characteristics of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness.

Further to above, Haig (2015), highlighted the brand credibility principles from different aspects. First; its position within the communication process, namely source, messages, channel, and receiver. The based logo design of the brand credibility. Evaluation the extension of brand credibility logos to whole of the branding elements. Compares branding measures also non-credible logos with credibility-based logos. The study pointed out what entirely credible company means. The authors asserted that brand credibility is an practical management strategy and a superior measure of brand equity. Whereas, Jin, Lee, and Jun (2015), explore consumers' behavioral intentions based on brand credibility in luxury restaurants brands. The study argued several assumptions, within different constructs, such as; the relationship between brand credibility on the brand preference, the impact of brand prestige on behavioral intention, information cost saved and the perceived risk.

On the grounds of the growing attention to the service branding, few is known on the concern of how service recovery efforts and/or failure influence brand credibility in service organizations. Notably, Bougoure, Russell-Bennett, Fazal-E-Hasan, and Mortimer (2016), addressed this subject expressively. This study is a simulation to the current research in terms of brand credibility, airlines' services. Self-completion survey was implemented to test the relations between entire constructs. From the essence of this study, the complaint about service firm's effectiveness found a positive influence to the service brand credibility and consumers' overall satisfaction. In the same vein, the greater the perceived size of failure, the extra difficult to satisfy consumers. Hence, service brand credibility can

be maintained during the service failure, which in turn, give the brand management the chance to, develop, enhance and implement effective procedures for complaints.

In line with the previous literature, another study by Jeng (2016), addressed airline brand credibility and its influence on consumer intentions to purchase airlines services. The study covered certain topics including; decision convenience, brand credibility, purchase intention and affective commitment. Decision convenience employed as a mediator between brand credibility and consumers purchase intention. The outcome proved the assumption that brand credibility has a positive influence on consumer purchase intention due to its ability to increase decision convenience by consumers' also enhancing affective commitment. Last but not the least, Sheeraz, Khattak, Mahmood, and Iqbal, (2016), tested the mediation effect of attitude in the relationship between the credibility of brand and consumer purchase intentions. The effect of the mediator found partially positive while the relationship between all of the constructs was full positive. Accordance to the authors, the brand managers, and advertisers obligated to administrate the campaigns of brand communication more consciously and purposefully in the service sector.

Previous theoretical and empirical literature has addressed brand credibility through different perspectives. Yet, regarding the role of credibility in influencing brand image whether direct or indirect through brand identity, it has almost deviated from the previous literature (e.g., Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010; Balmer, 2012; Eagar, 2009; Eisend, 2010; Jeng, 2016; Haig, 2015; Lee, Kim & Chan, 2011; Mathew, Thomas & Injodey, 2012; Mileti, Prete & Guido, 2013). Not to mention that there

is a paucity of studies between these relationships individually as well as on collective grounds. Hence, the present research decided to assess the role of brand credibility with brand identity and brand image directly followed by the mediating effect of the brand identity between brand consistency and brand image for a better understanding to these relationships. Which seeking from that to reveal this role within these relationships. Most importantly, the link between these relationships is contradictory within the past research (e.g., Baek, et al., 2010; Balmer, 2012; Bougoure, et al., 2016; Eagar, 2009; Eisend, 2010; Haig, 2015; Jeng, 2016; Jin, Lee, & Jun, 2015; Kim & Ball, 2013; Lee, et al. 2011; Leischnig et al., 2012; Mathew et al., 2012; Mileti et al., 2013; Sheeraz, et al., 2016).

2.2.5 Brand Uniqueness

The community development process holds varied approach and practices in different communities, keeping in view the preferences of their residents. This indicates a greater diversity in their ways of life and their material well-being, whether in terms of products, services or real estate (Chan, et al., 2012). Similar contributions were made by Codol (1987), Leyens et al. (1997), and Vignoles et al., (2000) that individuals were different from others which proved the desire of uniqueness depending on individuals' concept. Usually, the negative emotional response was generated from Individuals if their possessions were similar to the others (Chan et al., 2012; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

In addition, the uniqueness among consumers appears clearly in their property selection and consumption method which reflects on their desire to preserve self-image (Albrecht et al., 2011; Tian et al., 2001). On the other hand, purchasing behavior of consumers is compatible with low-risk processes as they prefer shopping within normal circumstances, especially in acquisition cases (Campbell & Goodstein, 2001; Dowling, 1986). Therefore, consumers tend to reduce risk when buying commodities and abandon the uniqueness in their property if the risks are high (Liang & He, 2012). Moreover, there are some circumstantial factors that contribute in individual's stimulation to pick differently than others (Ariely & Levav, 2000; Fishbach et al., 2011; Maimaran & Wheeler, 2008). Uniqueness came as an abstract means from consumption in order to avoid identities that match the same behavior by individuals (Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008; Berger & Rand, 2008; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). The desire for uniqueness stems from diverse consumer preferences (Irmak et al., 2010). From this perspective, Snyder and Fromkin (1977) have stressed that, individuals have internal motives which are derived from the principles of self-esteem. Based on this, they strive to preserve their distinctiveness within the same social setting (Irmak et al., 2010).

Brand uniqueness has been discussed within several forms of research. In specific, Gürhan (2003) examined the influence of predicted fluctuating (i.e., product quality) on the uniqueness of the brand family through product information based on consumers' evaluation. Irmak et al. (2010) within a different perspective, tried to explore how the uniqueness motivates social comparisons (i.e., projection

and interjections) from the consumers' perspective on product preferences. In the following year, Vieceli (2011) tested the effect of association on the uniqueness; and the equivalence of the brand associations on certain product categories, such as consumers' goods, service, and durable goods.

Furthermore, Chan et al. (2012) studied the combination of social identity and uniqueness motivations that forms the attributes on conflicting choices by consumers, which can be determined differently. In addition, Liang and He (2012), conducted a comparative study on East Asian consumers (as they represent necessity for conformity) and Northern s consumers (as they represent necessity for uniqueness). The main focus of this study was to figure out the effects of different cultures on consumers choices and their methods to purchase products. In the previous two years, Liljedal, and Dahllén (2015), covered several themes, brand attribution, brand uniqueness, brand schema, new product development, congruity and consumer behavior. In specific, the authors investigated how consumers' response to another idea by other consumers, this idea related to the information of new brand products development. The main assumption was to disclose the effects of congruity and brand schenua on brand attribution and brand uniqueness. According to that, the impacts of consumer participation in the product ideation become more satisfactorily on brand ratings and product development when the product is dissimilar (similar) with the brand.

Further to former dialogue, Lin, Huang, and Lin (2015), interested in their study in customer-based brand equity (CBBE) by various variables, namely; brand awareness, perceived brand quality, brand image and brand uniqueness on

consumers purchase intention in an attempt to understand their behavior, attitude, and mentality. Notably, CBBE is important to further increase repurchase intention by consumers. Based on the analysis outcomes perceived brand quality failed to be tested in this study. While the remaining three assumptions revealed a significant positive acceptance, where brand uniqueness achieved the highest rate of variability in repurchase intention. One year later, an attempt by Southworth, Southworth, Ha-Brookshire, and Ha-Brookshire (2016), to examine the effect of Chinese brands on US consumers. As known that the Asian brands are seeking to expand their businesses towards Northern nations, thus, this study focused on the strategies that been used of the cultural authenticity. The success of Asian brand depends on its uniqueness in terms of logo designs of cultural authenticity which may positively influence the brand success.

Brand uniqueness has been addressed repeatedly in the previous literature (theoretically and empirically). With consideration on the significant role of uniqueness in influencing brand image directly or indirectly through brand identity, the past studies seemed to have paid little attention to these relationships (e.g., Chan, Berger & Van, 2012; Gürhan, 2003; Irmak, Vallen & Sen, 2010; Liang & He, 2012; Lin, Huang, & Lin, 2015; Lynn & Harris, 1997; Vieceli, 2011). On the other hand, previous studies have almost lacked the incorporation of these relationships in one research. (e.g., Berger & Heath, 2008; Hsieh, 2002; Knight & Young 2007; Lin, Huang, & Lin, 2015; Liljedal, & Dahmén, 2015; Ruvio, 2008; Southworth, et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2001). Thus, the present study attempted to incorporate these relationships to assess the relationship of brand uniqueness with

brand identity and the brand image directly followed by the test of mediating effect of brand identity between brand consistency and brand image. Worth to mention that the connection of these variables coherent clearly yet still, highlights the state of weak attention with the past literature (e.g., Chan et al., 2012; Gürhan, 2003; Irmak et al., 2010; Liang & He, 2012; Liljedal, & Dahmén, 2015; Viecelli, 2011).

2.5.6 Word of Mouth

WOM is another trend found amongst individuals within the marketplace involving information about the organizations and it offers (Brooks, 1957; Martensson, 2009; Richins, 1983). WOM affects consumer decisions more than other communication elements (Herr et al., 1991). In addition, the process of interpersonal communication in an unpleasant manner could lead to dysfunctioning an organized activity or product brand which can also be referred as negative word of mouth (Laczniak et al., 2001; Richins, 1984; Weinberger et al., 1981). According to Kelley (1967, 1973), attribution theory could be described as causal attributes that allow individuals to obtain responses through the information provided, compressed and act as a stimulus (brand) and deteriorates individuals (communicator) and circumstances (e.g., NWOM). There are dimensions that contrast with the negative perspective of communicator such as, the capacity of the communicator to link the negative information about specified brand, and the consistency degree of the negative experience (time and circumstances) to the brand by communicator (Laczniak, et al., 2001). Where the consumers could avoid any potential risks

within a multiple procedure 'WOM and brand image' (Dowling, 1986; Liang & He, 2012; Roselius, 1971).

Moreover, WOM can influence the choice of brands within mature categories (Lovett, et al., 2013). Studies by East, et al. (2008) and Reichheld (2003) found that, the role of WOM in brand substitution was based on three rationales (1) positive /negative influence on brand choice or both (2) various responsiveness from a different group of people, depend on the positive / negative influence which will affect in purchase decision or both and (3) the ability to measure the performance of brands. Contrarily, there are three essential indicators which identify the relevant brand characteristics through WOM, these are (1) social indicators are self-enhancement and social motivation to participate in WOM, (2) emotional indicators motivates individual's emotions to share with others (i.e., stems from brand consumption process or thinking about it), (3) functional indicators are individual conversations to exchange the effective information about the brands (Heath et al., 2001; Lovett et al., 2013; Nardi et al., 2004; Peters et al., 2007).

It should wise to understand that when WOM were compared with other communication elements, individuals became susceptible to be convinced, especially when the information is acquired from other consumers which may correspond to the media differently (Kaikati, 2010). In line with this, WOM is equally more effective than any advertisement that may change the behavior from negative to positive (Day, 1971). Seven-fold effective than an advertisement in the newspaper and magazines which stimulates behavior to substitution brand (Katz &

Lazarsfeld, 1970), four-fold effective than personal selling (Kaikati, 2010) and twice effective than radio advertisements (Kaikati, 2010). Hence, WOM is classified as a social behavior (Wirts & Chew, 2002) ranging from strong link to weak bonding (Jang, 2007). In another way, WOM would be considered as a communication between the sender and the receiver 'the exporter conveys a non-commercial messages' (Day, 1971). It is worth to note that, messages are the source of information and the sender has no gain beyond the information being provided (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2003). WOM is a credible source of communication (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2003). Therefore, WOM cause a fundamental change within opinion and behavior (Alexander, 2006; Brooks, 1958).

WOM have dealt with numerous literature. Amongst this literature, a study was conducted by Lacznia et al. (2001) on the basis of attribution theory whereby, the researchers objected to determine the role of partial assessment through negative word of mouth for a particular brand through obtaining views from the consumer. In addition, attribution theory was taken as the basis in the work of Eckman (2004), to discover the difficulties that can be situated to trace WOM through marketing strategies method (through assistance methods to predict the behavior); where the target population was opera students in the field of art production. From arts to media or arguably; the electronic means, a new study within the web to know how the WOM via electronic means can affect the reorientation of email messages (how to ensure the preservation of the message content after re-transmission), were conducted by (Alexander, 2006).

Moreover, Jang in 2007 examined the implications of WOM in order to reveal the causes that can affect purchase decisions by consumers in the restaurants (Jang, 2007). A few months later, the body of knowledge was enriched through the contribution that has been carried out by East et al. (2008), the researchers used in their search two methods and three of measures to examine the effect of WOM whether it negative or positive on the probability of brand purchasing. Brand properties within the marketplace were given a chance for better understanding through the exploration of the role of WOM as it represents a transmission of information sources, which were implemented in the inclusive experimental analysis, by (Kaikati, 2010). In the area of electronic WOM research, Jahilvand et al. (2012) investigated the structural relationships through an integrated approach that combined the electronic WOM, destination image, travel intention, and attitudes towards tourist destinations. The relationship between brand and WOM based on marketing perspectives highlighted in another search, which stated that "there is no study which addresses brand and word of mouth" despite it is important in the area of marketing to investigate this relationship by using a comprehensive empirical analysis (Lovett et al., 2013).

In the past year, Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz, and Feldhaus (2015), examined word of mouth in the twitter microblogging and its effects on consumers, as well new movies adoption. This study provides an empirical examination of the "Twitter effect," which suggested that the microblogging word of mouth are shared through twitter and corresponding services which in turn affect the product adoption behaviors and post-purchase quality assessments by consumers'. This is a possibly

conclusive factor for the achievement of experiential media products. In a short interval, You, Vadakkepatt, and Joshi (2015), conducted their study on the elasticity of electronic word-of-mouth as it part of social media by meta-analysis. By meta-analysis, the researchers examined the influence of electronic word of mouth on the sales through inspecting 51 studies, and data that collected on product characteristics “trialability, usage condition, durability”, as well platform characteristics “trustworthiness and expertise” finally from industry characteristics “competition and industry growth”. In a contemporary year, Herold, Sipilä, Tarkiainen, and Sundqvist (2016), inquired on the influence of service values on how to handle word-of-mouth and its impact on the assessment of credibility beliefs in the common service context. The study indicated that two separate information processing methods are active when consumers assess complex beliefs, also service values have different effects on the handling of WOM information; while, socially oriented values possess contradictory effect.

By reviewing the current body of knowledge, WOM has taken a place in researches differently and numerously either theoretically or empirically (Laczniak et al., 2001; Lovett, Peres & Shachar, 2013). Despite the importance of discovering the function of WOM in influencing on the brand image directly or indirectly through the mediating effect of brand identity. Previous literature did not give any concern to include these relationships together (e.g., East, Hammond & Lomax, 2008; Eckman, 2004; Jang, 2007). Thus, the previous literature nearly empty from these relationships together in one research (e.g., Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz, &

Feldhaus, 2015; Herold, et al., 2016; Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012; Lovett et al., 2013).

Moreover, according to Lovett et al. (2013) and Jalilvand et al. (2012), there have been no studies combining and examining WOM and brand image directly and/or the mediating effect of brand identity indirectly thus, underlined need for further research. Thus, the current body of knowledge still facing a paucity including these relationships together (e.g., Alexander, 2006; East et al., 2008; Herold, et al., 2016; Jang, 2007; Kaikati, 2010; You, Vadakkepatt, & Joshi, 2015). Hence, this research has contributed by incorporating these relationships in one framework to assess the relation of WOM with brand image and brand identity directly, and to test the mediating effect of the brand identity between brand consistency and brand image for a better understanding to these relationships. It is important to mention, the relationships between these variables integrated clearly (Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009).

2.6 The Mediating Role of Brand Identity

Identity is an essential component in the brands and a key element towards generating the brand importance, successful organizations always protect their brand identity (Laforet, 2010). Brand identity in essence is designed and offered by organizations (Geuens et al., 2009). Uniqueness in brand identities authorize the consumers to achieve their self-definition (Berger & Heath, 2007; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). Thus, a brand with a distinct identity attracts consumers and

motivates them for consumption (Shirazi et al., 2013). The process of establishing sustained brand image in consumers' minds requires the creation of brand identity at the first place. Based on this identity, it releases the messages to generate a psychological image for all brands which should be characterized as attractive, powerful, and distinctive with a prominent status in identity compared to other brands (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994).

Furthermore, discerning between brands and value creation by brand owners is considered as a basic concept and important in modern competitive markets (Lu, Kadan, & Boatwright, 2008; Nandan, 2005; Vignoles et al., 2000). Brand identity is a process of designing and delivering brand by the organization and it is an effective method of communicating with consumers (Geuens et al., 2009; Kapferer et al., 2002). The variations and discrepancies in consumers understanding lead to disguise the meaning of brand or may cause a change in the values of the brand (McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999). Thus, brand identity is the basis for all communication activities, it is therefore, expected to be clear (Nandan, 2005).

Past studies in relation to brand identity have highlighted several factors. Each of these factors has served different facets of the concept of brand identity the following sections offer a detailed elaboration on the concept ranging from 1950 till data.

During the 50s and 60s; an initial idea was incorporated in a study conducted by Gardner and Levy (1955), which focused on products and brands

generally and underlined that brand identity is come superficial and unclear. In fact, the study was concentrated on how important the brand personality is to the consumers. Several years later, study by Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), gave a better chance to the concept and included self-concept of consumers, the symbolism, and marketing behaviors; indeed, the researchers examined the relation between consumption behavior and its relation to the consumer's self-concept within the markets behavior. A year later, with the same pattern comparing with their previous research, Grubb and Hupp (1968), came with the idea to include self-perception, generalized stereotypes, and brand selection. To measure self-concept and consumer behaviors but with a difference, this time, the study carried out based on a comparison approach. Within same time period, Brody and Cunningham (1968), investigated on personality variables and consumer decisions process. In specific, the study determined brand personality based on the consumers' expectations. Worth to mention that this study has also been applied to assess the risks of high-performance products.

During the 70s and 80s; in 1975, Ackoff and Emshoff did their research on role of advertising on a Anheuser-Busch.Inc brand. In it, the study concentrated deeply on brand commercials that were created for that brand in the first place; to assess individual responses in accordance to their personalities. After almost 30 years' study of Larçon and Reitter (1994) which focused on corporate imagery and corporate identity from the perspective of the irrationality executive. The study tried to clarify the brand identity concept within corporates strategies. In which the brand management were not interested about this issue until the mid-eighties).

Three years later, the brand identity started receiving expansion as a concept. Swann (1987) conducted study entitled "Identity negotiation: where two roads meet". In particular, the study focused on the conflict and discrepancy between social thought and social interaction. The study came with a suggestion that the identity negotiation process must be utilized, which its capable of doing that (Swann, 1987). The relation between identity theory and the organization has been discussed in the study of Ashforth and Mael (1989) whereby, the study inspected the role of social identity and how it matches with the institutional identity and psychological perception. In addition, it also strived to assess consumers role in belonging to a particular organization.

During the 90s; the studies in that decade witnessed radical changes for brand identity in theory and practice. In this regards, some of the studies are discussed herewith. In the study of organizational images and member identification, Dutton et al. (1994) detected on organizations methods to preserve its brand image through continuity in the self-concept to provide distinctiveness and enhance self-esteem for consumers. The study suggests that it can be accomplished through social identity which is the key for individuals to identify themselves via organizational attributes. In a competitive field, Upshaw (1995) outlined the process of building the brand identity and methods to success in the hostile marketplace. In brief the study attempted to track brand identity methods that constituted the official position of the organization in the marketplace.

Moreover, Aaker (1996) suggested that through products and markets, brand equity can be assessed. In specific, the search was constructed based on brand

identity procedures that facilitate the development of marketing communications. In this, the convey of the core messages which is the identity of the brand was target towards consumers, helping them to build a trustworthy relationship with them. This also highlighted the set of brand associations. Another perspective with same area Hatch and Schultz (1997), examined the relations between organizational culture, identity, and image. The search demonstrated around the relation between corporate branding, corporate image, and corporate identity in an extended argument regarding how the statement of top managers contrasting with fundamentals regulations of an organization which in turn affect brand identity and image. Marketing studies relating to organizations have also outlined these elements. The mentor De Chernatony (1999) has discussed on brand management through narrowing the gap between brand identity and brand reputation. More accurately, the search debated the characteristics of brand identity such as values and brand promises, which works as a base requirement in developing marketing communications to convey the core brand message toward target consumers.

During the Millennium; Kim et al. (2001), employed the social identity theory to determine the impact of brand personality represented by attractiveness, distinctiveness, and self-expressive value and brand identification represented by consumers concepts represented by the positive word of mouth on brand loyalty. The search was applied on the high-technology products (smartphones). While Underwood (2003), traced the communicative strength that can be obtained by the correct packaging of goods and it is described as the product related attribute. In fact, the communicative strength can be achieved by establishing the brand identity

using communications. Alongside, the study also implemented on CBBE and consumers brand relationships through experience, within the mediating variable of "self-concept for product". In over a short period of time from the study of Underwood in 2003; study conducted by Kapferer (2004) on the strategic brand management explored as to how to create and sustain the brand equity in the long term through brand identity by the prism model (1991-1999). Therein, study explained that the model works as a potential mechanism by brand managers to gauge brand's identity. Important to mention that as the name implies, the prism model consists of six facets: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image.

Furthermore, integrated marketing communication (IMC) was included in the study (Madhavaram et al., 2005). The study examined brand identity as critical components of brand equity strategy whereby, it emphasized that the role of integrated marketing communications and brand identity is very important to create and maintain the strategy or strategies of brand equity in the long run. Within the same period, Nandan (2005) investigated the relationship between brand image and brand identity. The brand image represents consumer perceptions, while brand identity represents two aspects; the source from companies and awareness of consumers regarding the brand. The integration of this relationship correctly can be done through communications perspectives. Among the most important studies associated with the existing variables in the present research. A study carried out by Bosch et al. (2006). The effects of reputation, relevance, personality, performance, and relationships through the brand identity (moderating variable) on

the conceptions and perceptions as represented by brand image. This research was performed on higher education institution in the University of Nelson Mandela metropolitan. Where it is located at the port of Elizabeth city, South Africa.

In addition to the above; Christodoulides and Jevons (2011), within a profound search examine the power of consumers words on brand identity. The study explained that the marketers must take into the account as to what the consumers are telling to each other about the brand which in turn relates to the identity. The study found that that the identity of brand generates the content which evokes word of mouth in a positive or a negative way. The relationships studied in this study were included in several criterias, namely; market orientation development, social interaction, word of mouth, brand relationships, consumer creativity, and customization. In parallel, Ulrich et al. (2011), investigated on the relationship between brand gender and consumers which connect them. The research focused that on consumers perceptions with the criteria of brand gender comprises of six dimensions, namely, brand attributes communication (i.e., brand identity is the source of all communication activity), grammatical brand name, logo attributes, and attributes products and benefits. The study was done based on a theory of gender psychology.

During the past five years, Blombäck, and Ramírez-Pasillas, (2012), revealed the logics of corporate brand identity formation, corporate communications. In general, they scrutinized corporate features that follow the right methods logically to communicate, which eventually accounts for "corporate brand identity". In the same year, Blomkvist et al., (2012), clarified the relationship

between brand identity and brand image in a case study of Coop. Indeed, the researcher identified and analyzed the communication gaps that can occur between companies as the source of brand identity and brand image by consumers. These gaps are principally because the perceptions are a reflection of messages that originates from the identity. Choi and Winterich (2013) studied from ethical perspectives as these ethical identities are treated as external identities (outside group), which are associated with the negative attitudes by consumers towards out-group brands. The study illustrated that the external identities can be moved to the internal brand group by marketers' efforts in a manner that will enhance transfer of the brands.

In addition, Shirazi et al. (2013) examined the effects of brand identity on consumers loyalty from the perspective of social identity. Practically, the management of brands is a process that produces the brand identity. Shirazi and colleagues carried the study out through perceived value, customer satisfaction, and trust. Wheares, Farhana (2014), studied the identity with slight differences and was found to be not away from the existing knowledge. The research focuses on brand identity complexities in marketing communication. In specific, the study was concerned about the effects of brand identity through communications effectiveness by consistency and congruence on the consumers loyalty. The study was based on social identity theory and used the identity prism model developed by Kapferer, who tested it on Lifestyle Magazine (Swedish Brand).

In recent times, within brand identity area Coleman, de Chernatony, and Christodoulides (2015), covered other related aspects to brand identity, the research

focused on business-to-business (B2B), specifically, service brand identity (SBI) and its relation with brand performance. An empirical examination was conducted in the UK's B2B within the sector of IT services for the first time. Similarly, in the UK with a different sector, Buil, Catalán, and Martínez, (2016), they conducted their study on the banking sector, the main concern of this study was corporate brand identity management from the employees' perspectives which represented by attitudes, behaviors, brand performance and satisfaction and analyzed it comparison to brand identity management. At a subsequent date, Hemsley-Brown, Melewar, Nguyen, and Wilson (2016), studied brand identity where was applied it in the higher education landscape. On the basis of rapid competition in international higher education, branding is an interesting topic covered by this research, the main discussion focused on brand identity, brand image, meaning, and reputation. Specifically, higher education institutions contend to find and develop distinctive identities, profound understanding of brand identity, brand image, meaning, and reputation in order to permit brand owners to communicate effectively with various parties such as stakeholders including faculty, alumni, students employers, and others. The authors stressed that the successful colleges and universities must give more interest to these topics in the commercial realm.

2.7 Brand Identity and Brand Image

The concept of brand identity has been explained in the brand management through numerous studies (Wally, 1989). The present use of identity concept is not restricted to the graphics or attractiveness of the name instead, it clearly explained

what the consumers want from the brand (Kapferer et al., 2002). This brings the attention of researchers towards brand identity as essential elements of brand management, the books on brand management strategy, were spread in Europe in the mid-eighties (Keller, 1993; Kapferer, 2008). Brand image has been addressed widely in previous researches (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990) One of these topics is attitudes, Faircloth et al. (2001) stipulates that attitudes affect brand image directly.

Thus, attitude is individuals' willingness to behave consistently in a favorable or unfavorable manner toward entity or something (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). Attitudes consist of three components with regards to brand and they are (1) cognitive 'consumers knowledge and beliefs about the brand' (2) affective 'emotions and feelings' (3) cognitive 'the consumer tendency to take certain actions' (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). Brand attitude is mostly repeated topics which discussed the consumers' critic on brands (Blomkvist et al., 2012; Chen, 2001). Likewise, scholars have discussed consumer personality and consumer behavior through the construct of self-concept 'image' (Nandan, 2005).

In line with the previous discussion, communications involve consumers activities in identity and image, the identity enables consumers to send signals about a brand, while under the image consumers, gives their opinions about the brand image and enable the organization to maintain a continuous feedback (Bivainienė, 2007; Taylor, & Smith, 2011). Therefore, the interdependence between communication mechanisms and understanding of behavior and attitudes provide a prospect of preserving the relationship with the consumers, which also establishes the perfect communication loop (Bivainienė, 2007; Sirgy, 1982; Taylor & Smith,

2011). Similarly, the coherence between brand identity and communications enable organizations to concentrate consistently on brand identity to ensure coherence, which in turn contributes to the stability and sustainability for the brand (Kapferer, 2004).

Furthermore, Wheeler (2010) concurs that, investment in brand identity is paramount to facilitate consumers to buy the brand and for the marketers to sell the brand. This also empowers the organizations to build its brand through communication (Farhana, 2014; Taylor, & Smith, 2011). The brand is like a system or tool that reflects the self-image of consumers (Keller, 1998). It allows consumers to show their attitudes and confirm their identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Likewise, brand identity expresses entity of consumers, which helps them to distinguish the brand (Mårtensson, 2009). In due course brand identity operate like a vision of how the brand would be viewed by the consumers, and the basis of communication activities which should have a clear and strong content (Mårtensson, 2009).

Logically, it possible to admit that there is a powerful link between brand identity and brand image from a communications perspective. When the consumers are aware of the brand, it suggests that they have a great understanding that the message emanates from the brand (Nandan, 2005). Noticeably, organizations create various product brands with unique properties in order to identify themselves (Blomkvist et al., 2012; Janonis et al., 2007). Organizations often use brand strategies as a means of showcasing their identity to consumers (Gehani, 2001). In due course, brand image is referred as the consumers perceptions and beliefs about

the brand identity (Nandan, 2005). Hence, brand identity and brand image are related concepts with distinctive functions, which form the core components of any powerful brands (Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005).

Moreover, communications are determined on the basis of the strength of identity and image (Bivainienė, 2007; Nandan, 2005; Ray, 1999). Organizations can promote its brand in the perspective of their unique brand image and identity (Nandan, 2005). Therefore, the relation between brand image and brand identity from points of difference within the marketing communications perspective take another curve when linked together (Bivainienė, 2007; Nandan, 2005). In the study of Finn and Grönroos (2009) they observe that, once the message is communicated to the recipient and from there, passes from the decoding and encoding procedures, the recipient develops a certain message meaning (Blomkvist et al., 2012). In view of what has been explained in line with the communication process, Table (2.1) clarifies the interaction in this relation. The company represents the sender side, while consumers represent the recipient.

Table 2.1.

Variation Between Brand Identity and Brand Image from Communications Perspective

Sender (Brand Identity)	Receiver (Brand Image)
Originates from the organization's activities.	Originates from the consumer perception.
Providing various products with Unique Properties.	Discriminating the brand products according to perceptions and Beliefs.
A Powerful Gadget to Discover Fundamental Difference between Brand and its Competitors.	A group of multi-functional advantages (both tangible and intangible) which enables consumers to recognize the product.
Establishing sustained brand image in the customers' minds.	Determined the brand associations (attributes, benefits and attitudes).
Serves as a feature to entice consumers to support self-respect.	Enhance the desire of self-image.
The cause of all communication activities, and untangled the messages that are sent to consumers.	Affect consumer comprehension about organization activity because of the received messages.

Source: Bivainienė, (2007), Janonis, et al., (2007), Nandan, (2005)

2.8 Conceptual Framework

Based on the previous studies indicating theoretical and empirical gaps, identified in the preceding paragraphs; a conceptual framework for the present research was developed. The framework illustrates the role of the independent variables represented by brand attributes which is composed of brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, and brand uniqueness, as well

as brand communication represented by word of mouth on the dependent variable; namely, brand image through the mediating effect of the brand identity as depicted in Figure 2.2

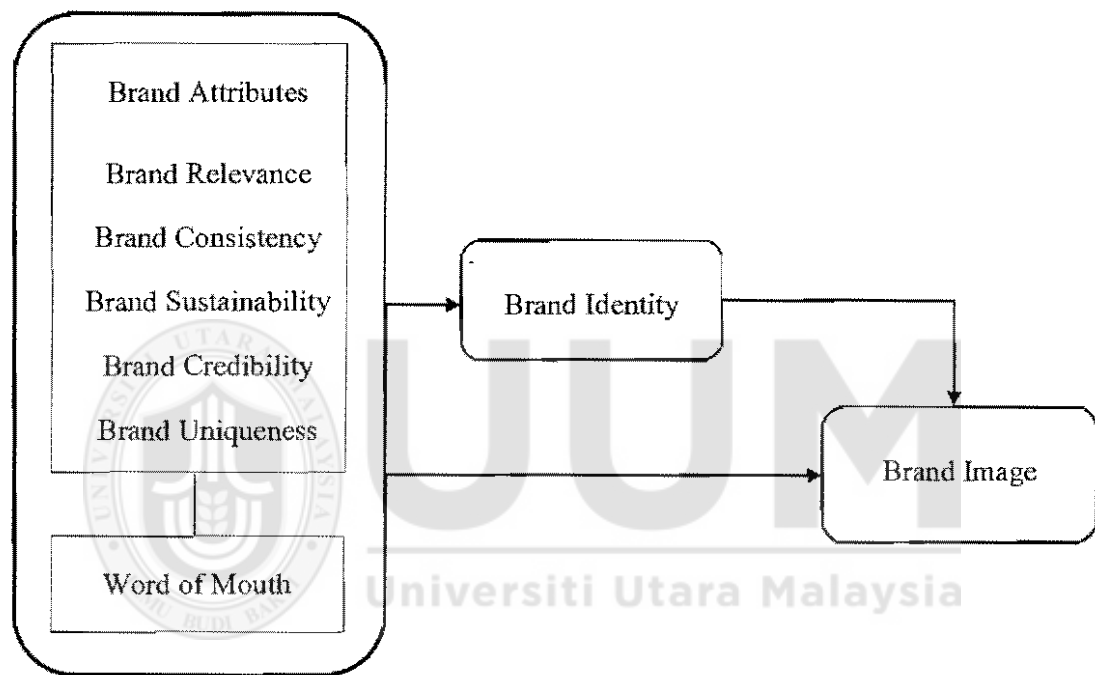


Figure 2.2 *Research Framework.*

2.9 The Underpinning Theory (Attribution Theory)

The present research examined the relationship between consumers of MAS and its brand image through deploying the explanations of attribution theory postulated by Fritz Heider (1958). The idea behind attribution theory was to understand the relationship between the decision-making process, represented in this research (An explanation of the brand attributes, the mediation effect of brand identity, the

perception of the brand image), and the restriction of the connection between motivation and behaviours (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965). Hence, the current study examined the motivation for the use of features of brand attributes, WOM of brand communication, brand identity, and brand image.

This theory was considered as the most appropriate underpinning to examine and testing the current research model which is best method to describe daily minds processes. Thus, the assumption of this theory includes behaviour that Influences brand attributes in case of the brand image and causes a confusion or discrepancy in opinions. In turn, it affects the voluntary action in a situation of how people responds (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Harris, 1967; Jones & Davis, 1965). In the same manner, the attribution theory is informative and derivative from the nature of person's (brand attributes) and represents a correspondent or behaviour that can be interpreted through any act (e.g. the respond to the brand image or opinion) which was characterized by; MAS image in the consumer's mind (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Harris, 1967; Jones & Davis, 1965).

According to Heider (1958), individuals need to understand the transient events by attributing them to the actor's disposition or to stable characteristics of the surrounding environment. Regarding that, the main purpose behind creating attributions is to achieve cognitive domination over environment events by explaining and comprehend the causes behind behaviors and unexpected occurrences (Feldman, 1981; Kelley & Michela, 1980). According to Jones and Davis (1965) individuals focus their attention on deliberate behaviour in the form of an association between motivation and behaviour (e.g. against deliberate or

mindless behaviour). Specifically, dispositional attributions make the internal behaviour for people, consumers, and information which enables the prediction of person's behaviour in the future. Therefore, attribution theory pushes the circumstances that change the dispositional attributes to deliberate behaviour 'imaginable behaviours' (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965). Hence, attribution theory is characterized as a source of information, which explains the causes of behavior and surrounded events (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2010).

In this research the attribution theory is used to explain the awareness (identity) and perceptions (image) of consumers through brand attributes and WOM focused toward brand image and brand identity and through brand identity toward brand image as a simulation, following the suggestions of Fritz Heider (1958). In details, brand attributes have an important role in shaping basic behavior in institutional psychology pertaining to individual differences and interactions between leaders and members (Harvey et al., 2014; Martinko et al., 2006). This suggests that brand attributes have the ability to transform the perceptions of consumers towards the brand image effectively. Based on this, it is congruent with attribution theory (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967), which explains the informative and derivative behavior from the nature of person (brand attributes), it represents and how it responds towards it accordingly, (e.g. the respond to the brand image or opinion).

Brand relevance holds additive properties of brands 'products/services' (Identity) that help in creating a better presentation to determine new classes (Image) (Aaker, 2012). Thus, brand relevance is critically important for measuring

brand image and indicates that an increase in brand relevance may increase the level of identity regarding the brand (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012). Hence, the linkage between brand relevance and brand identity validates the theoretical proposition that brand relevance has the ability to measure consumers' reactions and to measure self-awareness concerning to brand image (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). In connection to the attribution theory by Fritz Heider (1958) which talks about the correspondence between motivations and behaviors of individual (Jones & Davis, 1965); scholars (Gerzema, Lebar, Sussman & Gaikowski, 2007; Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013) have outlined that these behavioral actions can be better understood by this theory. Hence, the attribution theory was deployed in the present study to understand the decision-making process of individuals on the basis of brand attributes.

Brand consistency helps to achieve a high level of positivity for a brand image (Matthiesen & Phau, 2005). Likewise, brand consistency is one of the important features that help to create a brand identity (McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999). Alongside, it is an important tool for marketers to maintain relationship between consumers and brand satisfaction. Hence, the explanations of attribution theory (Heider, 1958) is mainly focused on general brand attributes (Harvey et al., 2014; Lord, 1995). However, it is very well known that brand consistency is an important indicator revealing, consumers attitudes and behaviour concerning to brand attributes, which in turn reflect by perceptions and awareness (Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Brown & Stayman, 1992).

Brand sustainability enables brand owners to build brand image to help distinguish from competitors (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Meffert, Rauch & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011). In which it influences the perceptions and awareness of consumers pertaining to the brands (Hay, 2010; Luchs, Naylor, Irwin & Raghunathan, 2010). Likewise, sustainable consumption within the societies can help to focus on choices facilitating the procedures of sustaining a self-identity (Soror, 2010). In regards to the correspondence with attribution theory (Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967), sustainability motivates consumers to interact within the production process (Simpson, & Radford, 2014; Radford & Simpson, 2009). Likewise, consumers assess the sustainable value within the same level of brand attributes (Cotte & Trudel, 2009). Hence, it can be asserted that individuals strongly connect with delicate features of the brand such as brand sustainability to perceive the potential benefits and value of the specific brand (Luchs et al., 2010).

Brand credibility is one important feature of brand attributes, which is very much mandatory in seek of building brand identity to enhance the perceptions regarding brand image in the consumer minds. Thus credibility denotes to a high quality and proper positioning for the brands through reliable information about the fulfilment of brands promises, and consumer persuasion (Erdem & Swait 1998; 2004; Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela 2006; Leischnig, Geigenmüller, & Enke, 2012). Furthermore, brand credibility influences consumer choice and selection (Erdem & Swait, 2004). This can be seen as another prospect wherein, brand credibility shapes consumer attitudes and behaviours. (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Swait, and Erdem, 2007). This is also in line with the explanation of attribution theory, underlining

how individual behaviours can be influenced (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967).

Brand uniqueness gives the ability to achieve a higher level of identity for the brand consequently it has the ability to influencing brand image (Laczniak & Ramaswami, 2001). As outlined, brand uniqueness is an important attribute that must exist in a brand to provide the element of distinctiveness for consumers. This on notable grounds also corresponds with the attribution theory in terms explaining different behavior and attitudes of individuals driven out of how they perceive elements such as brand attributes (uniqueness) which in the present study influencing their brand image (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967).

Word of mouth acted as a communication process between individuals through non-commercial hubs concerning to brands (goods and services) or companies that is taken as a reliable information from consumer perspectives (related to brand identity) (Brooks, 1957; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Richins, 1983). Similarly, it also affects consumer decisions more than other communication elements (Herr et al., 1991), which causes a fundamental change in the opinion and behaviours of consumers (related to brand perceptions) (Alexander, 2006; Brooks, 1957). Where WOM is a communication tool, brand image and brand identity is an integrated communication system which receives and processes organizational and consumer messages. Hence, these relationships share common factor of brand communication (Mårtensson, 2009). In line with attribution theory (Heider, 1958) it can be asserted

that WOM is an expression of individual attitudes and reactions (i.e., person to person) which this theory helps to unveil (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Heider, 1958; Griffin, 2006, 2008; Kelley (1967, 1973).

Brand identity is an organizational component that helps to create awareness regarding products and services which consumers observe based on their perceptions and experiences (Bivainienė, 2007; Nandan, 2005). The investment in brand identity is paramount to facilitate consumers to buy the brand and for the marketers to sell the brand which empowers the organizations to build its brand through communication (Farhana, 2014; Taylor & Smith, 2011; Wheeler, 2010). The brand is like a system or tool that reflects the self-image of consumers (Keller, 1998). It allows consumers to express their attitudes and confirm their identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Likewise, brand identity expresses entity of consumers, which help them to distinguish the brand (Mårtensson, 2009). In due course brand identity operates like a vision of how the brand would be viewed by the consumers and the basis of communication activities, offering a clear and strong content (Mårtensson, 2009).

According to Griffin (2006; 2008), attribution theory by Heider (1958) can be considered as one of the interpersonal communication theories. Thus, brand identity offers conclusive evidence of integrated communication system, generated by the companies themselves (Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005). For this reason, companies seek to preserve their brand characteristics and features. Hence, product related attributes can be obtained through communicative strength, whereby, the

communicative strength can be achieved through establishing brand identity using communication prospects (Kim & Morrison, 2005; Underwood, 2003).

According to Kelley (1967, 1973), attribution theory could be described as of the causal attributes that allow individuals to obtain responses through the information provided, compressed and stimulated (brand), individuals (communicator) and circumstances (e.g., WOM) (Laczniak et al., 2001). Moreover, the impression of brand image represents consumers' perceptions and influencing on their views about brand attributes (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al. 2012). Therefore, brand attributes can be tested and modeled within various frameworks under extraordinary circumstances regarding the depth of consumer's awareness for markets condition (Harvey et al., 2014). Hence, through deploying this theory, to explain the awareness (brand identity) and perceptions (brand image) of consumers; the current study seek to made a notable contribution in this regard. This, hence collectively aggregates within communication perspectives (Griffin, 2006, 2008; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005).

The significance of attribution theory and its usage can be understood as follows. First, offering guidelines for restriction of correspondence between motivation and behaviour. Second, providing a systematic approach for tracing attitudes by MAS consumers with concrete understanding of persuasion means. Third, measuring consumers' behaviour when it comes to brand image. Forth, support what reinforces the brand image and its reputation. Finally; consist with

design mechanism and structure of research (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965).

2.10 Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical justifications and previous empirical studies (e.g., Bivainienė, 2007; Chan et al., 2012; Doyle, 1989; Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Harris, 1967; Jones & Davis, 1965; Judson, et al., 2012; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Laczniak et al., 2001; Laforet, 2010; Mårtensson, 2009; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999; Nandan, 2005; Shirazi et al., 2013; Soron, 2010), the hypotheses for the present research were advanced for the empirical testing and validation. Accordingly, the present research had eight constructs; namely, brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness and word of mouth. Brand image was tested as the dependent variable through the mediating effect of brand identity. All of the research variables were linked with consumer perceptions which supposed to be compatible with attributes, attitude and behaviour which reflects on consumers' expectations of the brand image (Keller, 1993). Consequently, this research assumed nineteen hypotheses for the purpose of testing and validation of the relationships among the study variables.

2.10.1 Brand Relevance, Brand Image and Brand Identity

Brand relevance is an important instrument that is used to measure consumers' reactions toward the brand (Gerzema, et al. 2007; Lovett, et al. 2014;). While, Agres

and Dubitsky (1996) explained that, brand relevance shows the ability of brands to be meaningful in order to get consumer acceptance. Chan et al. (2012) was of the view that specific features of brand attributes contribute in distinguishing brand identity based on brand relevance. Therefore, the communication between consumers groups is based on brand relevance gets regarded as a group identification of the brand (Chan et al. 2012). Hence, brand relevance has the ability to measure consumer reactions and to outline consumer's self-awareness to the brand image (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). Therefore, brand image is considered as a source of consumer perceptions and beliefs that affects each brand attributes (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012). Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated as shown in table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2

The Develop Hypotheses for Brand Relevance, Brand Image and Brand Identity

H₁	There is a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand image.
H₂	There is a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand identity.

2.10.2 Brand Consistency, Brand Image and Brand Identity

Brand consistency is one of the most important tools used by marketers to maintain the relationship between consumers and brands (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). According to McEnally and de Chernatony

(1999) one of the important elements in brand identity is the consistency of brands, which requires being compatible with the constant messages through the identity that lead to confirm the meaning and values incorporated into the brand image. Furthermore, Matthiesen and Phau (2005) established that positive brand image could be achieved through brand consistency. Subsequently, it was observed that brand image was as a clear set of connection of components that define the brands, it could be realized through the steadiness in brand consistency (Biel, 1992; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999). Hence, the study tested the following hypotheses as shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3
The Develop Hypotheses for Brand Consistency, Brand Image and Brand Identity

H₃	There is a significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand image.
H₄	There is a significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand identity.

2.10.3 Brand Sustainability, Brand Image and Brand Identity

Brand sustainability is a typical indication of added-value of everything, which every brand owner seeks to build their brand image upon in order to distinguish them from competitors (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Meffert, Rauch & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011). According to Ottman (2011) consumers are willing to pay more for consistent quality in the brand, therefore companies strive try to exceed the

consumers' expectations, that would enhance brand image in the consumers' minds. Similarly, brand sustainability was established on the basis of benefits (one component contributes to creating a brand image (Killer, 1993; Luchs et al., 2010). Henceforth, the relation between image and sustainability can be seen as a crucial component towards enhancing consumer understanding of the brand image (Hay, 2010; Killer, 1993; Luchs et al., 2010). Likewise, sustainable consumption within societies focuses on the choices that facilitate the procedures of sustaining a self-identity (Soror, 2010). The aforementioned from previous literature thus contributed to formulate the following hypotheses as revealed in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4
The Develop Hypotheses for Brand Sustainability, Brand Image and Brand Identity

H₅	There is a significant positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand image.
H₆	There is a significant positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand identity.

2.10.4 Brand Credibility, Brand Image and Brand Identity

Brand credibility is the reliable information that contains in the brand position, which provides constant promised (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Leischnig, et al., 2012; Sweeney, & Swait, 2008). Thus, according to Leischnig et al. (2012) and Tirole (1990) the effectiveness of brand attributes can be measured through credibility. Likewise, according to Haley (1985), and Ruth (2001) the credibility of the brand was considered as the most significant characteristic in identifying the brand. While

Baek, Kim and Yu (2010), Bhat and Reddy (2001), and Lau and Phau (2007), were of the opinion that brand credibility can help secure a higher profile when it comes to brand image. However, previous studies have tested the effect of credibility benefits on brands. The results show a relationship between position and products that differentiate the brands (credible) and considered as the most significant characteristics of the brand (Ruth, 2001). Furthermore, credible information is an important part of brand position (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Sweeney, & Swait, 2008). These, contributes the formations of brand image, as the position has a wider effect than the image (Doyle, 1989; Laforet, 2010). These contributions, as indicated in Table 2.5 led to the following hypotheses:

Table 2.5
The Develop Hypotheses for Brand Credibility, Brand Image and Brand Identity

H₇	There is a significant positive relationship between brand credibility and brand image.
H₈	There is a significant positive relationship between brand credibility and brand identity.

2.10.5 Brand Uniqueness, Brand Image and Brand Identity

Brand uniqueness is the difference between competing brands at different levels of technical evolutions (Netemeyer, Krishnan, Pullig, Wang, Yagci, Dean, & Wirth, 2004). According to Laczniak and Ramaswami (2001), brand identity can be achieved through clarification of brand uniqueness. Conversely, Keller (2003) observes that, brand uniqueness contributes positively in activating brand image in

the consumer's mind, meaning that, the brand image can examine through brand uniqueness (Park, 2009). Hence, consumer's activity gives them the opportunity to show their unique personality which influences their purchasing behaviors (Burns & Warren, 1995; Lynn & Harris, 1997; Snyder, 1992). In this regard, consumers need to have a unique character that strives individuals distinctiveness through brands possession and consumption, which highlights the process of maintaining self-image and social image as well (Tian et al., 2001). Likewise, consumers are expressing their possessions and consumption methods of the brand to show their uniqueness or their respective group's identity (Laczniak et al., 2001). Moreover, many brands are suitable for expressing the uniqueness more than others, which means the difference between these brands make it easier for the consumers to show up the unique to associates in a certain group (Laczniak et al., 2001). Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6

The Develop Hypotheses for Brand Uniqueness, Brand Image and Brand Identity

H₉	There is a significant positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand image.
H₁₀	There is a significant positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand identity.

2.10.6 WOM, Brand Image and Brand Identity

Previous studies have shown theoretical and empirical interests on word-of-mouth noticeably (Jang, 2007; Martensson, 2009). In accordance to Martensson (2009), WOM was originated from the brand identity as the cornerstone of all communication activities. In the same way, Kim and Morrison (2005) have established that WOM bounds with positive or negative brand image. Consumers used brand image incompatible with their reference groups (WOM), in order to establish a psychological relationship with them in the exchange of information (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007). Nevertheless, the relationship between WOM, brand identity and brand image concentrates on a common factor which is a marketing communication. WOM is considered as a very important element when it comes to communication effectiveness. Brand identity is the foundation for all marketing communications activities and brand image is another aspect of marketing communications (Martensson, 2009). Based on the above evidence from previous studies theoretically and empirically, the following hypotheses were advanced as publicized in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7

The Develop Hypotheses for WOM, Brand Image and Brand Identity

H₁₁	There is a significant positive relationship between WOM and brand image.
H₁₂	There is a significant positive relationship between WOM and brand identity.

2.10.7 Brand Identity and Brand Image

Brand identity denotes to methods used by the companies to identify and raise awareness about the brand (Geuens, et al. 2009; Meenaghan, 1995). Brand image has emerged from the components of brand identity (Doyle, 1989). Scholars have given considerable attention to these terms such as brand identity and brand image. (De Chernatony, 2010). Therefore, the concepts of brand identity and brand image are accepted globally, especially in the work of Kapferer in 1986 (Farhana, 2014). Others like Bosch, Venter, et al. (2006), Konecnik and Go, (2008) and Nandan, (2005) have asserted that the relationship between brand identity and brand image is an important evidence towards its line with communication. Brand identity represents the sender, while the brand image represents the recipient (Konecnik & Go, 2008). Moreover, the connection between sender (identity) and receiver (image) permits the brand to transmit smoothly in the form of a message from the Sender to the receiver (Boisvert, 2012; Kapferer, 2008). This relationship originates from communication mechanisms that deliver unified meaning of brands (identity) to consolidate the brand position and status in the consumers' minds for these brands (image) (Boisvert, 2012; Doyle, 1989). In a view of the theoretical and empirical evidence from previous studies, the following hypothesis was advanced as point out in Table 2.8 below.

Table 2.8
The Develop Hypotheses for Brand Identity and Brand Image

H₁₃	There is a significant positive relationship between brand identity and brand image.
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2.10.8 The Mediation Role of Brand Identity in the relationship between Brand Attributes, Word of Mouth and Brand Image

Brand identity is considered from the most criteria that faced an attention by every successful organization's (Geuens et al., 2009; Neumeier, 2004). Thus, the process of designing and delivering the brands is a critically important issue (Geuens et al., 2009). This can be accomplished through different organizational activities and its methods in performing the business (Geuens et al., 2009; Neumeier, 2004). All of which in order to meet the promises for their consumers (Geuens et al., 2009). In respect of this research; the research goals formulated to reveal the awareness depth of consumers towards brand's characteristics. Also, a disclosure of the important role of brand identity in the relationship was performed with the present research variables. Hence, on the grounds of the aforementioned of hypotheses development in the previous paragraphs and sections which based on theoretical and practical contributions in the preceding literatures; framework of this research indicates that the brand identity mediates the relationships between brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, word of mouth and brand image. Therefore, based on previous extensive discussions, Table 2.9 exposes the following hypotheses were formulated to examine the effect of mediating of brand identity

Table 2.9

The Develop Hypotheses for the Mediation Role of Brand Identity in the Relationship Between Brand Attributes, WOM and Brand Image

- H₁₄** Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand relevance and brand image.
- H₁₅** Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand consistency and brand image.
- H₁₆** Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand sustainability and brand image.
- H₁₇** Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand credibility and brand image.
- H₁₈** Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand uniqueness and brand image.
- H₁₉** Brand identity mediates the relationship between WOM and brand image.
-

The parts concerning the development of hypotheses included all of this research hypotheses within logically sequence, Table 2.10. Indicates to all the hypotheses in the present research and as follow

Table 2.10

The Entire Research Hypotheses.

- H₁** There is a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand image.
- H₂** There is a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand identity.
-

Table 2.10 (continued)

H₃	There is a significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand image.
H₄	There is a significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand identity.
H₅	There is a significant positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand image.
H₆	There is a significant positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand identity.
H₇	There is significant positive relationship between brand credibility and brand image.
H₈	There is a significant positive relationship between brand credibility and brand identity.
H₉	There is a significant positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand image.
H₁₀	There is a significant positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand identity.
H₁₁	There is a significant positive relationship between WOM and brand image.
H₁₂	There is a significant positive relationship between WOM and brand identity.
H₁₃	Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand relevance and brand image.
H₁₄	Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand consistency and brand image.

Table 2.10 (continued)

-
- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| H₁₅ | Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand sustainability and brand image. |
| H₁₆ | Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand credibility and brand image. |
| H₁₇ | Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand uniqueness and brand image. |
| H₁₈ | Brand identity mediates the relationship between WOM and brand image. |
| H₁₉ | Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand consistency and brand image. |
-

2.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented detailed review the literature on brand image, brand attribute, brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, Word of Mouth and brand identity. In particular, past studies that addressed brand image stressed that the brand image is affected by two factors, both internal and external. Consonant to present study, previous studies have also confirmed through empirical evidence, the crucial connection between research variables predictor and outcomes variables of the study (Albrecht et al., 2011; Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Bivainienė, 2007; Chan et al., 2012; Judson et al., 2012; Keller, 1993; Kelley, 1967, 1973; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Leischnig et al., 2012; Luchs et al., 2010; Myers & Shocker 1981; Shirazi, et al., 2013; Sweeney, & Swait, 2008; Swait, & Erdem, 2007; Nandan, 2005; Wilkie & Pessemier, 1973). The chapter also critically explained that despite all this, the findings and

conclusions of these studies are far from being conclusive, which in turn suggests the need to test these relationships together. Hence, brand identity was proposed as a mediator to determine whether it will strengthen these relationships or change to a significant level.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the overall research methodology of the study. It offers information related to research philosophy and research design followed by the operational definition of the variables and measurements. Information related to pre-test is also presented in this chapter followed by the pilot study results. The chapter also highlights the sampling technique and the data collection procedures used. Lastly, the chapter highlights the data analysis process and approaches deployed to examine the hypothesised relationships.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy, also known research paradigm, is defined as the basic belief system and/or the world view which guides an investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). It is classified into two major categories, namely, positivist paradigm and interpretive paradigm (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Myers, 2009; 2013). The positivist paradigm (also called the scientific paradigm) is considered a philosophical contribution by a French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857) (Koval, 2009; Mack, 2010; Moore, 2010). The positivist doctrine is one of the most practised research paradigms in the area of social sciences (Neuman, 2011). Positivists believe that the social reality may be studied independently of the researcher (Scotland, 2012). They also assert that the social life can be represented

quantitatively using correlation and experimentation to determine cause-and-effect relationships between variables (Creswell, 2009).

Taken together, the positivists employ deductive inquiry (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), aiming to test hypotheses that reflect a causal relationship between variables that are based on theories and empirical evidence (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Deshpande, 1983; Perlesz & Lindsay, 2003). Furthermore, a major goal of the deductive research is to extract conclusions that are generalizable, permitting revision of the theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Deshpande, 1983). In summary, positivists are researchers who advocate value-free science, seeking precise quantitative measures, by testing the causal theories with statistics, and believe in the importance of replicating studies (Neuman, 2011).

In contrast, the interpretive paradigm, known as anti-positivist or a constructivist, is a philosophical underpinning of a German philosopher and mathematician, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (Mack, 2010; Willis, 2007). Being the opposite of a positivist paradigm, the interpretive philosophy assumes that social life of humans can be qualitatively studied by an array of means which include direct observation, case studies, and interviews among others (Neuman, 2011). Moreover, interpretivists view social reality subjectively and socially constructed whereby both researchers and participants interact to comprehend phenomena from an individual's perspective (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The present research tested a hypothesised structural model. The model theorised that brand attributes which comprise six dimensions and WOM have a significant influence on brand image directly and indirectly through the mediating effect of brand identity of international travellers. Four objectives were forwarded of which 19 hypothesized relationships were formulated for statistical assessment. In a nutshell, the current study focused on deductive approach as it tested and verified a model and theory rather than developing a new one. Drawing on the philosophical assumptions discussed above, the present study largely adopted a positivist paradigm, based on the objectivism as the underlying ontological and its epistemological position.

3.2 Research Design

Research methodology reflects the research ability to analyze the structure of relationships between the variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The current research deployed quantitative methodology to assess the structural relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables. Structural equation modelling using Smart-PLS 2.0 was employed to test the hypotheses established on the explanation of attribution theory by Fritz Heider (1958). Therein, a cross-sectional research design was used for data collection through which data were collected at one specific point in time (Bernard, & Bernard, 2013; Blaikie, 2009; Bryman, 2015; Creswell, 2013; De Vaus, & de Vaus, 2001).

The collected data were then analysed and interpreted statistically to draw conclusions and make inferences. The adoption of a cross-section research design over the longitudinal design was due to time and financial and resource limitations (Bryman, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Punch, 2005; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010; Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2009). Consistently, a survey method was used to collect the data through a self-administered questionnaire. A survey approach is considered optimal when it comes to collecting data from larger audiences. A survey method is widely adopted across commercial and academic research studies (Keeter, 2005; Tanur, 1982). Consequently, the present study took into account the target population size (i.e., study sample) which consisted of individual travellers travelling via specific airports. Based on this, the unit of analysis was individual.

3.3 Conceptual definitions of research variables

The terminology utilized in the present research can be defined as follows:

*** Brand image:**

Composed through combined effects of brand associations which connect everything as a contract in a consumer's memory about the brand (Aaker, 1991; Biel, 1991; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Keller, 1998, 2003; Park, 2009; Yoo, et al. 2000). Brand image is defined as individual feelings and perceptions of self-sensory that evaluate the brand and established through behavioural interpretations whether

it is emotional or rational (Bivainienė, 2007; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Gardner, 1965; Musante, 2000).

*** Brand Relevance:**

Additive properties of essential products/services of brands to create presentations that determine new classes or a subset (Aaker, 2012). It is a beneficial instrument to know the personal reactions of consumers (Lovett et al., 2014). It is an important resource to measure brand strength and a useful tool for market penetration (Lovett et al., 2014; Mizik & Jacobson, 2008; Young & Rubicam, 2000).

*** Brand Consistency:**

A positive attitude towards the brand to stimulate a criticism of behaviour which, in turn, permanently contributes to increasing sales (Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Brown & Stayman, 1992). It is an important tool used by marketers to maintain a positive association between consumers and brand satisfaction (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990).

*** Brand Sustainability:**

The added value in a brand regarding social benefits for consumers. It is considered a healthy tool for distinguishing the brand from the competitors' (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Meffert, Rauch, & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011).

*** Brand Credibility:**

High quality and proper positioning of a brand through reliable information about the fulfilment of the brand's promises and persuasion (Erdem & Swait, 1998; 2004; Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela 2006; Leischnig, Geigenmüller, & Enke, 2012). It facilitates in increasing consumers' confidence in the brand, thus reducing the potential risks and costs of searching for the most suitable product brands (Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Sweeney, & Swait, 2008).

*** Brand Uniqueness:**

Features that distinguish between competing brands in varying degrees by technical evolutions and consumer attitudes about it (Niemeyer et al., 2004). It helps consumers to select and make purchase decisions (Albrecht et al., 2011; Tian et al., 2001).

*** Word of Mouth:**

A communication process between individuals through non-commercial hubs concerning brands (goods and services) or companies taken as reliable information from consumer perspectives (Brooks, 1957; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Richins, 1983). It affects consumer decisions more than other communication elements (Herr et al., 1991), which cause a fundamental change in the opinion and behaviours of consumers (Alexander, 2006; Brooks, 1957).

*** Brand identity:**

The process of designing and delivering brands by an organisation (Geuens et al., 2009). It acts as a tool that enables consumers to express their self-image and establish their identity about certain brands (Aaker, 1997; Escalas, & Bettman, 2005; Farhana, 2014; Geuens et al., 2009; Keller, 1998). It is a virtual expression of a brand name, communications, and a visual manifestation that enables the brand owners to help consumers identify the brand (Niemeyer, 2004).

3.4 Research Instrument Design

The research instrument (questionnaire) was designed based on the common relevance of research variables. In particular, the questionnaire was categorised into five sections. Section 1 catered to the perception of participants regarding brand image, Section 2 regarding brand attributes, Section 3 the role of WOM, Section 4 brand identity, and lastly, Section 5 the background of the participants (refer Appendix A). Worth mentioning, the data collection procedure was coordinated by the researcher in person on the grounds of approval of a supervisory committee. The questionnaire also included a cover letter, clarifying the purpose of the research to maximise response rate. Notably, the questionnaires were also collected by the researcher in person to increase the validity and credibility of the survey. Thus, all the necessary procedures were followed to ensure the validity and credibility of the collected data.

The questionnaire was drafted in the English language for a responsive understanding of all the participants. The questionnaire used a simple language; it voided jargons or confusing terms (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The researcher also interacted to ensure participants were able to understand what was being asked in the questionnaire.

3.5 Measurement of the Questionnaire

To avoid biases in research, Sekaran and Bougie (2013) suggested considering several rating scales in measuring the study variables. Following the recommendation, the current study used three scales namely interval scale to examine the constructs of brand image. The nominal scale was also used to ask demographic questions such as age and gender. Ratio scale was used to measure social conditions and living circumstances of the participants such as income level and educational attainment (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

A Likert scale with five and seven points is used across humanities and marketing research alike (Burns & Bush, 2003). However, there are strict compulsions about the use of any of them. According to Iacobucci and Churchill (2009), there is a need for researchers to look at what would be more appropriate based on the research theme, sample, and type of participants. According to Garland (1991) and Iacobucci and Churchill (2009), a five-point Likert scale is a widely used choice because it minimises the hassle of answering the questions which usually occur when six or seven-point scales are used. Hence, to avoid complexity

and ensure consistency in the responses, a five-point scale was used whereby '5' denoted "strongly agree" and '1' "strongly disagree."

3.6 The Instrumentation

3.6.1 Brand Image

Brand image was measured by 22 items. Eleven items were about brand association/attributes. The items were adapted from Keller (1993) and Yagci (2000). Then, the following three items were used to measure the congruity of self-image adapted from Ericksen (1997) and Schewe and Dillon (1978). The suitability of brand extension was measured by three items adapted from Keller and Aaker (1992) and Weiss et al. (1999). The last five items measured the extent of credible reputation in influencing brand image, adapted from Ehrenberg et al. (1990) and Milewicz and Herbig (1994). Table 3.1 illustrates the items in detail.

Table 3.1
Brand Image Instrument

Questionnaire Items	Items Code
Consumers' Perception related to the brand association – Attributes.	BR IM
MAS has a unique personality.	BR IM 1
MAS has a powerful personality.	BR IM 2
MAS has a favorable personality.	BR IM 3

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Questionnaire Items	Items Code
MAS has a professional reputation.	BR IM 4
MAS' services superior to other Airlines.	BR IM 5
MAS' performance is a consistent success.	BR IM 6
I am familiar with the potentials of MAS.	BR IM 7
A convenient image consists in my mind when I think of MAS.	BR IM 8
I like MAS.	BR IM 9
I respect MAS.	BR IM 10
I appreciate MAS.	BR IM 11
Sources: Keller, (1993); Yagci, (2000).	
* The Congruity of Self-Image.	
MAS reflects who I am.	BR IM 12
MAS and I share a similar vision for travel.	BR IM 13
MAS is compliant with my image and character.	BR IM 14
Sources: Ericksen, (1997); Schewe, & Dillon, (1978).	
* The Suitability of Brand Extensions.	
Looking to find out more about MAS.	BR IM 15
Seeking for better airlines instead of MAS.	BR IM 16
Searching for more comfortable airlines instead of MAS.	BR IM 17
Sources: Keller & Aaker, (1992), Weiss et al., (1999).	

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Questionnaire Items	Items Code
* The Extent of Credible Reputation in Influencing Brand Image.	
MAS is a well-established brand.	BR IM 18
MAS is a stable brand.	BR IM 19
MAS is a dependable brand.	BR IM 20
MAS is a trustworthy brand.	BR IM 21
MAS is always concerned about consumers.	BR IM 22
Sources: Elhrenberg et al., (1990), Milewicz & Herbig, (1994).	

3.6.2 Brand Attributes

Brand relevance was measured by five questions: two questions asked personal issues and three social issues. The instrument was adapted from past studies (Lovett et al., 2014; Young & Rubicam, 2000). Brand consistency was measured by seven questions: two questions assessed brand rationality, three questions brand emotions, and two questions brand performance. These items were adapted from past studies (Gensch & Golob, 1975; Park et al., 1991; Taylor & Johnson, 2002). Brand sustainability was measured by four questions: two questions measured general assessment and two questions measured specific assessment (Luchs et al., 2010; Ogrizek, 2002). Brand credibility was measured by five questions (Erdem & Swait, 1998; 2006; Leischnig et al., 2012). Lastly, brand uniqueness was measured

by four questions (Albrecht et al., 2011; Netemeyer et al., 2004). Table 3.2 shows the items.

Table 3.2
Brand Attributes Instruments

Constructs & Questionnaire Items	Items Code
Brand Relevance	BR RE
* Personal Issues	
MAS enjoys great popularity.	BR P1
MAS suitable with my character.	BR P2
MAS compatible with my preferences.	BR P3
* Social Issues	
MAS enhances familiarity between travelers.	BR S1
MAS enhances communication between travelers.	BR S2
Source: Lovett et al. (2014), Young & Rubicam, (2000).	
Brand Consistency	BR CON
* Brand Rational Assessment.	
MAS is a reliable airline.	BC R1
MAS and other airlines are similar to me.	BC R2
* Brand Emotional Assessment.	
MAS is a friendly airline.	BC E1
MAS a pleasant airline.	BC E2
MAS always gives a good feeling.	BC E3

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Constructs & Questionnaire Items	Items Code
Brand Consistency	BR CON
* Brand Performance Assessment.	
MAS able to direct any crisis well.	BC P1
MAS able to fulfill the diverse requirements.	BC P2
Source: Gensch & Golob (1975), Park et al., (1991), Taylor & Johnson, (2002).	
Brand Sustainability	BR SUS
* General Assessment	
The effect of MAS and other airlines is the same.	BS G1
The needs to MAS and other airlines are the same.	BS G2
* Specific Assessment	
MAS provides efficient services.	BS S1
MAS provides steady services	BS S2
Source: Luchs et al., (2010), Ogrizek (2002)	
Brand credibility	BR CR
MAS offers believability in its services.	BC 1
MAS name is a source of trustworthiness.	BC 2
MAS has preference regarding its services.	BC 3
MAS has the capability to commit to its promises.	BC 4
MAS is a competent brand and able to determine what should be done.	BC 5
Source: Erdem and Swait (1998; 2006), Leischnig et al., (2012).	

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Constructs & Questionnaire Items	Items Code
Brand Uniqueness	BR UN
MAS is a different airline.	BU 1
MAS is a unique airline.	BU 2
MAS is a distinct airline.	BU 3
MAS offers superior advantages.	BU 4
Source: Albrecht et al., (2011), Netemeyer et al., (2004).	

3.6.3 Word of Mouth (WOM)

WOM scale was adapted from Kim et al. (2001). It has three parts. The first part includes questions related to WOM entity while the second part addresses communication between consumers. The scale was adapted from (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Jang, 2007; Netemeyer & Bearden, 1992). The last part of the scale relates to brand identity, and brand image under certain circumstances, adapted by (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Jang, 2007; Mishra et al., 1993). Table 3.3 demonstrates the items.

Table 3.3 WOM Instrument

Questionnaire Items	Items Code
* Word of Mouth Entity;	
Recommend others to travel with MAS instead than other airlines.	WOM E1
Seek for recommendations from others about the best airlines.	WOM E2
Source: Kim et al., (2001).	
* Communications Between Consumers;	
Prefer a knowledgeable person to talk to about the best airlines.	WOM C1
Prefer an experienced and competent person to give an advice concerning the best airlines.	WOM C2
Feel confident when you give or take advice regarding best airlines.	WOM C3
Give up some of your time when you asked advice regarding best airlines.	WOM C4
Source: Bansal and Voyer (2000), Jang (2007), Netemeyer and Bearden (1992).	
* Associated with Brand Identity and Brand Image;	
You can perceive the advantages of MAS based on some description.	WOM II1
You can identify the characteristics of MAS based on some description.	WOM II2
The extra price is not an issue for you in case you are advised about the best airline	WOM II3
Source: Bansal and Voyer (2000), Jang (2007), Mishra et al., (1993)	

3.6.4 Brand Identity

Brand identity was measured by eight items that asked about consumers' ability to identify the brand through awareness, attitudes and behaviours. The items were adapted from preceding works (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Ericksen, 1997; Schewe & Dillon, 1978). Table 3.4 shows the items.

Table 3.4
Brand Identity Instrument

Questionnaire Items	Items Code
The prosperity of MAS is my success.	BID 1
I care about what the others believes about MAS.	BID 2
I feel flattered when someone praises MAS	BID 3
I used a plural form when talking about MAS.	BID 4
I can identify MAS identity.	BID 5
MAS express my personality.	BID 6
MAS makes me feel a preferable person.	BID 7
My character and my lifestyle is compatible with MAS character.	BID 8

Source; Escalas and Bettman (2005), Ericksen (1997), Schewe and Dillon (1978)

3.6.5 Participants Backgrounds

Demographic variables such as gender, age, educational attainment, income level, and nationality were also incorporated in the questionnaire. Gender was measured and treated as a nominal variable using a dummy variable where 1 is male and 2 female. On the other hand, age, educational attainment, and income level were

treated as continuous variables and measured using a ratio scale. They were also coded with dummy variables (1 = 18 to 30 years; 2 = 31 to 40 years; 3 = 41 to 50 years; 4 = 51 to 60 years; (5 = 61 years and above). Educational attainment degrees ranged between 1 = Secondary education, 2 = University degree, and 3 = Graduate (higher education). Finally, income level in Malaysian Ringgit had five values (1= Less than 3000), (2 = 3001 to 6000), (3 = 6001 to 9000), (4 = 9001 to 12000), (5 = More than 12001). Participants were also asked to define their nationality.

3.7 Population of the Research

A study population refers to a set of clearly defined elements (e.g., places, people, cases, and objects) of which a researcher seeks to reveal some inferences (Cooper & Schindler, 2009). The present study concentrated on passengers traveling from two airports in the west coast of the Malaysian peninsula, namely Sultan Abdul Halim Airport (AOR) and Penang International Airport (PEN). The AOR airport offers domestic services (MAHB Annual Report, 2014). The airport is located in Alor Setar at the area Kepala Batas near to the town. It has a capacity of 800,000 passengers annually (MAHB Annual Report, 2015). The Penang International Airport (PEN) is an international airport. It was previously known as the Bayan Lepas International Airport. It is located in Bayan Lepas area, the southeastern part of the Penang Island. The airport is located 14 km away from George Town, the capital city of Penang (Department of Civil Aviation Malaysia, 2015). These are considered as the main airports for the northern region of Malaysia.

Four major airline carriers use the Sultan Abdul Halim Airport (AOR). They are Air Asia, Firefly, Malaysia Airlines, and Malindo Air (MAHB, 2015). In 2015, the travellers' rate increased by 8.9 percent to reach 719,029 passengers and air freight increased by 69 percent, reaching a total of 389 tons annually. Accordingly, the aircraft movement increased to 5.8 percent, reaching 18,368 records, thus exceeding the 2014 achievements (MAHB Annual Report, 2015). The Penang International Airport (PEN) was awarded the best Airport in 2014 (MAHB, 2015) where the rate of passengers went up by 3.6 percent, reaching 6,258,756 passengers in 2015. This led to a 1.4 percent increment in aircraft movements, reaching to 66,670 records (MAHB Annual Report, 2015). Overall, the two airports saw an increase in passengers' traffic in West Malaysia (MAHB, 2015). According to the Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad Annual Report 2015, 6,977,785 passengers travelled from the two airports. Table 3.5 illustrates the statistics further.

Table 3.5
Total Number of Passengers During the Year 2015

Airports	Passenger Preparation Annually	Percentage %
Sultan Abdul Halim Airport (AOR)	719,029	10.3 %
Penang International Airport (PEN)	6,258,756	89.7 %
Total	6,977,785	100 %

Source: MAHB, Annual Report (2015).

In 2009, the PEN airport reached 15 million passengers annually, and it was awarded with the Frost and Sullivan Asia Pacific Aerospace and Defence Award (Penang International Airport, 2015). It is one of the oldest airports in Malaysia; it started operation in 1935 when Penang was part of the Straits Settlements (MAHAB, 2015). The PEN airport has a good connectivity with some major cities in South East Asia and serves 15 major airline companies (MAHB, 2015). It is considered the third busiest airport in the country, right after the Kuala Lumpur International Airport and Kota Kinabalu International Airport in terms of international passengers and cargo traffic (MAHB, 2015). More importantly, in 2008, George Town in Penang was granted a UNESCO World Heritage status award, which has significantly increased the proportion of tourists (Goh, 2015).

Based on the above reasons, a survey involving the two airports that serve the MAS airline was justified. Due to the recent incidents in MAS, passengers were expected to be willing to share their experience and capable of recalling their recent travel memories with the airline

3.8 Sample size determination

A sample size refers to the objective and credible way of disseminating results (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Gay et al. (2009) emphasized that a minimum sample of 30 responses is needed to conduct research and forward any conclusions although Sekaran and Bougie (2010) stressed that quantitative research needs much more than that. In a survey research, the determination of appropriate sample size

is important (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001) to reduce the cost of sampling errors. Therefore, the power of a statistical test was taken into consideration. The power of a statistical test is defined as the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is actually false (i.e., there is no significant relationship between variables) (Cohen, 1988, 1992; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).

In general, the greater the sample size, the better the generalizability of the results (Hair et al., 2003). Similarly, researchers have agreed that the greater the sample size, the greater the power of the statistical test (Borenstein, Rothstein, & Cohen, 2001; Kelley & Maxwell, 2003; Snijders, 2005). The power analysis is an accurate statistical procedure in determining the appropriate sample size for a research study (Bruin, 2006). Hence, to determine the minimum sample size for this study, an initial power analysis was conducted using the G-Power 3.1.9.2 software (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009; Faul et al., 2007). The following parameters were considered: the power ($1-\beta$ err prob; 0.95); alpha significance level (α err prob; 0.05), medium effect size f^2 at 0.15; seven predictor variables namely BR-RE, BR CON, BR SUS, BR CR, BR UN, WOM and BR ID. The minimum sample of 153 turned to be the required minimum to test the regression-based model (Figure 3.1; Cohen, 1992; Faul et al., 2009; Faul et al., 2007) (see Figure 3.1).

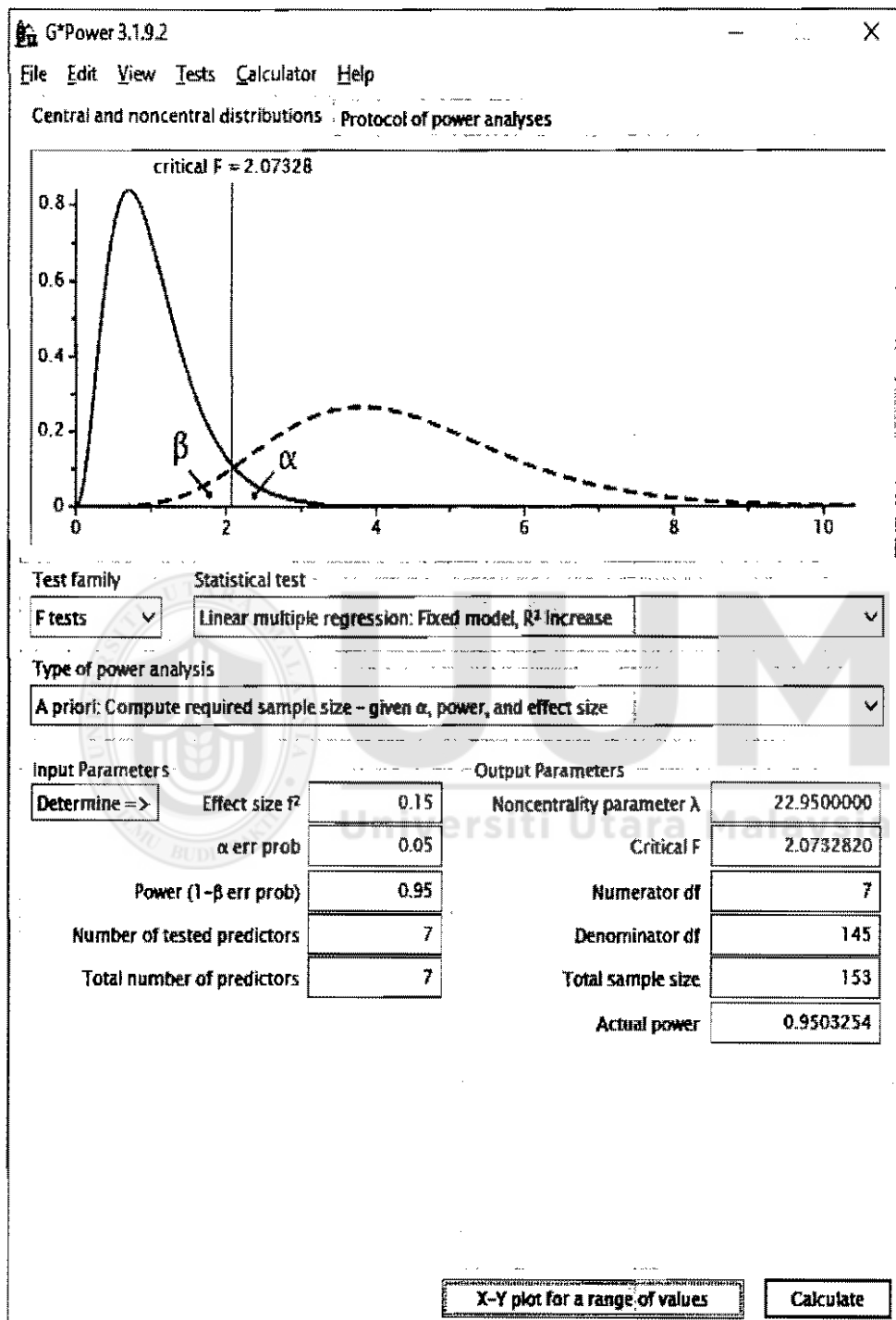


Figure 3.1
The Output of Initial Power Analysis

However, based on many of studies conducted across different international airports, 153 was not an appropriate sample to achieve the desired results (Biggs, 2009). Thus, Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) criteria for determination of the sample size was employed. As mentioned earlier, there were 6,977,785 of travellers via two airports in 2015 (MAHB, Annual Report 2015). Krejcie and Morgan (1970) suggested that for this size of population, 384 is the minimum sample. Furthermore, Salkind's (1997) recommendation was also applied. The sample size was increased by 40 percent to avoid a low response rate. Hence, 538 was the desired sample size.

3.9 Sampling Technique and Procedure

To ensure equitable distribution of travellers at the two airports, the study used a multi-stage sampling technique (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). At the first stage, the current research used a quota sampling technique (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010) which is a type of proportionate stratified sampling where a predetermined proportion of individuals is sampled from diverse groups but based on a convenience basis. The reasons for using quota sampling technique are as follows. Firstly, a sampling frame was not available. Hence, quota sampling was the most appropriate method even though the findings arguably could not be generalised (Cooper & Schindler, 2009; Saunders et al., 2009). Secondly, considering a large population of 6,977,785 travellers, the quota sampling technique ensures minimization of sampling error (Cooper & Schindler, 2009; Wilson, 2010). Thirdly, this technique is more suitable to affirm homogeneity and heterogeneity across the targeted groups (Cooper & Schindler, 2009; Hair, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2007; Punch, 2005). The current

study also used the quota sampling technique because of the restrictions imposed on the researchers' resources in terms of time and money (Hair et al., 2007; Punch, 2005; Saunders et al., 2009; Sekaran & Bougie, 2010; Zikmund et al., 2009).

A series of steps were involved in the use of the quota sampling technique. At first, 6,977,785 international travellers (refer to Tables 3.5 and 3.6) were divided into two strata (i.e., airports), resulting in 719,029 travellers in AOR and 6,258,756 in PEN. Then, a percentage of the questionnaire to be distributed was calculated where 56 questionnaires (10.3%) in the first stratum (AOR) and 482 (89.7%) in the second stratum (PEN). Table 3.6 outlines the distribution.

Table 3.6
Preparation of Participants in Each Stratum

Airports/ Stratum	Passenger Preparation Annually	Percentage %	Number of Subjects in Sample
Sultan Abdul Halim Airport (AOR)	719,029	10.3 %	56
Penang International Airport (PEN)	6,258,756	89.7 %	482
Total	6,977,785	100 %	538

In the second stage, a systematic random sampling technique to ensure an equal opportunity in distribution among the participants representing each stratum was employed. Systematic sampling is a form of probability sampling technique that uses a random selection to the first element in the sample. Then, the following

elements are selected by using a systematic or a fixed interval until the required sample in each stratum is obtained (Daniel, 2011). In where the sample size was 538, an interval of four was established. This means that every 4th traveller that passed through the terminal gate would be selected (Sekaran, 2003, 2010). Systematic sampling can be used to collect data even if a sampling frame cannot be accessed (Malhotra, 2010).

3.10 Pre-testing of the questionnaire

The initial questionnaire was examined and reviewed by a number of experts in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) prior to the actual survey to ensure face validity clarity, format, and simplicity of the questionnaire items (Dillman, 1991; Yaghmale, 2009). A number of improvements and corrections based on the suggestions given were incorporated into the final questionnaire. Then, a total of 100 questionnaires were pilot-tested to obtain participants' comments and feedback on the questionnaire items. Amendments were made based on the feedback gathered. Some amendments include changing the word 'pragmatic' to 'realistic' and statements like 'MAS gives me an exciting feeling' were rephrased to be 'MAS gives me a pleasant feeling.'

3.11 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to ascertain the reliability of the measures (Flynn, Sakakibara, Schroeder, Bates, & Flynn, 1990) (refer to Table 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4).

Following the guidelines of Riefler, Diamantopoulos, and Siguaw (2012), the current study distributed 100 questionnaires of which 91 were completed by international students of UUM who travelled through the designated airports. The reliability of each construct was assessed by internal consistency (Hair et al., 2011), which can be checked by considering the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2011). As shown in Table 3.7, the reliability coefficients ranged between 0.81 and 0.94, indicating that the reliability of measures was good (Hair et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2013; Henseler et al., 2009; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006).

Table 3.7.
Reliability Coefficients for Multiple Items in Pilot Study (N=91)

Latent variables	No. of Indicators	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Brand Image	22	0.94
Brand Relevance	5	0.88
Brand Consistency	7	0.81
Brand Sustainability	4	0.84
Brand Credibility	5	0.90
Brand Uniqueness	4	0.92
WOM	9	0.90
Brand Identity	8	0.92

3.12 Data Collection Procedures

In the current study, actual data collection was carried out over the period of four months (from the first week of January 2016 until the beginning of April 2016) after the completion of proposal defence. Questionnaires were administered by approaching every fourth traveller and intercepting them at the terminal gate (Bush & Hair, 1985; Gates & Solomon, 1982; Malhotra, 1993). Such method of data collection is more efficient than other methods such as what? (Bush & Hair, 1985). A cover letter was also included in the actual questionnaire, introducing the researcher and explaining the purpose of the study to encourage participants to take part in the survey. The questionnaire also had detailed instructions on how to answer the questions. To encourage participation, the identity of the participants was concealed and confidentiality of responses was also ensured in the cover letter (see Appendix A).

In the first 43 days of the survey distribution (The first phase of data collection exercise), 147 complete and usable questionnaires were collected from both the airports and were labelled as early responses. In the last 39 days, further 107 questionnaires were collected and were marked as late responses. This marking of early and late was essential to perform the test of non-response bias at a later stage. In conclusion, a total of 374 questionnaires were collected including ones received after the given deadline. A total of 94 questionnaires were excluded because the participants had not completed some of the essential parts of the questionnaire, resulting in 280 useable questionnaires for analysis and yielding a response rate of 52 percent. It is practically impossible to collect data without

encountering any problems. One of the major obstacles encountered during the time of the data collection was the geographical locations of the participants. Another obstacle encountered during the process of data collection was the time taken by the participants who responded beyond the given deadlines. Moreover, during the data collection, the majority of the passengers were in a hurry and had no time to participate in the survey (i.e., in a process of waiting to check the tickets, boarding, bags weight etc.). However, the researcher made efforts to help convince the participants of the importance of their participation in the survey by answering all questions posed by the participants. These efforts were taken to achieve a better response rate so that validity and reliability were not an issue. In total, the data collection exercise was completed within three months (i.e., 13 weeks).

3.13 Data Analysis Technique

Jöreskog (1966, 1973) developed the covariance structural analysis (covariance-based SEM) based on the work of Wold (1963) which was confined to multi-component models LS (least squares) (Davcik, 2014). SEM is divided into two approaches to estimate parameters. Firstly, the covariance-based approach (CB-SEM) was developed to be used in social research and humanities (Chin, 1998b). According to Byrne (2013), CB-SEM consistd of two statistical axes, i.e. sequences of structural relations leading to structural proceedings and the input of formulations can be converted into a model to estimate the theory being studied (Davcik, 2014; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Hair et al., 2014). The CB-SEM technique contains multiple analysis tools, such as EQS, AMOS, SEPATH,

COSAN, LISREL, path analysis, multiple regression analysis, CCA, and factor analysis (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). It is worthy to mention that LISREL is a synonymous term of covariance-based SEM which was developed by Jöreskog in 1973 (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004). Thus, CB-SEM is characterized in latent variables, which are confined to second-order in the model (Rindskopf & Rose, 1988), and the relationships are restricted between formative factors and reflective factors in the model (Edwards, 2001; Jarvis et al., 2003; Ringle et al., 2012b; Wetzels, et al., 2009). In other words, the construct of second-order (higher) is built based on the dimensions of the first-order (lower) to outline whether it is constituted within reflective factors or formative factors (Becker, Klein, & Wetzels, 2012).

On the other hand, PLS-SEM or partial least squares technique, also known as components based, is a technique developed and built from the core generation of statistical analysis that relies on an iterative approach that interprets the variance in the inner structure (Hair et al., 2014). The primary construction was derived from the works of Wold (1974, 1980, 1982) and Fornell and Bookstein (1982) (Hair et al., 2014). The PLS-SEM technique contains multiple techniques such as multiple regression analysis, differentiation analysis, analysis of variance, logistic regression, and cluster analysis (Hair et al. 2014). It is also capable of performing multiple regression analysis simultaneously and is recommended for exploratory research (Hair et al. 2014). Researchers have tried to overcome numerous restrictions imposed by the CB-SEM technique by replacing it with a new generation of structural equation modelling, i.e. PLS-SEM which is also known as a “second-generation” analysis. PLS-SEM is a simulation to regression approaches

(Becker, Klein, & Wetzels, 2012). To avoid the analysis between the independent and dependent variables of the links for each layer separately (Becker, Klein, & Wetzels, 2012), PLS-SEM has the ability to model the relationships between several variables at the same time between exogenous and endogenous latent variables (Diamantopoulos et al., 2000; Becker, Klein & Wetzels, 2012; Haenlein & Kaplan, 2004).

Furthermore, according to Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011), PLS SEM is a method that involves several options for researchers, especially in management and marketing research. Because of its properties, it is considered sophisticated for advanced analytical systems which are ahead of regression analysis and minimises the underlying variance within the constructs of the variables. It is also capable of using any small or large sample data to give meaningful results. Notably, it can handle both formative and reflective models conveniently which enable researchers to construct unobservable variables effectively with the possibility of measuring across many indicators. PLS-SEM is also robust in handling any measurement errors in a model, which also provides flexibility in fixed tests (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Therefore, the present study employed a technique of partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

3.14 Justifications for using PLS-SEM

PLS-SEM outperforms CB-SEM in model validation because it avoids the exaggeration in the statistical assessment which means that it conducts assessment

of each layer separately. Moreover, it is built on a steady scale which permits each of the indicator to contribute differently in the composite constructs (Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). Accordingly, it is beneficial for models with high level constructs such as fourth-order (Marcoulides, Chin, & Saunders, 2009; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). It contains many statistical techniques for analysis, such as principal components, multiple regressions, canonical correlation, variance multivariate, and redundancy analysis (Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). PLS path modelling also has the advantage to estimate the relationships between all the constructs (i.e., structural model) and the relationships between indicators and their corresponding latent constructs (i.e., measurement model) simultaneously (Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003; Duarte & Raposo, 2010; Gerlach, Kowalski, & Wold, 1979; Lohmöller, 1989).

Also, PLS-SEM is preferable to CB-SEM with regards to the theoretical aspects when comparing between proposed covariance and observed matrices because the first indeterminacy factor in PLS-SEM is that it permits the researcher to reject the null hypothesis through the indication of significance of the alternative hypothesis (Fornell, Lorange, & Roos, 1990; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). On the other hand, CB-SEM deals with a null hypothesis of the entire set of paths that are identified in the analytical model (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000). Similarly, in terms of data distribution flexibility, PLS-SEM is able to estimate the unknown parameters in the model and reduce the residual variance in the dependent variables, controlling the abuses that occur in multivariate normal distribution (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Lohmöller, 1989; Wold, 1982).

Also, PLS has the ability to calculate the significance of the outlined path and relationships amongst the exogenous and endogenous variables with both normal as well as non-normal data whereas CB-SEM can only handle data if they are normal (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000; Wold, 1982).

In terms of construction specifications, PLS-SEM can assess and analyse both reflective and formative indicators (Hair et al., 2014). However, CB-SEM can only handle a single indicator approach in a model (Diamantopoulos, 1999). Reflective indicator-observed variables have an impact on the latent structures in the form of points to detect the path of the indicators (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). In the case of CB-SEM, if the system is strong, the underlying construct will cause an obvious effect on the values of the observed variable, and these cause changes in the latent construct which consequently change the entire value of the indicators (Diamantopoulos, 1999). In contrast, PLS-SEM tries to ensure the measures' validity of the differences between the reflective indicators and any indicator within the same latent composition (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). A formative indicator is a measure that appears to draw the indicators which constitute the construct (Hair et al., 2014). In other words, it measures the variable components in the latent construct which are identified by its indicators. Consequently, the change in one indicator does not affect all indicators with a slight chance of change in the latent construct (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014).

Furthermore, the algorithm of PLS-SEM modifies the non-normal data according to the central limit theorem (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). On the other hand, CB-SEM fails to measure when the data are not compatible with the

multivariate normal distribution (Lei & Lomax, 2005). Furthermore, PLS-SEM is compatible with small-sized samples and can be implemented with very complex models, which give PLS-SEM an advantage over CB-SEM (Henseler, 2010; Hair et al., 2014; Reinartz et al., 2009). The minimum sample size required to be analysed must be equal to tenfold versus formative indicators that measure one construct or tenfold versus internal model paths orientated to a specific construct within the internal model (Barclay et al., 1995; Hair et al., 2014). Based on the previous arguments, the procedural implementation of data analysis in the present research was based on PLS-SEM (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011) and implemented for analysis using SmartPLS 2.0 M3 software. SmartPLS has a very friendly user interface which supports the user in modelling mediating and moderating interactions conveniently (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Henseler et al., 2009; Temme, Kreis, & Hildebrandt, 2006, 2010).

3.15 Data Analysis procedure and implementation

Data analysis procedures were implemented through following several steps. The first procedure was screening the collected data using SPSS statistical software to ensure that the data were suitable and valid (free of defects) for analysis. Primary data screening is a very critical matter in any multivariate analysis to detect any possible violations to the key assumptions concerning the multivariate technique's application for data analysis (Hair, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2007). Consistently, all usable questionnaires were coded into the SPSS, and a preliminary data analysis was performed to check for missing values, outliers, normality, and

multicollinearity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Descriptive analysis was performed by calculating the mean and standard deviation of each of the latent variables using a five-point Likert scale in which '1' denoted "strongly disagree" and '5' "strongly agree." The second procedure was implemented to ascertain the measurement model, internal consistency reliabilities, individual item reliabilities, discriminant validity, and convergent validity (Henseler et al., 2009). The standard bootstrapping procedure was implemented with 5000 bootstrap samples to evaluate the structural model (Hair et al., 2011; Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012; Henseler et al., 2009). Specifically, the significance of path coefficients, the level of R-squared values, the effect size, and the model's predictive relevance were assessed (e.g., Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014).

A mediator analysis was also performed using PLS-SEM analysis. Following Hair et al. (2014), the study used a two-stage approach to test the mediating effect of brand identity on the relationship between brand image (i.e., dependent variable) and independent variables (refer to Table 4.11). Also, the strength of the mediating effect size was also analysed (refer to Table 4.12). Since the current study was exploratory in nature, the role of brand attributes features (i.e., Relevance, Consistency, Sustainability, Credibility, Uniqueness) and WOM in influencing brand image based on attribution theory was examined (Heider, 1958) by using PLS (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009; Hulland, 1999).

3.16 Chapter Summary

The chapter explained the employed research methodology of the current study. Specifically, the chapter described the research philosophy, research design, operational definitions, measurement of the variables, and the pilot study. The chapter also outlined the sample size determination and Power analysis and sampling technique along with data collection and analytical procedures. The next chapter talks about the statistical results and conclusions.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides findings of the analyzed data using PLS-SEM analysis. Initially, in order to ascertain the validity and reliability of the measures (questionnaire), the results of the pilot study were reported whereby, the preliminary analysis and initial data screening were also discussed. The results of descriptive statistics for all latent variables are then reported. Thereafter, the main results of the present study are presented in two main sections. The first section includes measurement model assessment in determining the individual item reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity. In the second section, structural model results are reported in which, the significance of path coefficients, effect size, the level of R-squared values, and the predictive relevance of the study model). Besides, the results of supplementary PLS-SEM analysis, that examines the mediating effects of brand identity on a structural model, are presented.

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 538 questionnaires were distributed to the participants at two airports located in the northern region of Malaysia. In an attempt to obtain higher response rate, the questionnaires were distributed manually (hand to hand) by the researcher in person to ensure reliability and validity of data collection (Sekaran & Bougie,

2010, 2013). Thus, the outcomes of this attempt yielded 374 returned questionnaires out of 538 questionnaires that were distributed amongst the participants. The response rate reached 70 percent which, according to the definition of response rate by Jobber's (1989). Of these 374 questionnaires, 94 were unusable as some of the essential sections of the questionnaires were left incomplete. The remaining 280 questionnaires were found usable and hence, were taken forward for further analysis. This accounted 52 percent of usable response rate. The response rate of 52 percent is considered sufficient for the analysis based on the suggestion by Sekaran (2003) who has recommended a minimum of "30 percent of the response rate to be considered as sufficient for survey studies" (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1
The Questionnaire Response Rate

Response	Frequency/Rate
No. of distributed questionnaires	538
Returned questionnaires	374
Returned and usable questionnaires.	280
Returned and excluded questionnaires.	94
Questionnaires not returned	164
Response rate	70%
Usable Response rate	52%

4.2 Data Screening and Preliminary Analysis

Primary data screening is a very critical issue in any multivariate analysis as it helps to identify any potential violations of the main assumptions regarding the multivariate technique's application for data analysis (Hair, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2007). Additionally, primary data screening helps in attaining better comprehension of the collected data for further analysis. Henceforth, prior to primary data screening, all the 280 usable questionnaires were coded into the SPSS and a preliminary data analyses was performed which involved (1) report of missing values, (2) outliers' assessment, (3) normality test, and (4) test of multicollinearity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

4.2.1 Missing Values Report

In the SPSS data set, all of the usable questionnaires (280) were coded which resulted with a total of 16,256 data points in an effort to examine the measurement and the path analysis. Most significantly, Schafer and Graham (2002) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) affirmed that scholars agreed, in order to achieve a valid statistical inference, if the rate of the missing values in a data set is less than 5 percent then it can be considered as negligible. According to the data set developed in this study used in the analysis was achieved a sufficient level of valid statistical inference (Schafer & Graham, 2002; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

4.2.2 Assessment of Outliers

The outliers are regarded as "subsets of observations that seem inconsistent with the rest of the data" (Barnett & Lewis, 1994). The existence of outliers in the regression-based analysis in the data set may distort the estimation of the regression coefficients seriously hence, leading to inaccurate and unreliable results (Verardi & Croux, 2008). In line with these observations, outliers were found in SPSS preliminary screening. Values that were entered incorrectly at the extreme and the tabulation of the frequency for all variables using the minimum and maximum value were detected. Based on this fundamental analysis of the frequency statistics, none of the values were found outside the expected range.

Furthermore, the data were tested for univariate outliers using unified values through a cutoff of ± 3.29 ($p < .001$) as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). This criteria suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) as the technique of detecting outliers, was used and found no single case that classified using unified values as probable uni-variate outliers. Besides using unified values to detect the univariate outliers, the multivariate mode of analysis was also applied to validate the univariate mode using Mahalanobis distance (D^2). The definition of (D^2) is "the distance of one case from the centroid to the residual cases, where the centroid is the interaction point that created in the intersection of all variables" (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Based on 94 observed variables (items) of the study, the suggested threshold of chi-square is 142.12 at ($p = 0.001$). The Mahalanobis values that exceeded this threshold have been deleted. Following this criterion, twenty-six of the cases were found multivariate outliers, which are: 1, 2, 5, 31, 84, 86, 101, 102,

104, 105, 128, 134, 136, 137, 157, 162, 171, 176, 204, 221, 222, 224, 226, 230, 253, and 257, were detected and hence removed from the dataset because these outliers can affect the estimation of the result. Conclusively, after the deletion of the twenty-six of outliers, the dataset was left with 254, for the analysis of the measurement and structural models.

4.2.3 Normality Test

The assumption that the PLS-SEM provides an accurate estimation of the model within a situation of non-normal data, as it is stated in the previous research (Cassel, Hackl, & Westlund, 1999; Reinartz, Haenlein, & Henseler, 2009; Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder, & Van Oppen, 2009). Contrary to this assumption Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle and Mena (2012) were of the opinion that the normality test of data is eminent to facilitate adequate estimation. The extremely skewed or kurtotic data, can inflate the bootstrapped standard into wrong estimates (Chernick, 2008) leading to underestimating the statistical significance of the PLS path coefficients (Dijkstra, 1983; Ringle, Sarstedt, & Straub, 2012a).

Based on this principle, present research employed a graphical method in order to validate the normality of the data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). According to Field (2009), the large sample of 200 and higher, requires to be viewed in a graphical distribution shape. This is preferable compared to statistic values of the kurtosis and skewness. Field (2009) interpreted that large samples reduce the standard errors in a manner that inflate the statistic value for the kurtosis and

skewness. Hence, this logical approach has justified the reason for testing the normality by the graphical method. Using the Field (2009) suggestion, the normal probability plots and histogram were examined in this research to ensure that the normality assumption was not violated. Figure 4.1 in this regard, depicts that the data for this research meets the normal pattern since all of the bars were closed on the histogram within a normal curve. Hence, Figure 4.1 indicates that the normality assumptions had not violated in this research.

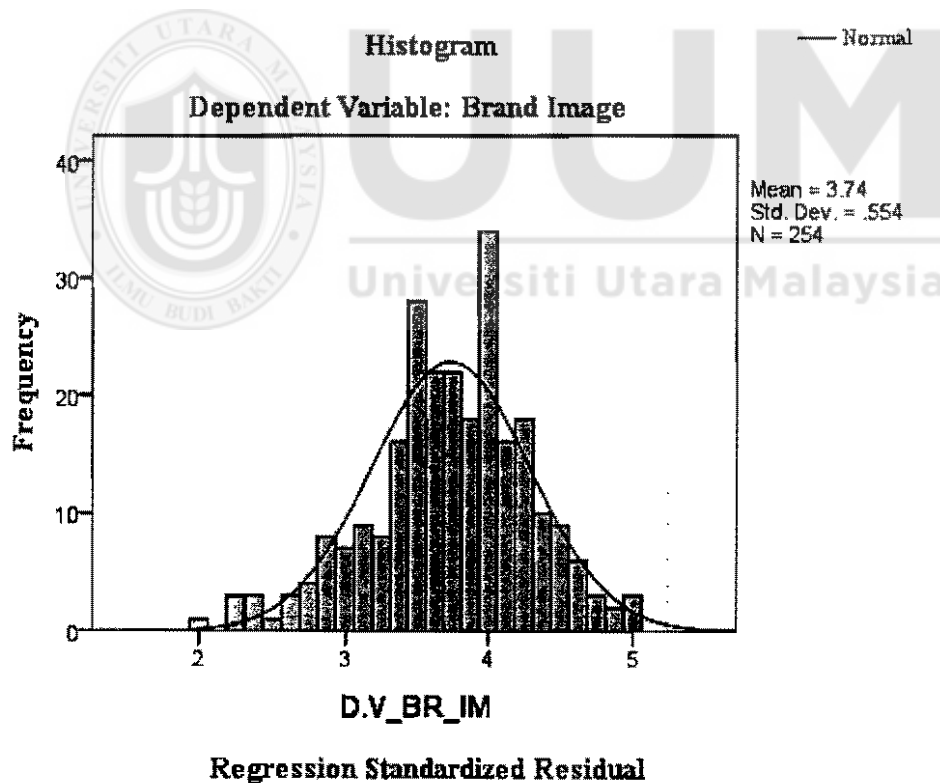


Figure 4.1 - Histogram with Normal Probability Plots

4.2.4 Multi-collinearity Test

Multi-collinearity indicates a situation where two or more of exogenous latent constructs become somewhat correlated. The existence of multi-collinearity amongst the exogenous latent constructs may distort to a greater extent the regression coefficient estimates and its statistical significance tests (Chatterjee & Yilmaz, 1992; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The presence of multi-collinearity in a model increases substantially the standard errors in the coefficients, which leads to rendering the coefficients statistically non-significant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Therefore, multi-collinearity was detected in the present study in two different methods (Chatterjee & Yilmaz, 1992; Peng & Lai, 2012). First, the correlation matrixes of exogenous latent constructs were examined. Hair et al. (2010) confirmed that the value of 0.90 for the correlation coefficient or above indicates a multi-collinearity amongst exogenous latent constructs. Table 4.2 reveals the correlation matrix for all the exogenous latent constructs.

Table 4.2
Correlation Matrix of Exogenous Latent Constructs

No	Latent constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Brand Relevance	1					
2.	Brand Consistency	0.52	1				
3.	Brand Sustainability	0.46	0.50	1			
4.	Brand Credibility	0.47	0.48	0.53	1		
5.	Brand Uniqueness	0.54	0.53	0.56	0.58	1	
6.	WOM	0.45	0.46	0.49	0.50	0.51	1

Note: Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (1-tailed).

As outlined in Table 4.3. All correlations between exogenous latent constructs were adequately below the proposed threshold values of 90, leading to conclusion that the exogenous latent constructs are independent and not highly correlated.

Secondly, another way of examining the correlation matrix of the exogenous latent constructs could be done through variance inflated factor (VIF), where the tolerance value and the condition index were evaluated in order to detect any presence of multi-collinearity. According to Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011), multi-collinearity is considered as a matter of concern, when the value of (VIF) higher than 5, the tolerance value were less than. 0.20 and the condition index value

is higher than 30. Table 4.3 reveals the values of (VIF), tolerance values, and the condition indices of exogenous latent constructs.

Table 4.3
Collinearity (Tolerance, VIF), and Condition Index

Latent Constructs	Collinearity Statistics		Condition Index
	Tolerance	VIF	
			1.000
Brand Relevance	0.498	1.805	15.057
Brand Consistency	0.484	1.970	17.151
Brand Sustainability	0.518	1.890	19.681
Brand Credibility	0.481	1.776	16.156
Brand Uniqueness	0.495	2.013	20.412
WOM	0.564	1.612	21.039

Thus, table 4.4, indicates no presence of multi-collinearity amongst exogenous latent constructs, since the values of (VIF) less than 5, all the tolerance values exceeded 20, plus, the condition indices were less than 30, as recommended by Hair et al. (2011). Hence, multi-collinearity is not an issue in this study.

4.3 Non-Response Bias

Non-response bias is variations in the answers between respondents and non-respondents (Lambert & Harrington, 1990). In order to find out the existence of potential of non-response bias, the researchers should conduct a time-trend extrapolation as suggested by Armstrong and Overton (1977). In this, comparison is done between the initial early responses and late response (which is an imaginary simulation between the actual respondents and non-respondents). The test confirmed that the characteristics of non-respondents share some similarities with late respondents (Chen, Wei, & Syme, 2003; Helasoja, Prättälä, Dregval, Pudule, & Kasmel, 2002), hence giving similar results (Lindner & Wingenbach, 2002). Irrespective of the similarities of non-respondents and actual respondents, prior studies that applied Non-Response Bias analysis used the time interval between the initial date of collection, up till the last deadlines of collecting questionnaires. Most of these studies followed a method of cross-sectional design for data collection similar to current research (Chen et al., 2003; Helasoja et al., 2002; Lindner & Wingenbach, 2002; Vink, & Boomsma, 2008).

In line with the similar reasoning for the need to minimize the non-response bias issue, Lindner and Wingenbach (2002), suggested that the minimum rate of response should be at least within the bracket of 50 percent. However, following the recommendations of Armstrong and Overton's (1977), the responses were divided into two main categories wherein, the first group comprised of ones who responded within the first 43 days and marked as early responses. One week later, the second group involved those who responded within the next 39 days and were

marked as late responses (Vink & Boomsma, 2008). Therefore, the data collection as at first two weeks of its commencement obtained more than half of the respondents that is 147 (58%) responded to the questionnaire in 43 days. While the rest of the 107 respondents, represented (42%), who responded in the last 39 days (Refer to Table 4.4). At later, the independent samples t-test was conducted which revealed the existence of non-response bias in the main research variables including brand image, brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, WOM, and brand identity. Table 4.4 indicates the results of the independent samples t-test.



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Table 4.4

Results of Independent-Samples T-test for Non-Response Bias

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for equality of means	
					F	Sig.	T	Sig.
Brand Image	Early Response	147	3.71	0.52	2.23	0.74	1.93	0.78
	Late Response	107	3.77	0.60				
Brand Relevance	Early Response	147	3.79	0.54	1.89	0.52	1.43	0.56
	Late Response	107	3.82	0.60				
Brand Consistency	Early Response	147	3.70	0.49	1.59	0.85	1.24	0.87
	Late Response	107	3.72	0.50				
Brand Sustainability	Early Response	147	3.70	0.64	0.89	0.41	0.82	0.43
	Late Response	107	3.81	0.62				
Brand Credibility	Early Response	147	3.84	0.53	1.45	0.63	1.12	0.65
	Late Response	107	3.85	0.55				
Brand Uniqueness	Early Response	147	3.67	0.64	0.83	0.57	0.76	0.59
	Late Response	107	3.75	0.65				
WOM	Early Response	147	3.79	0.52	0.94	0.91	0.89	0.94
	Late Response	107	3.84	0.50				
Brand Identity	Early Response	147	3.75	0.55	1.34	0.69	1.19	0.71
	Late Response	107	3.75	0.51				

As illustrated in Table 4.4, the findings of the independent-samples t-test indicates that equal variance significance values in all of the eight major study variables were higher than 0.05 at a significance level of the Levene's test for equality of variances and t-test for equality of means (Field, 2009; Pallant, 2010, 2013). This hence suggested that an assumption of equal variances among the early and late respondents has not been violated. As such it was concluded that the non-response bias isn't a major concern in this study. Moreover, by following the recommendation of Lindner and Wingenbach (2002), the present study achieved 52 percent usable response rate, the matter of non-response bias doesn't appear to be a concern.

4.4 Common Method Variance Test

Common method variance (CMV) is also known as mono-method bias, indicates the "variance that is attributable into measuring method instead of the construct of interest" (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). There's a consensus among researchers regarding common method variance which is a significant concern for scholars using self-report surveys (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Podsakoff et al., 2003; Spector, 2006). For instance, Conway and Lance (2010) have mentioned that "common method bias inflates the relationships between variables measured through self-reports". Organ and Ryan (1995) were of the opinion that research using self-report surveys essentially are associated with spurious high correlations because of the common method variance.

In this study, several remedies were applied to reduce the CMV (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Viswanathan & Kayande, 2012). Firstly, in order to reduce the evaluation anxiety, the survey questions were written neatly and the participants were advised that there is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions and all given information would be treated with full confidentiality. Secondly, in order to reduce method bias in this study, the items and scales were improved and fashioned out to have simple language. Hence, each statement in the questionnaire wrote in simple and concise language.

In addition to the remedies described above, the present study also employed Harman's single factor test, as suggested by Podsakoff and Organ (1986). According to authors the test of common method variance using this procedure whereby, all variables of interest are treated through the exploratory factor analysis and the results are un-rotated factor solutions that examined the number of factors to ensure that are indispensable to account the variance in variables (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). According to the assumption of Harman (1967) regarding single factor test; in the case of existence a considerable amount of common method variance, either one factor may emerge, or a single factor would account for the covariance in the criterion and predictor variables (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

Based on the recommendation of Podsakoff and Organ (1986) all the items used in this study were subjected to factor analysis (principal components analysis). Analysis results yielded seven factors, clarifying a cumulative of 69 percent of the variance, with first (largest) factor explaining 27.48 of the total variance, and that

is less than 50 percent (Kumar, 2012). Furthermore, the result indicated that there is no single factor representing in the majority of covariance inside the criterion variables or the predictor (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Thus, it implies that the common method bias isn't a major concern and it is unlikely to inflate relationships among variables measured in this study.

4.5 Respondents profile (Demographic variables)

This part describes the demographic characteristics of the responders that were surveyed, which involves pre-travel with MAS, travel intention, gender, age, educational attainment, and income level Table 4.5 provides further details which are as follows:

Table 4.5
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender		
Male	136	53.5
Female	118	46.5
Age		
18-30 years	49	19.3
31-40 years	82	32.3
41-50 years	74	29.1

Table 4.5 (Continued)

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
51-60 years	41	16.1
61 years and above	8	3.1
Educational Attainment		
Secondary education	28	11.0
University degree	146	57.5
Postgraduate (High Education)	80	31.5
Income Level - Per month (RM)		
Less than 3000	18	7.1
3001 to 6000	47	18.5
6001 to 9000	90	35.4
9001 to 12000	56	22.0
More than 12001	43	16.9
Nationality (specify)		
Algerian	4	1.6
Palestine	1	.4
Bangladesh	4	1.6
British	1	.4
Chinese	9	3.5
Egypt	2	.8

Table 4.5 (Continued)

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Nationality (specify)		
Indonesia	6	2.4
Iraq	2	.8
Jordanian	4	1.6
Lebanon	1	.4
Libya	3	1.2
Malaysian	168	66.1
Mauritania	2	.8
Nigerian	11	4.3
Pakistani	4	1.6
Slovakia	4	1.6
Somalian	2	.8
Thai	18	7.1
Uzbekistan	8	3.1
Do you travel with MAS previously?		
Yes	145	57.1
No	109	42.9
Do you intend to travel with MAS in the future?		
Yes	196	77.2
No	58	22.8

In Table 4.5, majority of the respondents 136 (53.5%) reported to be male while the remaining 118 (46.5%) to be female. In previous studies, the recorded distribution results for both genders of the respondents were slightly different. For instance, the study conducted on brand image and consumers by Morgan (2004) reported 49 percent male and 51 percent female. Similarly, study by Finlay (2012) obtained 51 percent male and 49 percent female respondents. Hence, the response rate of male and female is appropriate in comparison with previous studies. In a way, it provides additional level of acceptance as well as an additional share of perspectives for male over females.

Furthermore, the survey catered to respondents from different age groups in which, the largest group belonged to 31-40-year category with 82 (32.2 percent) participants while the smallest age group recorded a percentage of 3.1 percent with only 8 participants that belonged to 61 years and above category. This indicates that the current study has obtained responses from different age groups. In terms of educational attainment, Table 4.5 shows that the largest number 146 (57.5 percent) had a university degree. A total of 80 (31.5 percent) participants had secondary education whereby, 28 (11 percent) participants had secondary education. Hence, the participants' opinions relied on a basis of educational reference. Furthermore, in terms of income, 35.4 percent which accounts for 90 respondents reported to belong to 6001 to 9000 RM category. This is a remarkable point for the survey compared with the lowest category where, only 7.1 percent (18) participants reported to have income ranging 3000 RM or less. These results indicate that majority of the participants were from a moderate earning class and hence, may be

travelling for leisure or business purposes. Accordingly, majority of them were also highly educated. Furthermore, the rest of the categories recorded 57.5 percent of 146 participants. While information according to the respondent's nationality identification the largest community that participated in the survey was Malaysians with the record percentage of 66.1 percent (168) participants. Despite the fact that this research was conducted at the two airports that catered to passengers from multiple nationalities yet, one possible reason can be the fact that the survey was conducted in Malaysia. While, the lowest number of respondents were from British, Lebanon, and Palestine with 1 participant (0.4 percent) from each of these nationalities respectively.

In respect of the last two items in the questionnaire, table 4.5 shows that higher number of respondents who have had traveled with MAS accounted for 145 respondents (57.1 percent) and the remaining 109 (42.9 percent) had never travelled through MAS. While those respondents that were assessed according to whether they have a travel intention with MAS or not, Table 4.5 reveals that the majority of respondents that have the intention to travel with MAS, resulted to be 196 (77.2 percent) whereas, 58 (22.8 percent) had no intention of travelling with MAS. Thus, "the price, safety issues, trust, services, fear" were measured. Noticeably, it was justifiable and appropriate to conduct survey at the two airports with the presence of passengers traveling via MAS and other airlines. In view of that, it was also expected that MAS passengers will be willing to share their experience and capable of recalling their recent travel memories to gain insight into airline passengers in general and regarding MAS customers in particular. Also, those who have not

traveled with MAS are able to express their views about MAS airline as prospective customers. Hence, these two airports were selected as the best choice to conduct the survey on the respondents, due to the overcrowding of passengers (e.g. local and international travelers) from different destinations on the basis that Penang and Kedah are among the most visited places in Malaysia (Goh, 2015).

4.6 Latent Constructs (Descriptive Analysis)

The issue of descriptive analysis in this study was measured using the descriptive statistics through calculating mean and standard deviation of each of the latent variables. All of the latent variables were measured in this study using a five-point Likert scale in which, 1 denoted to strongly disagree and 5 denoted to strongly agree. Tables 4.6 reveals the results for interpretation. The five-point Likert scale used in this study was categorized into three i-e low, moderate and high. The scores less than 2 ($3/3 + \text{lowest value of } 1$) represent the low category; the higher category is the scores of 4 (higher value of $5 - 3/3$), while the category between low and high scores is the moderate category; scores of 3 (higher value $4 - 3/3$) (Sassenberg, Matschke, & Scholl, 2011).

Tables 4.6

Descriptive Statistics for Latent constructs (Variables)

Latent Constructs	NO. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Brand Image	20	3.74	0.554
Brand Relevance	5	3.80	0.565
Brand Consistency	5	3.71	0.496
Brand Sustainability	4	3.74	0.632
Brand Credibility	5	3.84	0.540
Brand Uniqueness	4	3.70	0.646
WOM	8	3.81	0.512
Brand Identity	8	3.75	0.531

As shown in Table 4.6, the overall mean of the latent constructs ranged between 3.71 and 3.81. Precisely, the mean plus the standard deviation for the brand image was 3.74 and .554, respectively. Suggesting the responders tended to have a high level of perception of the brand image. Likewise, the findings of the brand attributes that comprised of, “brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, and brand uniqueness”, were 3.80, 3.71, 3.74, 3.84, and 3.70, respectively for the mean, and 0.565, 0.496, 0.632, 0.540, and 0.646, for standard deviation, respectively. This suggests that the responders perceived the level of those variables as higher. Furthermore, the results revealed a higher score for word of mouth (Mean = 3.81, Standard deviation = .512). Conclusively, the

descriptive statistics also indicate a higher score for brand identity (Mean = 3.75; standard deviation = .531).

4.7 Assessment the PLS-SEM Path Model Results

Henseler and Sarstedt (2013) in their study have suggested that the index of goodness-of-fit (G-O-F) is not suitable for the model validation (Hair et al., 2014). Due to the fact that it cannot separate the valid models from the invalid, by using the PLS path coefficient models with simulated data (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). As a result of the recent development regarding the inappropriateness of PLS path coefficient in model validation, the current study adopted a two-step process in order to assess and report the findings, as suggested by (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009). This two-step process comprises of (1) assessment of measurement model, and (2) assessment of structural model; as shown in Figure 4.2 (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2012; Henseler et al., 2009).

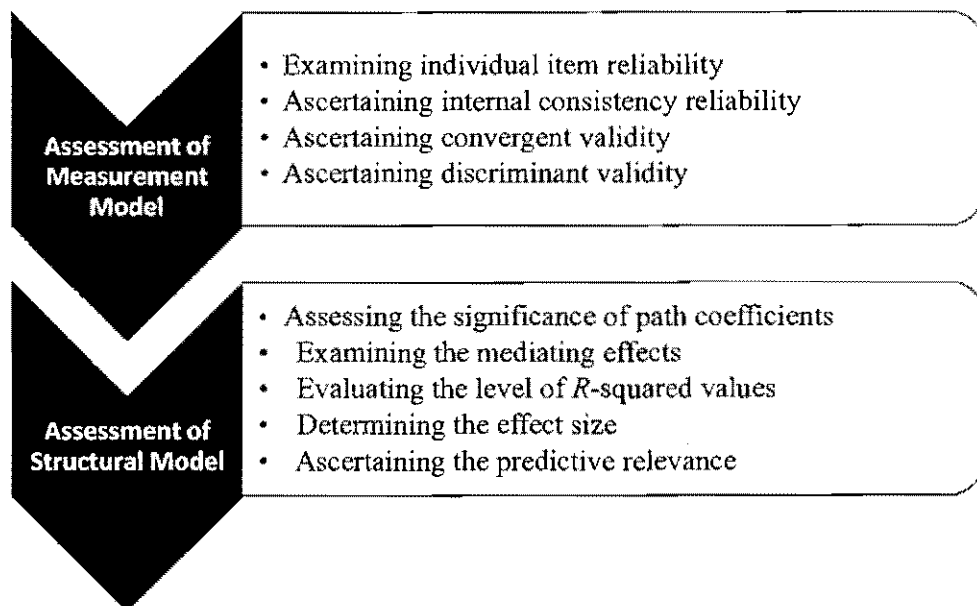


Figure 4.2
A Process of Two-step to Assess the PLS Path Model.
Source: (Henseler et al., 2009).

4.7.1 Assessment of Measurement Model

In the assessment of measurement model, it involves the determining of individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability (ICR) and the content validity, which includes convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009).

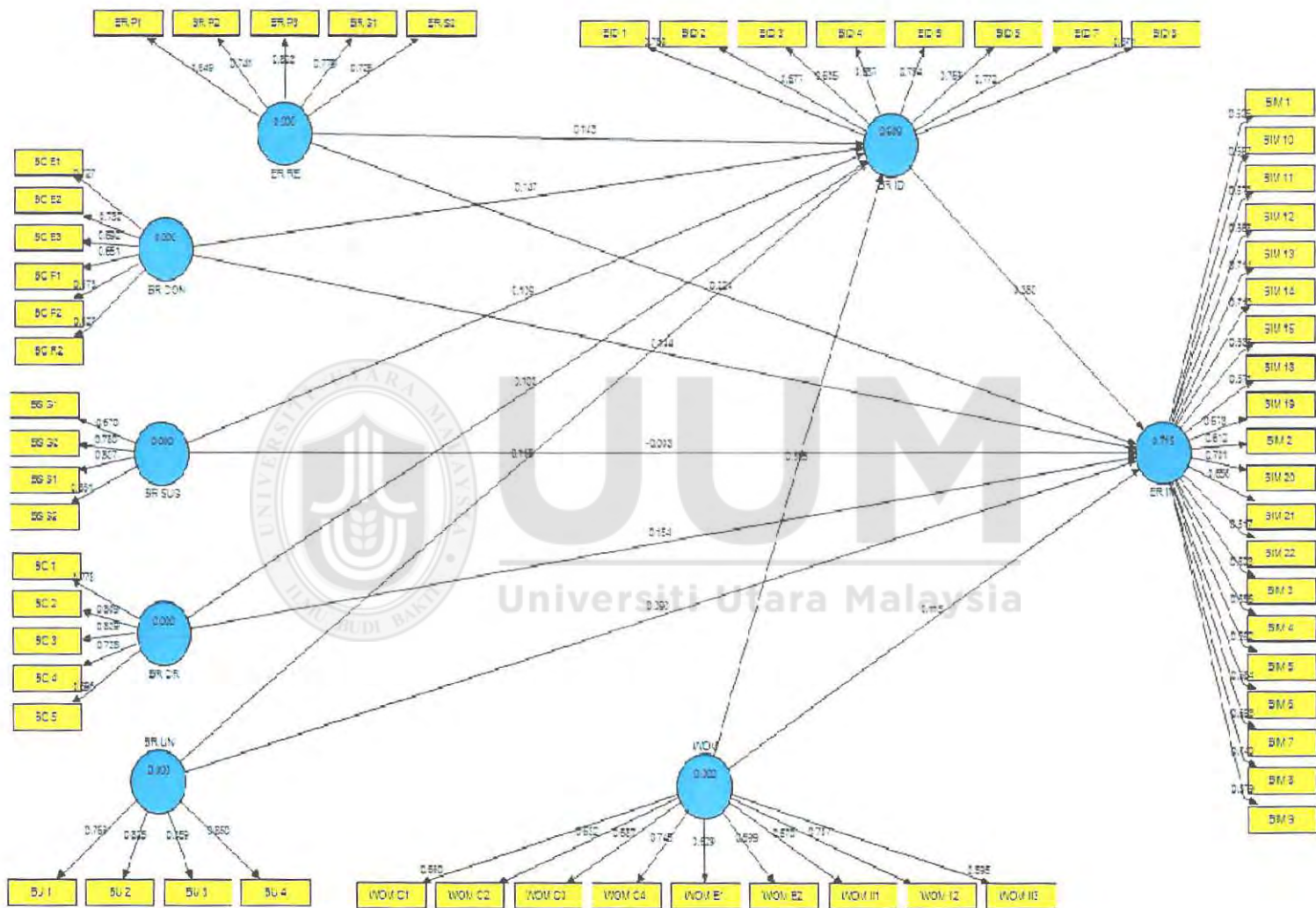


Figure 4.3.
Measurement Model

4.7.1.1 Individual Item Reliability

The process of assessing Individual item reliability was determined by testing the outer loadings of each construct (Duarte, Alves, & Raposo, 2010; Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2012; Hulland, 1999). This is done by applying rules of thumb, to rate items within loadings among .40 and .70 (Hair, et al., 2014). It was observed that out of 64 items, three were deleted because of their loadings below 0.40. The remaining 61 items adequately achieved loading between 0.571 and 0.859, as reported in Table (4.7 and 4.9).

4.7.1.2 Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency, reliability offers measuring the extent to which every item on a particular construct can measure the same concept (Bijttebier, Delva, Vanoost, Bobbaers, Lauwers, & Vertommen, 2000; Sun, Chou, Stacy, Ma, Unger, & Gallaher, 2007). The estimators used to assess the internal consistency reliability are composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Bacon, Sauer, & Young, 1995; McCrae, Kurtz, Yamagata, & Terracciano, 2011; Peterson & Kim, 2013). This study has chosen composite reliability coefficient to ensure the measures are adapted for the internal consistency reliability.

The justification of utilizing composite reliability coefficient were built on two major reasons, in the first instance is because composite reliability was observed to be much less biased in the estimation of reliability than Cronbach's alpha coefficient because the latter assumes every item contribute evenly to its construct without taken into account the genuine contribution of individual loadings

(Barclay, Higgins, & Thompson, 1995; Gotz, Liehr-Gobbers, & Krafft, 2010;). Secondly, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient may increase or decrease the estimation of the scale reliability. However, composite reliability takes into consideration that the indicators have various loadings can also be interpreted in a similar way as Cronbach's α , (internal consistency reliability value that above .70 is considered as acceptable for an adequate model while a value below .60 indicates an insufficiency of reliability, regardless of which reliability coefficient is used). Nonetheless, the explanation of internal consistency reliability by using a composite reliability coefficient has relied upon the rule of thumb suggested by (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Likewise, Hair et al. (2011) recommended that composite reliability coefficient, should have a value of .70 or above. Table 4.7 reveals the composite reliability coefficients (PC) of the latent constructs.

Table 4.7
Loadings, Composite Reliability (pc) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Latent constructs and indicators	Standardized Loadings	Composite Reliability (pc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Image		0.939	0.713
BR IM 1	0.625		
BR IM 2	0.667		
BR IM 3	0.710		
BR IM 4	0.638		
BR IM 5	0.571		

Table 4.7 (Continued)

Latent constructs and indicators	Standardized Loadings	Composite Reliability (pc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Image		0.939	0.713
BR IM 6	0.673		
BR IM 7	0.701		
BR IM 8	0.656		
BR IM 9	0.617		
BR IM 10	0.612		
BR IM 11	0.623		
BR IM 12	0.656		
BR IM 13	0.692		
BR IM 14	0.684		
BR IM 15	0.693		
BR IM 18	0.740		
BR IM 19	0.579		
BR IM 20	0.671		
BR IM 21	0.668		
BR IM 22	0.714		
Brand Relevance		0.872	0.556
BR RE P1	0.649		
BR RE P2	0.741		
BR RE P3	0.823		

Table 4.7 (Continued)

Latent constructs and indicators	Standardized Loadings	Composite Reliability (pc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Relevance		0.872	0.556
BR RE S1	0.779		
BR RE S2	0.726		
Brand Consistency		0.861	0.569
BR CO E1	0.727		
BR CO E2	0.732		
BR CO E3	0.692		
BR CO P1	0.651		
BR CO P2	0.673		
BR CO R2	0.627		
Brand Sustainability		0.844	0.608
BR SU G1	0.670		
BR SU G2	0.780		
BR SU S1	0.807		
BR SU S2	0.851		
Brand Credibility		0.878	0.592
BR CR 1	0.778		
BR CR 2	0.809		
BR CR 3	0.829		

Table 4.7 (Continued)

Latent constructs and indicators	Standardized Loadings	Composite Reliability (pc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Credibility		0.878	0.592
BR CR 4	0.728		
BR CR 5	0.695		
Brand Uniqueness		0.896	0.683
BR UN 1	0.768		
BR UN 2	0.825		
BR UN 3	0.859		
BR UN 4	0.850		
Word of Mouth		0.874	0.543
WOM C1	0.660		
WOM C2	0.632		
WOM C3	0.687		
WOM C4	0.745		
WOM E1	0.629		
WOM E2	0.599		
WOM II1	0.671		
WOM II2	0.707		
WOM II3	0.595		

Table 4.7 (Continued)

Latent constructs and indicators	Standardized Loadings	Composite Reliability (pc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Identity		0.895	0.616
BR ID 1	0.767		
BR ID 2	0.675		
BR ID 3	0.633		
BR ID 4	0.687		
BR ID 5	0.756		
BR ID 6	0.770		
BR ID 7	0.774		
BR ID 8	0.672		

As Table 4.7 indicates, the composite reliability coefficient (PC) of each latent construct ranged between 0.861 and 0.939 thus, the study has achieved acceptable loadings to ensure adequate internal consistency reliability for all its measures (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2011).

4.7.1.3 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity explains the degree to which the items representing a latent construct, truly correlate with other measures of a same latent construct (Hair et al., 2006). It was assessed through examining Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the latent constructs, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). In accordance with Chin (1998), the AVE value for each latent construct must be 0.50 or higher

in order to achieve a sufficient convergent validity. Consequently, the value of AVE of the present finding showed high loadings ($> .50$) for each of the latent constructs hence, indicating sufficient convergent validity (see Table 4.7).

4.7.1.4 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity outlines the extent at which a particular latent construct differs from other latent constructs (Duarte, Alves, & Raposo, 2010). As per recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981) the discriminant validity can be tested by comparing the correlations between the latent constructs through taking the square roots of AVE. Chin (1998) has recommended that the square root of AVE should be greater than the other reflective indicator and reflective indicator loadings within the cross loadings table.

The current study in this regard, responsively achieved discriminant validity. Moreover, following the rule of thumb as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was also deployed whereby, the AVE results were ensured to be 0.50 or more. Furthermore, in order to attain sufficient discriminant validity, the authors have suggested that the square root of Average variance extracted should be higher than the correlations among the latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4.7 indicates that the value of average variances extracted ranged between 0.543 and 0.683, which suggests acceptable values. Hence, a comparison was conducted between latent constructs correlations and the square root of average variances extracted (bolded) as it was indicated in the Table 4.8. The square roots of average

variances extracted were found greater than the correlations between latent constructs, which decisively suggested sufficient discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4.8
The Correlations of Latent Variable with Square Roots of AVE

NO.	Latent variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Brand Image	0.83							
2.	Brand Relevance	0.48	0.77						
3.	Brand Consistency	0.54	0.50	0.74					
4.	Brand Sustainability	0.53	0.58	0.61	0.71				
5.	Brand Credibility	0.61	0.54	0.49	0.57	0.76			
6.	Brand Uniqueness	0.47	0.57	0.62	0.54	0.56	0.75		
7.	Word of mouth	0.54	0.57	0.59	0.6	0.62	0.53	0.78	
8.	Brand Identity	0.51	0.52	0.57	0.65	0.63	0.49	0.56	0.80

Note: the boldface figures express the square root of the AVE

Moreover, as mentioned previously that in order to ascertain discriminant validity, it should be compared between indicator loadings and cross-loadings (Chin, 1998). Thus, according to Chin (1998), all of the indicator loadings must be higher than cross-loadings as it was shown in Table 4.9. All of the indicator loadings were higher than cross-loadings, suggesting sufficient discriminant validity for more analysis, as follow;

Table 4.9
Cross Loadings

Items	BR IM	BR RE	BR CON	BR SUS	BR CR	BR UN	WOM	BR ID
BR IM 1	0.625	0.330	0.389	0.340	0.402	0.312	0.473	0.504
BR IM 2	0.667	0.200	0.351	0.347	0.402	0.416	0.523	0.555
BR IM 3	0.710	0.152	0.434	0.271	0.384	0.376	0.386	0.442
BR IM 4	0.638	0.307	0.400	0.376	0.431	0.343	0.454	0.539
BR IM 5	0.571	0.312	0.426	0.324	0.483	0.438	0.492	0.565
BR IM 6	0.673	0.306	0.399	0.402	0.444	0.382	0.436	0.547
BR IM 7	0.701	0.264	0.448	0.443	0.481	0.450	0.449	0.573
BR IM 8	0.656	0.321	0.453	0.433	0.553	0.452	0.443	0.587
BR IM 9	0.617	0.231	0.327	0.289	0.407	0.266	0.283	0.421
BR IM 10	0.612	0.379	0.389	0.360	0.432	0.367	0.294	0.502
BR IM 11	0.623	0.460	0.413	0.377	0.424	0.415	0.376	0.487
BR IM 12	0.656	0.518	0.430	0.447	0.411	0.506	0.366	0.487
BR IM 13	0.692	0.553	0.467	0.463	0.440	0.514	0.456	0.568
BR IM 14	0.684	0.503	0.432	0.462	0.446	0.516	0.486	0.549
BR IM 15	0.693	0.431	0.365	0.324	0.328	0.344	0.436	0.480
BR IM 18	0.740	0.240	0.336	0.360	0.379	0.349	0.339	0.450
BR IM 19	0.579	0.261	0.398	0.351	0.394	0.422	0.388	0.474

Table 4.9 - (Continued)

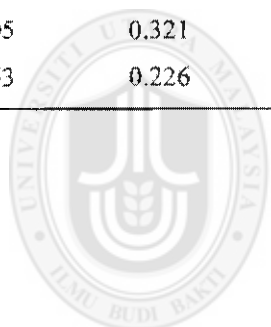
Items	BR IM	BR RE	BR CON	BR SUS	BR CR	BR UN	WOM	BR ID
BR IM 20	0.671	0.309	0.417	0.386	0.363	0.443	0.398	0.503
BR IM 21	0.668	0.244	0.383	0.397	0.406	0.400	0.327	0.433
BR IM 22	0.714	0.191	0.331	0.311	0.347	0.404	0.311	0.421
BR RE P1	0.380	0.649	0.165	0.207	0.245	0.188	0.174	0.272
BR RE P2	0.328	0.741	0.150	0.221	0.153	0.166	0.088	0.231
BR RE P3	0.388	0.823	0.181	0.237	0.219	0.204	0.202	0.314
BR RE S1	0.420	0.779	0.249	0.316	0.268	0.318	0.247	0.345
BR RE S2	0.353	0.726	0.187	0.168	0.178	0.186	0.209	0.253
BR CO E1	0.463	0.200	0.727	0.385	0.412	0.459	0.373	0.444
BR CO E2	0.432	0.214	0.732	0.432	0.446	0.331	0.304	0.362
BR CO E3	0.347	0.122	0.692	0.333	0.365	0.321	0.239	0.312
BR CO P1	0.431	0.199	0.651	0.424	0.422	0.475	0.434	0.463
BR CO P2	0.398	0.176	0.673	0.445	0.386	0.400	0.276	0.358
BR CO R2	0.401	0.112	0.627	0.298	0.305	0.295	0.243	0.364
BR SU G1	0.322	0.182	0.396	0.670	0.287	0.288	0.330	0.362
BR SU G2	0.409	0.323	0.364	0.780	0.331	0.315	0.362	0.404
BR SU S1	0.493	0.215	0.495	0.807	0.581	0.456	0.427	0.433
BR SU S2	0.521	0.257	0.502	0.851	0.658	0.482	0.492	0.571

Table 4.9 - (Continued)

Items	BR IM	BR RE	BR CON	BR SUS	BR CR	BR UN	WOM	BR ID
BR CR 1	0.535	0.248	0.511	0.635	0.778	0.452	0.435	0.513
BR CR 2	0.512	0.232	0.390	0.503	0.809	0.435	0.446	0.462
BR CR 3	0.520	0.217	0.439	0.458	0.829	0.477	0.462	0.486
BR CR 4	0.421	0.212	0.385	0.395	0.728	0.449	0.340	0.410
BR CR 5	0.441	0.204	0.478	0.366	0.695	0.508	0.277	0.365
BR UN 1	0.523	0.267	0.531	0.483	0.630	0.768	0.441	0.505
BR UN 2	0.479	0.209	0.415	0.384	0.480	0.825	0.475	0.427
BR UN 3	0.507	0.229	0.436	0.391	0.442	0.859	0.440	0.508
BR UN 4	0.533	0.253	0.474	0.411	0.430	0.850	0.427	0.551
WOM C1	0.325	0.104	0.191	0.223	0.226	0.282	0.660	0.361
WOM C2	0.300	0.019	0.229	0.352	0.248	0.225	0.632	0.380
WOM C3	0.391	0.133	0.316	0.393	0.307	0.299	0.687	0.420
WOM C4	0.396	0.213	0.280	0.402	0.387	0.362	0.745	0.425
WOM E1	0.600	0.328	0.492	0.461	0.492	0.577	0.629	0.631
WOM E2	0.307	0.121	0.233	0.220	0.254	0.296	0.599	0.366
WOM II1	0.439	0.212	0.343	0.399	0.449	0.307	0.671	0.427
WOM II2	0.436	0.145	0.353	0.319	0.387	0.389	0.707	0.434

Table 4.9 - (Continued)

Items	BR IM	BR RE	BR CON	BR SUS	BR CR	BR UN	WOM	BR ID
BR ID 1	0.593	0.310	0.505	0.496	0.446	0.484	0.537	0.768
BR ID 2	0.534	0.327	0.444	0.443	0.413	0.344	0.448	0.677
BR ID 3	0.454	0.215	0.399	0.307	0.360	0.340	0.349	0.635
BR ID 4	0.502	0.273	0.377	0.432	0.377	0.366	0.308	0.687
BR ID 5	0.584	0.259	0.345	0.418	0.453	0.475	0.494	0.755
BR ID 6	0.570	0.271	0.418	0.446	0.468	0.489	0.509	0.769
BR ID 7	0.605	0.321	0.458	0.436	0.440	0.542	0.607	0.772
BR ID 8	0.553	0.226	0.316	0.328	0.399	0.404	0.544	0.671



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4.7.2 Assessment of Structural Model

Upon responsive assessment of the measurement model, the study examined the structural model. The study applied bootstrapping procedure through running 500 bootstrap samples on 254 cases to evaluate the significance of path coefficients (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009). Figure 4.7 shows the estimates of the entire structural model as well Table 4.13 and 4.14 illustrates the mediation effects (Brand Identity).



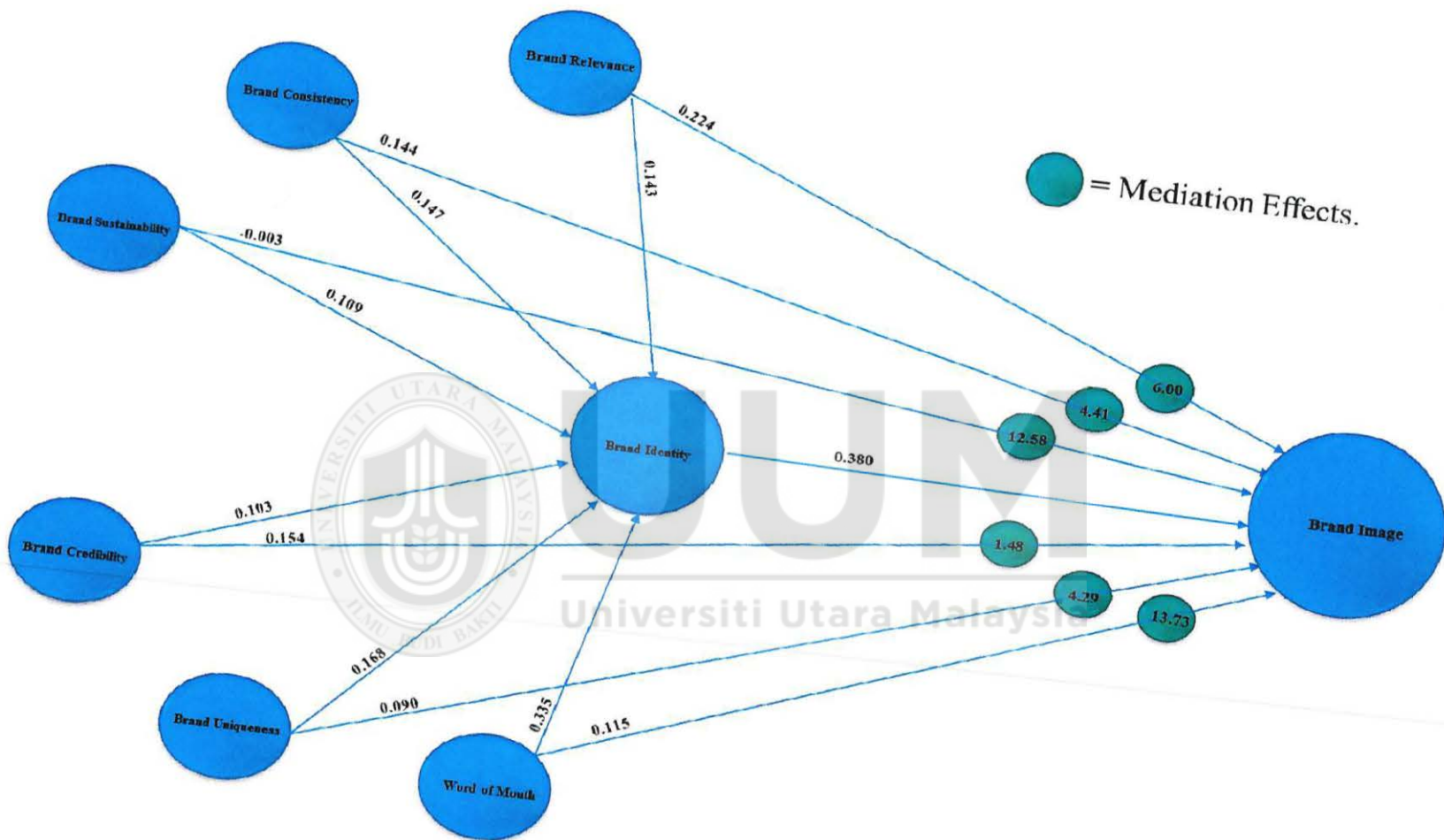


Figure 4.4
Structural Model with Mediation (Full Model)

At the onset, as stated in the first four hypotheses; the structural model found a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand Image. Also, as predicted in H₂. The study also reported a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand identity. Likewise, significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand image was also concluded by the examination of path analysis. Similarly, as predicted, the examination of hypothesis 4 also found a significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand identity. The results of these hypotheses which merged in table 4.10 and figure 4.4, indicating, ($\beta = 0.28, t = 5.26, p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.15, t = 2.86, p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.20, t = 3.77, p < 0.00$), and ($\beta = 0.15, t = 2.49, p < 0.01$), respectively. Hence, indicating all four significantly positive relationships. Consequently, all of which were accepted. However, the result regarding the hypothesis H₅, whereby, the study found an insignificant relationship between brand sustainability and brand image ($\beta = 0.04, t = 0.60, p < 0.27$), hence rejecting the hypothesis. Table 4.10 and figure 4.4 provides further details in this regard.

Table 4.10
Assessment of Structural Model

Hypo	Relations	Beta	SE	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
H ₁	Brand Relevance -> Brand Image	0.28	0.05	5.26*	0.00	Accepted
H ₂	Brand Relevance -> Brand Identity.	0.15	0.05	2.86*	0.00	Accepted
H ₃	Brand Consistency -> Brand Image.	0.20	0.05	3.77*	0.00	Accepted
H ₄	Brand Consistency -> Brand Identity.	0.15	0.06	2.49**	0.01	Accepted
H ₅	Brand Sustainability -> Brand Image.	0.04	0.06	0.60	0.27	Not Accepted
H ₆	Brand Sustainability -> Brand Identity	0.11	0.06	1.94**	0.03	Accepted
H ₇	Brand Credibility -> Brand Image.	0.19	0.06	3.17*	0.00	Accepted
H ₈	Brand Credibility -> Brand Identity.	0.11	0.06	1.83**	0.03	Accepted
H ₉	Brand Uniqueness -> Brand Image.	0.15	0.05	3.07*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₀	Brand Uniqueness -> Brand Identity.	0.17	0.06	2.87*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₁	Word of Mouth -> Brand Image.	0.25	0.06	4.10*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₂	Word of Mouth -> Brand Identity.	0.37	0.05	7.07*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₃	Brand Identity -> Brand Image.	0.48	0.06	8.28*	0.00	Accepted

Note: *Significant at 0.01 (1-tailed), **significant at 0.05 (1-tailed), ***Significant at 0.1 (1-tailed)

The present research predicted that the hypotheses H₆, H₇, H₈, H₉, H₁₀, H₁₁, H₁₂, and H₁₃. Which stated that; there is a significance positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand identity, there is a significance positive relationship between brand credibility and brand image, there is a significance positive relationship between brand credibility and brand identity, there is a significance positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand image, there is a significance positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand identity, there is a significance positive relationship between WOM and brand image, there is a significance positive relationship between WOM and brand identity, and there is a significance positive relationship between brand identity and brand image, respectively. The outlined results in Table 4.10 and Figure 4.4, revealed significant positive relationships ($\beta = 0.11, t = 1.94, p < 0.03$), ($\beta = 0.19, t = 3.17, p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.11, t = 1.83, p < 0.03$), ($\beta = 0.15, t = 3.07, p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.17, t = 2.87, p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.25, t = 4.10, p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.37, t = 7.07, p < 0.00$), and ($\beta = 0.48, t = 8.28, P > 0.00$), hence, supporting the positive claims of these hypotheses.

4.7.3 Structural Model Assessment of the Mediation

The Mediation can be defined as a process where variables interfere in the relation between other variables (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The mediation analysis explains about the indirect effect that exists between the exogenous and endogenous variables via an intervening variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Table 4.11 shows the structural model assessment of the mediation.

Table 4.11

Structural model assessment of the mediation effects

Hypo	Relations	Beta	SE	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
H ₁₄	Brand Relevance -> Brand Identity -> Brand Image	0.04	0.01	6.00*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₅	Brand Consistency -> Brand Identity -> Brand Image	0.04	0.01	4.41*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₆	Brand Sustainability -> Brand Identity -> Brand Image	0.06	0.01	12.58*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₇	Brand Credibility -> Brand Identity -> Brand Image	0.03	0.02	1.48***	0.07	Accepted
H ₁₈	Brand Uniqueness -> Brand Identity -> Brand Image	0.06	0.01	4.29*	0.00	Accepted
H ₁₉	Word of Mouth -> Brand Identity -> Brand Image	0.14	0.01	13.73*	0.00	Accepted

Note: * Significant at 0.01 (1-tailed), ***Significant at 0.1 (1-tailed).

This study tested developed six hypotheses to assess the mediation effect of brand identity between brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand Uniqueness and Word of Mouth in their relationship with brand image, as it was predicted in hypotheses 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19. Table 4.11 indicates that the results were found significant and all the hypotheses hence were accepted at ($\beta = 0.04$, $t = 6.00$, $p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.04$, $t = 4.41$, $p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.06$, $t = 12.58$, $p < 0.00$), ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 1.48$, $p < 0.07$), ($\beta = 0.06$, $t = 4.29$, $p < 0.00$), and ($\beta = 0.04$, $t = 13.73$, $p < 0.00$) respectively. However, the finding on section explains the mediation effect size.

4.7.3.1 Assessment of Mediation Effects

The interference variable (Mediation) has an effect on the relationship between dependent and independent variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). As such relations restricted within two paths, "Path A" independent variables with the mediator, "Path B" the mediator with the dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Successively, "Path C" occurs when the overall effect of the independent variable represents a large extent of variation in the dependent variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). So, when A and B are controlled, the direct effect of the independent variables into the dependent variable will decrease considerably; or becomes insignificant if the mediator is entered concurrently (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Baron & Kenny, 1986). Thus, the effect of "Path C" alone cannot measure the mediation effect size (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). For that reason, mediation size

should be measured through indirect effect between "A * B" and the total effect of latent variables (Hair et al., 2014; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Figure 4.2 shows the paths of the mediation effect.

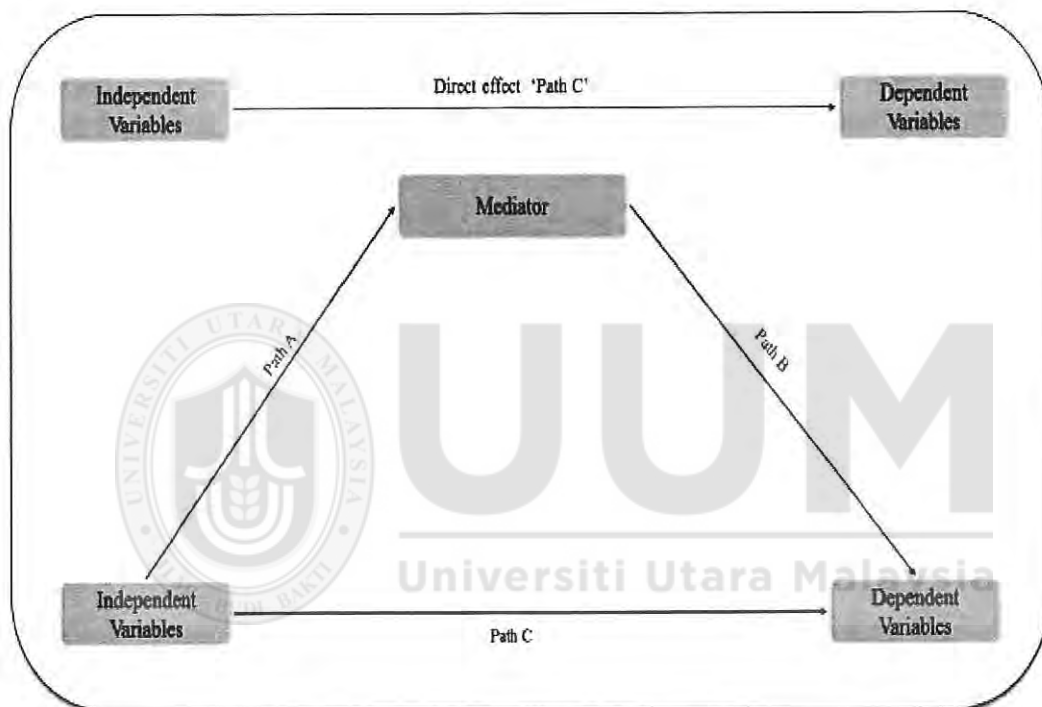


Figure 4.5

The Paths of Mediation Effect Derived from Preacher and Hayes (2008)

The present research followed Hair, et al. (2014) recommendations to estimate the mediating effect by using bootstrapping procedures. Therein, 5,000 bootstraps were applied on 254 cases to evaluate the significant of the path coefficients (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009). Which is the examination of the relationships between the constructs

loadings of the exogenous latent variables to the mediation (*path A*) multiple by the construct loading of mediation to the endogenous latent variable constructs (*path B*), compared to the bootstrapped results of PLS path coefficients (the value of indirect effects ranged between lower bound and upper bound) which indicates that the coefficient is significantly different from zero (Hair, et al., 2014; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Thus, this procedure estimated the structural model path coefficients crucially (significantly) (Hair et al., 2014; Helm, Eggert, & Garnefeld, 2010). Table 4.12 shows the bootstrapping procedure with confidence interval (CI) for the Mediation Effect Size.





Table 4.12
Mediation Effect Size

**Bootstrapped Confidence
Interval (CI)**

Hypo	Path (<i>A</i>)	Path (<i>B</i>)	Indirect Effect(β)	SE	T-value	P-Value	95% LL	95% UL
H ₁₄	0.143	0.380	0.054	0.022	2.52*	0.01	0.054	0.058
H ₁₅	0.147	0.380	0.056	0.026	2.12*	0.02	0.056	0.061
H ₁₆	0.109	0.380	0.041	0.022	1.92**	0.03	0.037	0.041
H ₁₇	0.103	0.380	0.039	0.023	1.68**	0.05	0.038	0.042
H ₁₈	0.168	0.380	0.064	0.024	2.66*	0.00	0.060	0.064
H ₁₉	0.335	0.380	0.127	0.031	4.11*	0.00	0.137	0.143

Note: (*a*) = Independent Variables * Mediating Variable, (*b*) = Mediating Variable * Dependent Variable, (LL) = Lower Limit, (UL) = Upper limit, (CI) = confidence interval, (1-tailed). (*) Significant at 0.01 (1-tailed), (**) Significant at 0.05 (1-tailed)

As indicated in Table 4.12, the proportions of the mediation effect size (Indirect Effect-(β)) for the latent variables constructs, namely; brand relevance H₁₄, brand consistency H₁₅, brand sustainability H₁₆, brand credibility H₁₇, brand uniqueness H₁₈, WOM H₁₉ ranged between the bootstrapped confidence interval (CI) values that were different from zero. Henceforth, it Indicated presence of mediation effects and the size is explained by the t-values of those constructs which has resulted to be significant at 1-tailed level (t = 2.52, 2.12, 1.92, 1.68, 2.66, and 4.11, respectively, and P-value at (0.01, 0.02, 0.03, 0.05, 0.00, and 0.00) Therefore, the t-values are significantly accepted at 1- tailed for those hypotheses which ranged between 0.01 and 0.05.

4.8 Assessment of Variance Explained into Endogenous Latent Variable

R-squared value is a significant criterion to assess structural model in PLS-SEM algorithm (Hair et al., 2012; Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009). Therefore, the value of R-squared represents the contrast ratio in the dependent variable(s) which allows the interpretation of predictor variable (Elliott & Woodward, 2007; Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2006). Despite the acceptable level of R-squared value (R^2), it also depends on the research context (Hair et al., 2010), yet, the minimum acceptable level of R-squared value could a minimum of 0.10 as suggested by Falk and Miller (1992). Besides, Chin (1998) suggested that the R-squared value at 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 in PLS-SEM algorithm can be described respectively as substantial,

moderate, and weak. Table 4.13 in this aspect shows the R-squared value for the endogenous latent variables.

Table 4.13
Variance Explained in the Endogenous Latent Variable

Latent Variable	Variance Explained (R^2)
Brand Image	72%

As shown in Table 4.13, the research model explained 72 percent variance in brand Image. This suggests that the sex sets of the exogenous latent variables (i.e., brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and word of mouth) collectively explained 72 percent variance in the brand image. Hence, by following the criteria of both Chin's (1998), Falk and Miller's (1992) the endogenous latent variables showed a significant level of (R-squared) value, which is above the substantial level.

4.9 Assessment of Effect Size (f^2)

Effect size refers to the relative effect of a specific exogenous latent variable upon the endogenous latent variable (s). This is assessed through changes in the R-squared values (Chin, 1998). Therein, f^2 can be calculated through change in R^2 of latent variable and to what extent the path is connected (Chin, 1998). This is

calculated through the effect size formula (Callaghan, Wilson, Henseler, & Ringle, 2007; Cohen, 1988; Selya, Rose, Dierker, Hedeker, & Mermelstein, 2012).

$$\text{Effect size: } (f^2) = \frac{R^2 \text{ Included} - R^2 \text{ Excluded}}{1 - R^2 \text{ Included}}$$

In accordance with Cohen (1988) recommendation, the f^2 value of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 can be described as weak, moderate, and strong effects respectively. According to the Table 4.14, the effect size results of brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, Word of Mouth and brand identity on brand image, were 0.15, 0.05, 0.00, 0.07, 0.03, 0.04 and 0.38 respectively. Therefore, according to Cohen (1988) directives by applying the equation above, the effects sizes from the seven exogenous latent variables and the mediator variable on the brand image can be considered as moderate ($f^2 = 0.15$), small ($f^2 = 0.05$), none ($f^2 = 0.00$), small ($f^2 = 0.07$), small ($f^2 = 0.03$), small ($f^2 = 0.04$), and strong ($f^2 = 0.34$), respectively. Table 4.14 below demonstrates the respective effect sizes of latent variables in the structural model.

Table 4.14.

Effect Size of the Latent Variables on Cohen's (1988) Recommendation

R-squared	included	excluded	f-squared	Effect size
Brand Image (D.V)				
Brand Relevance	0.72	0.67	0.15	Moderate
Brand Consistency	0.72	0.70	0.05	Small
Brand Sustainability	0.72	0.72	0.00	None
Brand Credibility	0.72	0.70	0.07	Small
Brand Uniqueness	0.72	0.71	0.03	Small
Word of Mouth	0.72	0.70	0.04	Small
Brand Identity	0.72	0.61	0.38	Strong

4.10 Assessment of Predictive Relevance

In this study the assessment of predictive relevance was carried out through PLS-SEM algorithm using Stone-Geisser test to determine the predictive relevance of the research model through employing blindfolding procedures (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974). Generally, it is used as a supplementary evaluation of a goodness-of-fit to obtain better outcomes in PLS-SEM path model (Duarte & Raposo, 2010). Despite blindfolding being applied to ensure predictive relevance of the research model, it is worthy to mention that, in accordance to Sattler, Völckner, Riediger, and Ringle (2010) "blindfolding as is a procedure that can be applied only to the endogenous latent variables that have a practical reflective potential in the measurement model". The reflective measurement model "stipulates that the latent

and unobservable concept causes variations in a group of observable indicators (McMillan & Conner, 2003). Hence, because the endogenous latent variables in this study are reflective in nature, the blindfolding procedure was applied.

However, a cross-validated redundancy measure " Q^2 " was also applied to evaluate the predictive relevance of the search model (Hair et al., 2013; Ringle, Sarstedt, & Straub, 2012b; Chin, 2010; Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974). Q^2 is a criterion, utilized to measure the extent of a model's ability to predict the data of deleted cases (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 2014). Thus, in accordance with Henseler et al. (2009), any research model with Q^2 statistic above zero can be termed to have achieved adequate predictive relevance. The research model with high positive value of Q^2 suggests increase in the predictive relevance. Table 4.15 presents the findings of cross-validated redundancy test (Q^2).

Table 4.15
Construct Cross-Validated Redundancy

Total	SSO	SSE	1-SSE/SSO
Brand Image	5334	3771.6	0.293
Brand Identity	2032	1424.5	0.300

As indicated in Table 4.15, the Q^2 cross-validation redundancy measure for each endogenous latent variable was above zero hence, suggesting sufficient predictive relevance in the model (Henseler et al., 2009; Chin, 1998).

4.11 Summary of Findings

All the results of main and mediation effects as presented in previous sections from hypotheses test were summarized in the Table 4.16.

Table 4.16
Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypo	Statement	Findings
H ₁	There is a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand image.	Accepted
H ₂	There is a significant positive relationship between brand relevance and brand identity.	Accepted
H ₃	There is a significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand image.	Accepted
H ₄	There is a significant positive relationship between brand consistency and brand identity	Accepted
H ₅	There is a significant positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand image.	Not Accepted
H ₆	There is a significant positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand identity.	Accepted
H ₇	There is significant positive relationship between brand credibility and brand image.	Accepted
H ₈	There is significant positive relationship between brand credibility and brand identity.	Accepted

Table 4.16 - (Continued)

Hypo	Statement	Findings
H ₉	There is significant positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand image.	Accepted
H ₁₀	There is a significant positive relationship between brand uniqueness and brand identity.	Accepted
H ₁₁	There is a significant positive relationship between WOM and brand image.	Accepted
H ₁₂	There is a significant positive relationship between WOM and brand identity.	Accepted
H ₁₃	There is a significant positive relationship between brand identity and brand image.	Accepted
H ₁₄	Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand relevance and brand Image.	Accepted
H ₁₅	Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand consistency and brand Image.	Accepted
H ₁₆	Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand sustainability and brand Image.	Accepted
H ₁₇	Brand identity mediates the relationship between brand credibility and brand Image.	Accepted
H ₁₈	Brand identity mediates the relationship between Brand uniqueness and brand image.	Accepted
H ₁₉	Brand identity mediates the relationship between WOM and brand image.	Accepted

4.12 Summary

In this chapter, data analysis results were explained whereby, the discussion was initiated with the justification for utilizing the PLS-SEM path modeling approach and test of the theoretical model. Following to this, the chapter underlined significance of path coefficients via assessment of the measurement and structural model. The chapter also highlighted the results of the mediation effects of brand identity which also resulted to be significant in the relationship between endogenous and exogenous variables of the study. Particularly, the path coefficients confirmed the positive relationships between (1) brand relevance, brand consistency, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and WOM on the brand image, (2) brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and WOM on the brand identity, (3) brand identity and brand image. On a contrary, the path coefficients failed to outline any positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand image.

More importantly, concerning the mediating effects of brand identity on the relationships between exogenous variables and the endogenous variable, PLS-SEM path coefficients confirmed six formulated hypotheses of mediating effects. In particular, brand identity mediated the relationship between brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and Word of Mouth on brand image. However, only one hypothesis was not supported that is the relationship between brand consistency and brand image. Chapter five discusses findings, implications, limitations, future research suggestions, and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

Parallel to the research questions and objectives of the study, the current chapter draws a detailed discussion on the findings by relating them to previous studies and theoretical propositions on brand image. The chapter starts with the recapitulation of the findings followed by a critical appraisal of the research findings. The chapter also discusses the linkage between the findings and those reported in prior studies to forward theoretical, practical and methodological implications. Finally, the chapter highlights the limitations and scope for further research followed by the conclusion of the study.

5.1 Recapitulation of the Research Findings

Overall, the present research succeeded in offering an understanding of the examined variables. The study has responsively answered the research questions as follows:

RQ₁: Do brand attributes and WOM significantly influence brand image?

RQ₂: Do brand attributes and WOM significantly influence brand identity?

RQ₃: Does brand identity has a positive relationship with brand image?

RQ4; Does brand identity mediate the relationships between brand attributes, WOM, and brand image?

In line with the research questions, the study's main objective was to examine the influence of brand attribute components (i.e., brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and brand communications represented by word of mouth) on brand image. It also assessed the mediating effect of brand identity on these relationships among travellers using two international airports in the northern region of Malaysia. In specific, the three objectives were as follows:

RO1: To examine the relationships between brand attributes, WOM and brand Image.

RO2: To examine the relationships between brand attributes, WOM and brand identity.

RO3: To assess the relationship between brand identity and brand image.

RO4: To assess the mediating effect of brand identity on the relationship between brand attributes, WOM and brand image.

On the direct relationship between the endogenous and exogenous latent variables, the results of the PLS path modelling provide significant contributions to both theory and practice. The findings showed that five hypotheses of six were accepted. That is, brand relevance, brand consistency, brand credibility, brand

uniqueness, and WOM were found to positively influence brand image. Brand sustainability, however, failed to show any positive relationship with brand image. Similarly, the direct relationship between the endogenous latent variables and brand identity (mediator) were also found significant.

Of all brand attributes, brand sustainability was not significantly related to brand image. Brand attributes refer to the differentiation process and adopted procedures by competitors regarding their brands which are developed to strengthen the mental perceptions of consumers about the brands (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto 1994; Mizik, & Jacobson, 2008). Wilkie and Pessemier (1973) asserted that brand attributes are capable of structuring various models under extraordinary circumstances related to market conditions and consumer awareness. For this reason, attributes have been surrounded by individuals and processes that are related to regulatory marks (Harvey et al., 2014). According to Martinko et al. (2006), brand attributes have an important role in shaping basic behaviour in institutional psychology pertaining to individual differences and interactions between leaders and members. That is, brand attributes have the ability to transform the perceptions of consumers towards the brand image effectively. The result is congruent with attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967), which explains the informative and derivative behaviour from the nature of person (brand attributes) it represents and how it responds towards it accordingly (i.e., the response to brand image or opinion).

Notably, previous studies on the relationship between brand attributes and brand image on indirect nodes. For example, a study conducted by Keller (1993)

found that brand image was everything in a consumer's mind about the brand that generates perceptions and perspectives called the attribute. Swain et al. (1993) revealed the relationship between brand attributes and self-brand image. Yagci (2000) examined the relationship between attribute relevance and brand image in a mediated model and found what? Theodoridis and Chatzipanagiotou (2009) integrated several brand features and brand image under one name and termed them as image attributes. Harvey et al. (2014) confirmed the role of attribution theory in the predictive ability of attributes in an organizational context.

Secondly, the present research hypothesized a significant positive relationship between brand attributes (brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, and brand uniqueness) and brand identity. As proposed, the findings indicated a positive relationship between brand attributes and brand identity. This result indicates that brand attributes and brand identity share a similar function and both originate from organizational prospects and expressed through brand attributes. Features of brand attributes differentiate brand characteristics in consumers' minds (Keller, 1993; Myers & Shocker 1981). Keller (1998) explained that brand attributes can be classified and addressed under different subjects, such as brand identity and brand image.

According to Griffin (2006), attribution theory by Heider (1958) is a communication theory (i.e., interpersonal communications). It follows that brand identity reflects an integrated communication system, generated by the companies themselves. For this reason, companies seek to preserve their brand characteristics and features. Accordingly, organizations also strive to highlight and identify their

brand to all parties involved (Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005). The empirical results on the positive relationship between brand attributes and brand identity were not surprising because of a consensus of scholarly opinions (Harvey et al., 2014). As mentioned previously, brand attributes can be tested and modelled within various frameworks under extraordinary circumstances regarding the depth of consumers' awareness for markets condition (Harvey et al., 2014). Also, previous researchers had attempted to combine these variables but had not studied them directly (Chung, 2001; Keller, 1993, 1998; Myers & Shocker 1981; Ulrich et al., 2011). In particular, a study by Underwood (2003) stressed that product-related attributes can be obtained through communicative strength, which can be achieved by establishing brand identity using communication prospects. On the other hand, Ulrich et al. (2011) studied the criteria of brand gender and its relation to consumers. They revealed six dimensions of what namely, brand attributes, communication (i.e., brand identity is the source of all communication activity), grammatical brand name, logo attributes, attributes of products and benefits.

Word of mouth is regarded as an effectiveness tool of brand communication which connects to individuals within the marketplace concerning the information about the organization and its offering (Brooks, 1957; Martensson, 2009; Richins, 1983). Word of mouth affects consumer decisions more than other communication elements (Herr et al., 1991). If the process of interpersonal communication is unpleasant, it could lead to the dysfunctioning of an organized activity or product brand which can also be referred to as negative word of mouth (Laczniak et al.,

2001; Richins, 1984; Weinberger et al., 1981). According to Kelley (1967, 1973), attribution theory could describe the causal attributes that allow individuals to obtain responses through the information provided, compressed and stimulated (brand), individuals (communicator) and circumstances (e.g., NWOM). There are dimensions that contrast with the negative perspective of communicator such as the capacity of the communicator to link the negative information about a specified brand, the consistency, and the degree of the negative experience (time and circumstances) to the brand by the communicator (Laczniak et al., 2001). A considerable number of prominent scholarly papers have reported that word of mouth, brand image, and brand identity are associated within communication perspective (Escalasm & Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009).

Based on the previous debate, to attain a theoretical understanding of the linkages between the current research variables, four questions and four objectives were formulated. Accordingly, a total of 19 hypotheses were tested using the structural equation modelling approach. The following sections address these issues in depth on the research findings. Recommendations are forwarded in line with the research objectives.

5.2 Discussion

The first question asked, 'Do brand attributes and WOM significantly influence brand image?'. The question was in line with the first objective which was to

examine the relationship between brand attributes, WOM, and brand image. The second question asked, 'Do brand attributes and WOM significantly influence brand identity?', which was in line with the second objective which was to examine the relationship between brand attributes, WOM, and brand identity. Consequently, 12 hypotheses were formulated to examine the significance of the relationships. The following section presents the findings by the research questions.

5.2.1 Brand Attributes and Brand Image

The first hypothesis on the positive relationship between brand relevance and brand image was accepted. The result is consistent with previous research. For instance, Yagci (2000) examined the mediating role of brand image and attribute relevance. Judson et al. (2012) tested the relationship between self-perception and brand relevance indirectly. The relationship between brand consistency and brand image was also found significantly positive, supporting the third hypothesis. The positive relationship is congruent with previous research, indicating that perceptions of consistency depend on the product's capability of extending the comprehension of the brand concept (Biel, 1992; Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999; Park et al., 1991).

However, the fifth hypothesis on the relationship between brand sustainability and brand image was not supported contrary to previous studies (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Cotte & Trudel 2009; Luchs et al., 2010; Meffert, Rauch, & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011). One possible reason for the non-significant relationship could

be that brand sustainability, in some cases, does not have much relevance to brand image because previous research has associated it with topics like sustainable production, consumption processes, consumer preferences, corporate financial services, and industrial production (Cotte & Trudel, 2009; Luchs et al., 2010; JK Simpson, & Radford, 2014; Radford & Simpson, 2009; Ogrizek, 2002). Another point is that sustainability is a concept with a narrow and limited coverage in many of the previous studies regarding the brand (Kang & Hur, 2012; Luchs et al., 2010).

On the relationship between brand credibility and brand image, the result supported the hypothesised positive relationship. This empirical finding is congruent with past studies of Baek, Kim and Yu (2010), Bhat and Reddy (2001), and Lau and Phau (2007), highlighting that brand credibility can lead towards enhancing brand image. Also, brand uniqueness and brand image were found to be positively related. This finding is parallel with Keller (2003) and Park (2009). Both of these studies also concluded that brand uniqueness is one of the key factors of enhancing brand image.

5.2.2 Word of Mouth and Brand Image

The hypothesis on the influence of word of mouth on brand image was also supported, resonating with past findings. The result suggests that WOM is a communication tool which is closely related to brand image which is why consumers prefer a compatible brand based on their reference groups (Escales & Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Mårtensson, 2009).

5.2.3 Brand Attributes and Brand Identity

The hypothesised relationship between brand relevance and brand identity was also supported. The finding is congruent with past literature (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). Other researchers also found a significant and positive relationship between relevance and brand communication (Albrecht et al., 2011; Bauer et al., 2007; Judson et al., 2012), corroborating the idea that brand identity is the cornerstone of all communication activities (Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005).

The fourth hypothesis on the relationship between brand consistency and brand identity was also supported. This result is one of the major contributions of the current study because the relationship was never studied before (e.g., Biel, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999; Posavac, Sanbonmatsu, & Ho, 2002). Past studies on brand consistency seemed to have focused more on topics related to consumer attitudes, purchasing behaviours, existence of differences in advertisement and brand value in the global market (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; Van-Kerckhove et al., 2011), neglecting topics such as brand identity.

On the positive relationship between brand sustainability and brand identity, the finding also found an empirical support for it. The literature suggests that sustainability can influence the perceptions and awareness of consumers about a brand (Hay, 2010; Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, & Raghunathan, 2010). Sustainable consumption within the societies can help focus on choices that facilitate the sustenance a self-identity (Soron, 2010). Notably, this is another major contribution

of the present study both theoretically as well as empirically. Past studies have not considered the impact of brand sustainability and brand identity in such a model (Cotte & Trudel, 2009; Luchs et al., 2010; Radford & Simpson, 2009; Ogrizek, 2002).

The eighth hypothesis proposed that the relationship between brand credibility and brand identity is positive. Expectedly, the result supported the proposition. This empirical finding is congruent with past studies by Haley (1985) and Ruth (2001) who revealed that brand credibility was the most significant characteristic of the identification of a brand. Brand credibility has a notable influence on the consumer awareness level, boosting consumer confidence in the brand as reported in the past literature (Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Haley, 1985; Lau & Phau, 2007; Ruth, 2001). Brand uniqueness and brand identity were shown to be significantly and positively related. The result is consistent with Laczniak and Ramaswami's (2001) finding. The result is another empirical contribution towards the existing body of knowledge. It is worth to mention that uniqueness is derived from individuals' self-esteem and distinctiveness needs (Albrecht et al., 2011; Tian et al., 2001).

5.2.4 Word of Mouth and Brand Identity

On the second objective of the present research, the result demonstrated that WOM influenced brand identity positively. This result is consistent with the past literature which reported that WOM and brand identity are closely related to the

communication of the brand which makes a significant impact on consumers (Mårtensson, 2009). Word of mouth acts as a communication process between individuals through non-commercial hubs concerning the brands or companies. Such communication is taken as reliable information by consumers because it is connected to brand identity (Brooks, 1957; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Lacznia, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Richins, 1983). The result adds another contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

5.2.5 Findings Implications for the First Two Objectives

Brand relevance is one of the components of brand features that is likely to create brand identity and brand image. To ensure the stability of its own brand in the market and amongst the consumers to keep the brand surviving competitively, MAS needs to consider strongly the role of brand relevance in its marketing and promotional strategies. Furthermore, brand relevance is vital for MAS since it represents the country's image.

The attribution theory by Fritz Hiedler (1958) talks about the correspondence between individual motivation and behaviour (Jones & Davis, 1965). Scholars asserted that behavioural actions can be better understood by this theory (Gerzema, Lebar, Sussman, & Gaikowski, 2007; Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013). Hence, the theory was deployed in the present study to understand the decision-making process of individuals based on brand attributes. Accordingly, the result can be explained from the theoretical lense (Aaker, 2012; Albrecht et al.,

2011; Bauer et al., 2007; Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Judson et al., 2012; Lovett et al. 2014; Mårtensson, 2009; Mizik, & Jacobson, 2008; Nandan, 2005; Yagci, 2000; Young & Rubicam, 2000). Based on the theory, MAS consumers when provided with better services are likely to perceive the relevance of the MAS brand.

Brand consistency was also found to enhance brand identity and brand image. The finding has important implications for MAS in that MAS needs to put in relevant measures to ensure that it projects brand consistency in the services offered to satisfy its customers. It is worth noting that past research did not attempt to examine brand consistency through attribution theory (Heider, 1958) as they mainly focused on general brand attributes (Harvey et al., 2014; Lord, 1995). However, brand consistency was reported to be an important indicator of consumer attitudes and behaviour toward a brand (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990). Past studies showed that brand consistency created the overall brand identity and brand image, leading to customer satisfaction (Biel, 1992; Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Mårtensson, 2009; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999; Nandan, 2005; Park et al., 1991; Van-Kerckhove et al. 2011).

Of the brand features, the non-significant result on brand sustainability and brand image was unexpected. The result is inconsistent with past studies (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Meffert, Rauch, & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011). Two key clarifications appear to be fitting this result; First, past research demonstrated the significant role of brand sustainability as it is an important feature of brand

attributes, which can have significant effects on brand identity and brand image (Harvey et al., 2014; Keller, 1993; Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005; Swain et al., 1993; Theodoratos, & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009; Underwood, 2003; Yagci, 2000). The significant relationship between brand sustainability and brand identity was also reported elsewhere (Hay, 2010; Luchs, Naylor, Irwin & Raghunathan, 2010; Soron, 2010).

Worth to recap that brand identity has a significant impact on brand image as suggested by the findings of the current study. Also, brand sustainability adds value to the brand in terms of social benefits it offers to consumers. Consumers perceive brand identity in relation to its attributes, resulting in a positive brand image. Based on the findings, MAS can develop its brand to deal with its competitors and lure customers. The link between brand sustainability and brand identity was found to be strong, and a similar result was reported for brand identity and brand image relationship. In conclusion, brand sustainability and brand image seems to be indirectly related. Furthermore, in line with attribution theory (Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967), sustainability motivates customers to interact within the production process (Radford & Simpson, 2009; Simpson & Radford, 2014) so that they can assess the sustainable value of the brand attributes (Cotte & Trudel, 2009). In short, individuals connect with the delicate features of the brand such as brand sustainability to perceive the potential benefits and value of the specific brand (Luchs et al., 2010).

The resemblance between brand credibility, brand identity and brand image refer to the fact that they share some properties. For instance, credibility is an

important feature of brand attributes, which is vital in building brand identity to enhance customer perceptions of a good brand image. In this respect, MAS needs to consider the relationships to deliver a suitable brand in the market and to its customers to maximize the airline's services and overall brand. Mas also needs to ensure brand stability to help it achieve broader organizational objectives. At the moment, brand credibility has become a delicate feature due to its association with the country's image.

Furthermore, brand credibility influences consumer choice and selection (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Swait & Erdem, 2007). The result can also be explained from the perspective of attribution theory (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967). The finding supports past studies (Baek, Kim, & Yu, 2010; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Bivainienė, 2007; Erdem & Swait, 1998, 2004; Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela 2006; Haley, 1985; Lau & Phau, 2007; Leischnig, Geigenmüller, & Enke, 2012; Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005; Ruth, 2001; Sweeney, & Swait, 2008). The finding suggests that when customers perceive a brand of being trustworthy, they tend to see that the brand is credible.

The empirical finding of the present study also revealed that brand uniqueness and brand identity were positively and significantly related. The choice of a unique brand reflects consumers' desire to preserve self-image, hence the importance of developing a good brand image for MAS. Brand uniqueness is an important attribute that needs to exist in a brand to provide the element of distinctiveness for consumers. Attribution theory proposes that different behaviour and attitudes of individuals are shaped by how they perceive elements such as brand

attributes (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967). The finding is also parallel to that reported in past studies (Albrecht et al., 2011; Berger & Heath, 2007, 2008; Berger & Rand, 2008; Bivainienė, 2007; Keller, 2003; Laczniak & Ramaswami 2001; Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005; Niemeyer et al., 2004; Park, 2009; Tian et al., 2001; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). The past literature suggests that uniqueness is a fundamental element of brand particularly in creating brand awareness in consumer minds and shaping brand perceptions. In the context of airline services, brand identity reflects the different brand of the airlines in question, which is critical for the airline's brand.

On WOM, brand identity, and brand image, WOM is a communication tool in which brand image and brand identity form an integrated communication system that receives and processes organizational and consumer messages. The relationships represent brand communication. Therefore, MAS must consider the potential relationships to present a positive brand because WOM has the power to make a substantial change in the market and consumers' attitude towards any brand.

In line with attribution theory (Heider, 1958), it can be said that WOM is an expression of individual attitudes and reactions (i.e., person to person) which this theory helps to unveil (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Heider, 1958; Griffin, 2006, 2008; Kelley (1967, 1973). Importantly, these relationships have not been tested directly and indirectly with brand image and directly on a larger scale (Lovett et al., 2013; Jalilvand et al., 2012). Notably, these findings support and validate theoretical propositions of other scholars (Alexander, 2006; Brooks, 1957; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Herr et al., 1991; Escales & Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007; Kim & Morrison,

2005; Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Mårtensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005; Richins, 1983).

Consumers are vulnerable to the positive and negative WOM that can influence brand identity and brand image of the MAS airline. Since the literature indicates that WOM is an uncontrollable communication tool, it is vital for MAS to conduct market research frequently to measure the status of their brand from the consumers' point of view. Likewise, MAS must also keep the communication wide open with the consumers in the markets. Thus, to preserve its brand identity and brand image, MAS should form its brand identity such that their brand is well-established in comparison with competitors to reflect the brand perception (brand image) positively. In the case of accidents, a well-established brand will not encounter too much trouble in terms of its reputation and perception.

5.2.6 Brand Identity and Brand Image

The third objective outlined that brand identity is a key element in generating awareness about a brand and its importance (Geuens et al., 2009; Laforet, 2010). Brand image is a collection of feelings and perceptions of self-sensory nature that helps evaluate a particular brand. Brand identity and image are established through behavioural interpretations whether emotionally or rationally (Bivainienė, 2007; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Gardner, 1965; Musante, 2000). The result found a significant and positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that brand identity could influence brand image. This finding is consistent with the

previous literature (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dutton et al., 1994). Also, according to Mårtensson (2009), the relationship between brand identity and brand image is homogeneous in nature, meaning that they can be described as two sided. According to Bivainienė (2007) and Nandan (2005), brand identity is an organizational component that helps create awareness of products and services that consumers observe based on their perceptions and experiences. Bosch, Venter, Han, and Boshoff (2006), Konecnik and Go (2008), and Nandan (2005) also confirmed the critical relationship between brand identity and brand image.

Aaker (1997), Escalas and Bettman (2005), Farhana (2014), Geuens et al. (2009), and Keller (1998) emphasized that brand identity is the outcome of designing and delivering brands by the organization, and it acts as a tool that enables consumers to express their self-image and establish their identity about certain brands. According to Bivainienė (2007), Janonis et al. (2007), and Nandan (2005), brand identity originates from the organization's activities and provides various products with unique properties. It helps discover fundamental differences between brands and their competitors and establish a sustained brand image in the customers' minds. It works as a feature to entice customers to support self-respect and untangle the messages that are sent to consumers. On the other hand, brand image originates from consumers' perceptions that helps them distinguish and differentiate amongst the brands' offerings. It is a group of multi-functional advantages (both tangible and intangible) which enables consumers to recognize the product, determine the brand associations (attributes, benefits, and attitudes), and enhance the desire of self-image.

In line with the previous discussion, communications involve consumers' activities to build an identity and image about a brand. This identity enables consumers to send their signals about a brand. Based on their self-image, consumers give opinions about the brand image which enables organizations to maintain a continuous feedback and improvement process (Bivainienė, 2007; Taylor & Smith, 2011). Therefore, the interdependence between communication mechanisms and the understanding of behaviour and attitudes provide a prospect for preserving the relationship with consumers, which creates a perfect communication loop (Taylor & Smith, 2011; Bivainienė, 2007; Sirgy, 1982). Similarly, the coherence between brand identity and communications demand that organizations concentrate consistently on brand identity, which in turn contributes to the stability and sustainability of the brand (Kapferer, 2004).

5.2.7 Findings Implications for the Third Objective

Wheeler (2010) contended that investment in brand identity is paramount to facilitate consumers to buy the brand and for marketers to sell the brand which empowers the organization to build its brand through communication (Taylor & Smith, 2011; Farhana, 2014). A brand is like a system or tool that represents the self-image of consumers (Keller, 1998). It allows consumers to express their attitudes and confirm their identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Likewise, brand identity expresses the entity of consumers, which help them to distinguish the brand (Mårtensson, 2009). Brand identity operates like a vision of how the brand would be viewed by consumers and the basis of communication activities, offering a clear

and strong content (Mårtensson, 2009). Notably, the MAS airline is recommended to consider presenting its brand in such a manner that could be perceived viable by its consumers. MAS also needs to focus on such elements to help improve its status in the market, making its services more acceptable and demanded to ensure brand continuity and the achievement of strategic organizational goals. Since MAS represents the country's image, addressing its branding issues is essential for its existence and survival.

Past studies documented a significant relationship between brand identity and brand image (Aaker, 1997; Bhattacharya & Sen 2003; Bivainienė, 2007; Bosch et al., 2006; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Dutton et al., 1994; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Farhana, 2014; Gardner, 1965; Geuens, et al., 2009; Janonis et al., 2007; Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1998; Konecnik & Go 2008; Laforet, 2010; Mårtensson 2009; Musante, 2000; Nandan, 2005; Sirgy, 1982; Taylor & Smith, 2011; Wheeler, 2010). Based on the finding, airline companies such as MAS must consider creating its brand identity the meet and surpass market and consumer expectations. Such measure will help it receive positive feedback from consumers.

The significant finding corresponds with attribution theory Heider (1958) which postulates that individuals need to understand the transient events by attributing them to the individual disposition or to the stable characteristics of the surrounding environment. Since the present study focused on how perception affects behaviour and preferences (Fritz Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & Harris, 1967), the attribution theory is apt because it explains the causes of behaviour (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2010). Moreover, brand image represents

consumer' perceptions which influence their views on brand attributes (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012).

5.2.8 The Mediating Effect of Brand Identity on the Relationship between Brand Attributes, WOM and Brand Image

Brand identity was hypothesised to mediate between the endogenous and exogenous latent variables because it shares a similar feature of brand attributes. Accordingly, brand identity can be expressed by brand attributes because brand attributes or features differentiate a brand (Keller, 1993; Myers & Shocker 1981). The relationship can be summarised as follows: brand attributes build brand associations which, in turn, develop brand image that can be influenced by brand identity (Bivainienė, 2007; Bosch et al., 2006; Keller, 1993; Konecnik & Go, 2008; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005). Martensson (2009) emphasized that WOM originated from brand identity as the basis for all communication activities whereas brand identity and brand image bind together (Bivainienė, 2007; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005). Similarly, Kim and Morrison (2005) established that WOM can have positive as well negative influence on brand image.

As attribution theory falls under communication theories (Griffin, 2006, 2008), brand attributes, WOM, brand identity, and brand image are included within the communication perspective (Griffin, 2006, 2008; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005). That is, in the case when the level of identity is high or low, the relations between attributes and image will be

influenced accordingly. The positive mediation is a significant contribution of the present study, addressing several theoretical and empirical gaps in the literature. Accordingly, brand identity also follows the explanations of attribution theory and expresses consonance with prior studies, outlining these relationships on theoretical grounds (Griffin, 2006, 2008; Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Keller, 1993; Martensson, 2009; Myers & Shocker 1981; Nandan, 2005). On this basis, the present research formulated the fourth question to examine the mediation of brand identity on the relationship between brand attributes, WOM, and brand image. Individual results on the mediation of brand identity are as follows:

The present study examined the mediation of brand identity in the relationship between brand relevance and brand image. The result found support for this relationship. The finding corresponds with many past works (Agres & Dubitsky, 1996; Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chan et al., 2012; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Judson et al., 2012). The finding implies that brand relevance can measure brand strength and has the ability to determine the reactions of consumers (Lovett et al. 2014; Mizik, & Jacobson, 2008; Young & Rubicam, 2000).

The next hypothesis posited that brand identity mediates the relationship between brand consistency and brand image. As expected, empirical support for this hypothesis was found. An explanation for the significant mediating effect can be found on the works of McEnally and de Chernatony (1999). The authors suggested that one of the important elements of brand identity is the consistency of brands, which require them to be compatible with the constant messages through

which the identity confirms the meanings and values incorporated into the brand image. This finding is an important empirical contribution that seems to be significantly missing in previous studies (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; Posavac, Sanbonmatsu & Ho, 2002). It is clear that brand consistency can influence brand identity.

The next hypothesis was about the mediation of brand identity in the relationship between brand sustainability and brand image. The result reported a positive relationship, hence, accepting the hypothesis. The significant mediation result is another notable contribution of the present research. The finding suggests that brand identity could influence sustainability and image. Even though the finding could not be compared directly with past research, the relationship between the variables is in consonance with past studies (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Hay, 2010; killer, 1993; Luchs et al., 2010; Meffert, Rauch & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011; Soron, 2010).

Another hypothesis concerned with the mediation of brand identity in the relationship between brand credibility and brand image. The results found support for this relationship, thus, marking another notable contribution of the present study. The finding corroborates past results (Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Haley, 1985; Lau & Phau, 2007; Leischnig et al., 2012; Ruth, 2001; Tirole, 1990).

The mediation of brand identity was also tested in the relationship between brand uniqueness and brand image. The result showed a significant relationship,

hence, accepting another hypothesis. The finding is an important empirical contribution and parallels past results (Burns & Warren, 1995; Keller, 2003; Laczniak & Ramaswami, 2001; Lynn & Harris, 1997; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Park, 2009; Snyder, 1992).

The last hypothesis was about the mediation of brand identity in the relationship between WOM and brand image. The proposition has never been tested before but it was developed theoretically to correspond with past studies (Jang, 2007; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009). Past studies seemed to contend that brand identity develops consumer awareness which leads to evoking word of mouth and subsequently nurturing perceptions (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009). Also, WOM, brand identity, and brand image belong to the domain of marketing communication (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007; Martensson, 2009). In a conclusion, brand identity empirically played an important role in building and fostering these relationships.

5.3 Research Implications

The conceptual framework of the present research was based on evidence and gaps outlined from the previous literature. Using attribution theory (Heider, 1958), the present research incorporated brand identity as a mediating variable to understand the relationship between brand attributes (brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, and brand uniqueness), WOM, and brand

image better. Based on the findings, the study offers numerous theoretical and practical contributions.

5.3.1 Theoretical Implications

The current study offers empirical evidence to validate attribution theory in explaining individual behaviours, feelings, and intentions (Heider, 1958). Attribution theory was employed because it helps us understand the decision-making process by individuals on the basis of product attributes (Heider, 1958). Additionally, the theory outlines the correspondence between motivations and behaviours of individuals (Jones & Davis, 1965). Principally, the attribution theory is a motivational theory (Jones & Davis, 1965), outlining how the forming of certain events (e.g., MAS crisis) can be justified and judged based on the perceptions and motives of individuals through which they develop a perception about a specific brand (brand image) (Kassin, Fein, & Markus, 2010). Furthermore, attribution theory can also be categorized as a communication theory (Griffin, 2006), which explains the integration of brand image and brand identity within a communication system (Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005), which helps the understanding of the link between brand attributes and consumers' perceptions of the overall brand image (Beckwith & Lehmann, 1975; Judson et al., 2012). Moreover, it also highlights the understanding of WOM and its transmission from one individual to another, affecting their reactions and behaviours (Harrison-Walker, 2001).

Markedly, the majority of the past studies focused excessively on brand themes and other communication tools such as performance of organizations; consumer satisfaction; consumer retention; financial issues; and international trade, neglecting works on brand image and its association with other brand attributes and WOM. Also, past studies tended to examine brand image with different facets such as store image of a private brand, communication, advertising, CBBE, performance, brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived value, financial corporate, brands position, consumer behaviour, purchase intentions, and brand comparison (Aaker, 1996, 1997; Batra & Homer, 2004; Biel, 1991; Bivainienė, 2007; De Chernatony et al., 2011; Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Kapferer et al., 2002; Keller, 1998, 2003; Kotler et al., 2009; Magid et al., 2006; Mehta, 2012; Park, 2009; Romaniuk et al. 2012; Syed & Kitchen, 2014; Tu et al., 2013; Virvilaite & Dailidiene, 2012; Yoo et al., 2000). So, the current research filled the gap by assessing the link between brand attributes, WOM, brand identity, and brand image.

Brand identity was positioned as the potential mediator between the predictor and outcome variables which has not been examined till date. However, extant empirical research regarding the relationship of brand identity and brand image (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Bivainienė, 2007; Bosch et al., 2006; Dutton et al., 1994; Konecnik and Go, 2008; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005) has reported inconsistent findings. Hence, this study addressed the gap by considering the mediation of brand identity in the relationship between brand attributes, WOM, and brand image.

On the whole, the results corroborate attribution theory (Heider, 1958) in that brand attributes and WOM have the ability to influence brand image and brand identity positively.

5.3.2 Practical Implications

Several practical implications can be derived based on brand image and in connection to traveller's perceptions of MAS. In respect of Brand Attributes, the results indicated that brand attributes (brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness) shaped positively customers' perceptions of brand image. According to Carpenter, Glazer, and Nakamoto (1994) and Mizik and Jacobson (2008), the differentiation process between competitors strengthens consumers' mental perceptions of the brand(s). Thus, on the grounds of the findings of the present study, airlines and MAS in particular should make efforts to highlight their brand attributes for a better brand image. Particularly, in the event of aviation disasters, such attributes can play a critical role in maintaining their brand identity and supporting them to control market conditions in a much responsive manner. Following Wilkie and Pessemier (1973), the study demonstrated that the brand attributes under study can be effectively structured to offer an in-depth knowledge about consumers and how to spread awareness among them.

In connection with the first variable, Brand Relevance, the results revealed that brand relevance positively influenced brand image and identity. Airlines and MAS in particular therefore should be concerned about demonstrating brand

relevance to maximize the benefits from consumer responses, brand strength, and consumers' self-awareness (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Chattopadhyay & Nedungadi, 1990; Lovett et al., 2014; Mizik & Jacobson, 2008; Young & Rubicam, 2000). On Brand Consistency, the findings are also of value to practitioners in the airline industry to understand how they can use brand consistency to boost the industry's brand image and thereby attain organizational objectives (Biel, 1992; Matthiesen & Phau, 2005; McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999; Park et al., 1991).

Brand Sustainability helps to differentiate between the competing brands through added value (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Meffert, Rauch, & Lepp, 2010; Ottman, 2011). Regardless of the non-significant relationship between brand sustainability and brand image, brand sustainability and brand identity were strongly connected to brand image. Thus, sustainable value could be estimated by consumers experiencing a similar level of brand attributes (Cotte & Trudel, 2009). However, organizations cannot predict consumers' preferences with reference to their brand's sustainability levels (Luchs et al., 2010). Sustainable consumption within societies focuses on the choices that facilitate the procedures of sustaining a self-identity (Soror, 2010). Hence, MAS and other airline companies may try to focus on providing better brands with higher sustainable features to distinguish themselves from other brands. Such elements would also help brands to develop and sustain a strong relationship with customers (Costanza & Patten, 1995; Cotte & Trudel, 2009; Luchs et al., 2010; Radford & Simpson, 2009).

Brand Credibility is one of the unique features of any brand that contributes to consumers' favourable perceptions. MAS and other airlines should focus on

these aspects to stimulate customer awareness of the brand and its overall image (Baek, Kim & Yu, 2010; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Haley, 1985; Lau & Phau, 2007; Leischnig, Geigenmüller, & Enke, 2012; Ruth, 2001). Brand Uniqueness is another brand feature that is highly sensitive to changes in the market conditions. It facilitates the transformation of customers' attitudes towards brand image both positively and negatively. The finding revealed that brand uniqueness influenced brand image and identity (Keller, 2003; Laczniak, DeCarlo & Ramaswami, 2001; Park, 2009).

Word of Mouth plays a significant role in influencing brand image and brand identity. It is considered an uncontrolled communication tool that cannot be neglected due to its strength in influencing the attitudes of consumers toward brand image and brand identity. Importantly, this finding is congruent with past research (Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Martensson, 2009). On Brand Identity, the finding showed that brand attributes enhanced brand identity (Keller, 1993; Myers & Shocker 1981). Hence, brand identity should be given a serious consideration to improve brand image because it could directly influence customers' perceptions of a brand, leading to their intimately associating the brand with a certain brand image. Airline companies should also consider and focus on establishing a positive brand identity to ensure that they will not lose out to the competition. The findings are consistent with past research (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Bivainienė, 2007; Bosch, Venter, Han, & Boshoff, 2006; Dutton et al., 1994; Konecnik & Go, 2008; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005).

Arguably, the present research has succeeded in validating attribution theory in explaining the role of brand image and brand identity in influencing individual behaviours within the context of social behaviourism. In line with attribution theory (Heider, 1958), these features can help airline companies develop customer awareness of their brand, resulting in favourable perceptions of the brand and overall offerings and consolidating their bond with their customers. Thus, MAS should work on the development, enhancement, and maintenance of standards that help keep its brand identity and brand image intact. Consequently, protecting and expanding its customer base would help MAS attract new customers. In short, brand attributes including brand relevance, brand consistency, brand credibility, brand uniqueness, and WOM need to be developed to enhance brand image (Button, 2008; Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Hodgson et al., 2015; Neil, 2014).

5.3.3 Methodological Implications

The present study has also contributed methodologically. To examine brand image effectively, the assessment tools were constructed based on several criteria. The scales were carefully assessed to include the evaluation of brand association/attributes and emotional judgments (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Hoek et al., 2000; Keller, 1993; Yagci, 2000), the congruity for self-image (Erickson, 1997; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Schewe, 1973; Jang, 2007; Schewe, & Dillon, 1978; Yim et al., 2007), the suitability of brand extensions “Malaysia Airlines” (Keller & Aaker, 1992; Pina et al., 2006; Weiss et al., 1999), and the extent of credible reputation (Ehrenberg et al., 1990; Pina et al., 2006; Milewicz & Herbig, 1994;

Winchester & Fletcher, 2000). In addition, the scales for brand attributes, WOM, and brand identity were all adopted from previous research (refer CH-3). In doing so, irrelevant items were removed to ensure that the objectives of the research were met. The scales were also preliminarily tested to ensure that they were reliable and valid in the context of Malaysia and airline business in particular.

The use of PLS path modelling can also be regarded as one of the methodological contributions of this research in assessing the properties of all latent variables by examining the convergent validity and AVE values for all the latent variables. Then, the discriminant validity was also evaluated by comparing the correlations between all the latent variables. By deploying PLS, the cross-loadings of each of the construct's items was also examined to assess the discriminant validity of the conceptual model. Also, individual item reliability and composite reliability were examined to check the psychometric properties of all latent variables.

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.

The present findings should be interpreted by considering the following limitations.

Recommendations

The present research adopted a cross-sectional design which is limited in terms of making causal inferences for the entire population. Therefore, future works should consider longitudinal designs. Likewise, since the present study adopted non-

probability sampling (quota sampling), all elements of the target population were not captured. Hence, to what extent the sample size actually represented the entire population remained unknown (Lohr, 2009). This limitation might affect the generalizability of the findings across the airline industry. Despite these limitations, the study was still valid in the case of MAS (refer to CH 3). However, future studies are recommended to employ probability sampling techniques.

Brand image was assessed by self-reported measures. According to Markovikj and Serafimovska (2015), Nardi (2015), and Charles (2015), a self-reported measure is a method where participants read the questions and choose the responses freely without any interference of the researcher. The self-reported measure involves questions about feelings, beliefs, and attitudes. In some cases, such questions may generate common method variance (Malhotra, Kim, & Patil, 2006; Podsakoff et al., 2003; Temme, Paulssen, & Hildebrandt, 2009). Also, participants at times answer with some doubts, either because they cannot recall or because they desire to present themselves in a socially acceptable manner (Dodaj, 2012; Nederhof, 1985; Grinun, 2010; Randall & Fernandes, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for future studies to conduct several studies (surveys) on airlines accidents around the world including MAS accidents whilst considering the same variables to compare the findings of the present study.

Furthermore, brand image was assessed by five dimensions of brand attributes from the positive perspective. However, the negative perspective is yet to be investigated. Hence, future research may consider other attributes of brand image and brand identity in different contexts other than the aviation industry. Also,

the present research has limited generalizability because it focused mainly on consumers (travellers) from two international airports located in the northern region of Malaysia. As a result, additional empirical work is needed to include travellers from various airports in the world for better generalizability.

The present model managed to explain 72 percent of the total variance in brand image, which means that there are other latent variables that can possibly explain the remaining 28 percent of the variance in brand image. Future research may also consider other variables that can influence brand image and perceptions of consumers. Future studies are also encouraged to examine other communication tools apart from WOM to understand their role in brand image. The current research corroborates prior works that demonstrated that brand identity played an important role in the communication process and brand image (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Bivainienė, 2007; Bosch, Venter, Han & Boshoff, 2006; Dutton et al., 1994; Konecnik & Go, 2008; Martensson, 2009; Nandan, 2005). The finding offers a better understanding of the relationship between brand image, brand attributes, and WOM (Bettman, 2005; Jang, 2007; Keller, 1993; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Myers & Shocker 1981; Martensson, 2009). Therefore, future research is recommended to focus on the role of brand identity from the communication perspective in relation to brand image across various occupational settings.

Finally, the positive relationships between all the examined variables were established except between brand sustainability and brand image. This non-significant relationship demands further empirical attention and confirmation. Future investigations may also be conducted on other products and services with

the same endogenous and exogenous variables. Equally, future research may also consider examining to what extent brand sustainability is capable of affecting brand image in different work settings.

5.5 Conclusion

The present research offers theoretical and practical value in the current body of knowledge of brand image. In particular, the present study succeeded in answering all research questions and achieved all objectives. The current study addressed many theoretical gaps by relating the endogenous latent variables with an exogenous latent variable and a mediation variable in one framework. The present study also managed to assess how brand identity mediates the relationships between the endogenous latent variables and the exogenous latent variable.

The theoretical framework of present research also adds value to the domain of attribution theory by examining the influence of brand attributes (brand relevance, brand consistency, brand sustainability, brand credibility, brand uniqueness) and WOM on brand image as well as brand identity since there were limited empirical works between these variables. The current study also offers practical implications for the MAS airline to enhance the company's brand image.

The present findings demonstrated that the image of the MAS brand was not damaged at all despite two unfortunate accidents. MAS was able to overcome all obstacles and come out with the least losses. In fact, MAS was actually encountering a challenge to regain its previous prosperity before the two accidents

occurred. Therefore, MAS is recommended to consider applying the findings as much as it could to regain its image and accomplish its desired goals in the long run. Based on the limitations of the present research, recommendations for future studies are offered. In conclusion, the present research makes valuable contributions to theory, practice and methodology in the domain of brand image and management.



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Appendix A

Research Questionnaire



**Pusat Pengajian
Pengurusan Perniagaan**
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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Dear Prof / Reader / Dr / Mr / Mrs / Ms,

ACADEMIC RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

I'm a Ph.D. student at University Utara Malaysia (UUM). Currently, I am conducting a new study to explore the influence of brand attributes and word of mouth on brand image. I would like to express my gratitude and deep appreciation for your consent to participate in this survey. 10 to 15 Minutes is required from you to complete this questionnaire, please do not hesitate to answer all the questions based on your conviction, experience, and your personal information. Your answers are not judged whether right or wrong. Worth to mention, this survey addressing Malaysia Airlines (Known as MAS) and Aviation industries in general, through several variables which mentioned above.

Important note: this study is just for Academic Purposes, Therefore, it will be treated with complete confidentiality and discretion.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,
Hazem Mohammad Al-Kasassbeh.
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- ❖ Directive; Based on the scale below, please fill in the blank by ticking (/) in the appropriate box for your answer;

1. Strongly Disagree. 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

First Section: Brand Image.

Statements	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
MAS has a unique personality.					
MAS has a powerful personality.					
MAS has a favorable personality.					
MAS has a professional reputation.					
MAS services superior to other Airlines.					
MAS performance is a consistent success.					
I am familiar with the potentials of MAS					
A convenient image consists in my mind when I think of MAS.					
I like MAS.					
I respect MAS.					
I appreciate MAS.					
MAS reflects who I am.					
MAS and I share a similar vision for travel.					
MAS is compliant with my character image.					
Looking to find out more about MAS.					
Seeking for finest airlines instead of MAS.					
Searching for more comfortable airlines instead of MAS.					

Statements	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
MAS is a well-established brand					
MAS is stable brand					
MAS is dependable brand					
MAS is trustworthy brand					
MAS always concerned about consumers.					

Second Section; Brand Attributes.

Statements	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
MAS enjoys great popularity.					
MAS suitable with my character.					
MAS compatible with my preferences.					
MAS enhances familiarity between travelers.					
MAS enhances communication between travelers.					
MAS is a reliable Airline.					
MAS and other Airlines are similar to me.					
MAS is a friendly Airline.					
MAS a pleasant Airline.					
MAS always gives a good feeling.					
MAS able to direct any crisis well.					
MAS able to fulfill the diverse requirements.					

The effect of MAS and other Airlines are the same.					
The need to MAS and other Airlines are the same.					
MAS provides efficient services.					
MAS provides steady services					
MAS offers believability in its services.					
MAS name is a source of trustworthiness.					
MAS has the preference regarding its services.					
MAS has the capability to commit to its promises.					
MAS is a competent brand able to determine what should be done.					
MAS is a different Airline.					
MAS is a unique Airline.					
MAS is a distinct Airline.					
MAS offers superior advantages.					
Recommend others to travel with MAS instead than other Airlines.					
Seek for recommendations from others about the best Airlines.					
Prefer a knowledgeable person to talk with about the best Airlines.					

Third Section; Word of Mouth

Statements	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
Prefer an experienced and competent person to give an advice concerning the best Airlines.					

Feel confident when you give or take advice regarding best Airlines.					
Give up some of your time when you asked advice regarding best Airlines.					
You can perceive the advantages of MAS based on someone description.					
You can identify the characteristics of MAS based on someone description.					
The extra price is not an issue for you in case you are advised about the best airline					

Fourth Section; Brand Identity.

Statements	Scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
The prosperity of MAS is my success.					
I care about what the others believes about MAS.					
I Feel flattered when someone is praising MAS					
I used a plural form when talking about MAS.					
I can identify MAS identity.					
MAS express my personality.					
MAS make me feel a preferable person.					
My character and my lifestyle compatible with MAS character.					

Fifth Section; Respondent Background

Instructions: Please fill in the blank by ticking (/) in the appropriate box for your answer.

1. Your gender is; Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Your age is;

18 to 30 years	31 to 40 years	41 to 50 years	51 to 60 years	More than 61 years

1. Your Educational Attainment is;

Secondary education	University degree	Graduate (Higher Education)

2. Your income per month (Malaysian Ringgit) is;

Less than 3000	3001 to 6000	6001 to 9000	9001 to 12000	More than 12001

3. Your Nationality is;

4. Do you travel with MAS previously?

Yes

No

5. If you do not have yet travelled with MAS, do you intend to travel in the future?

Yes

No (why?)

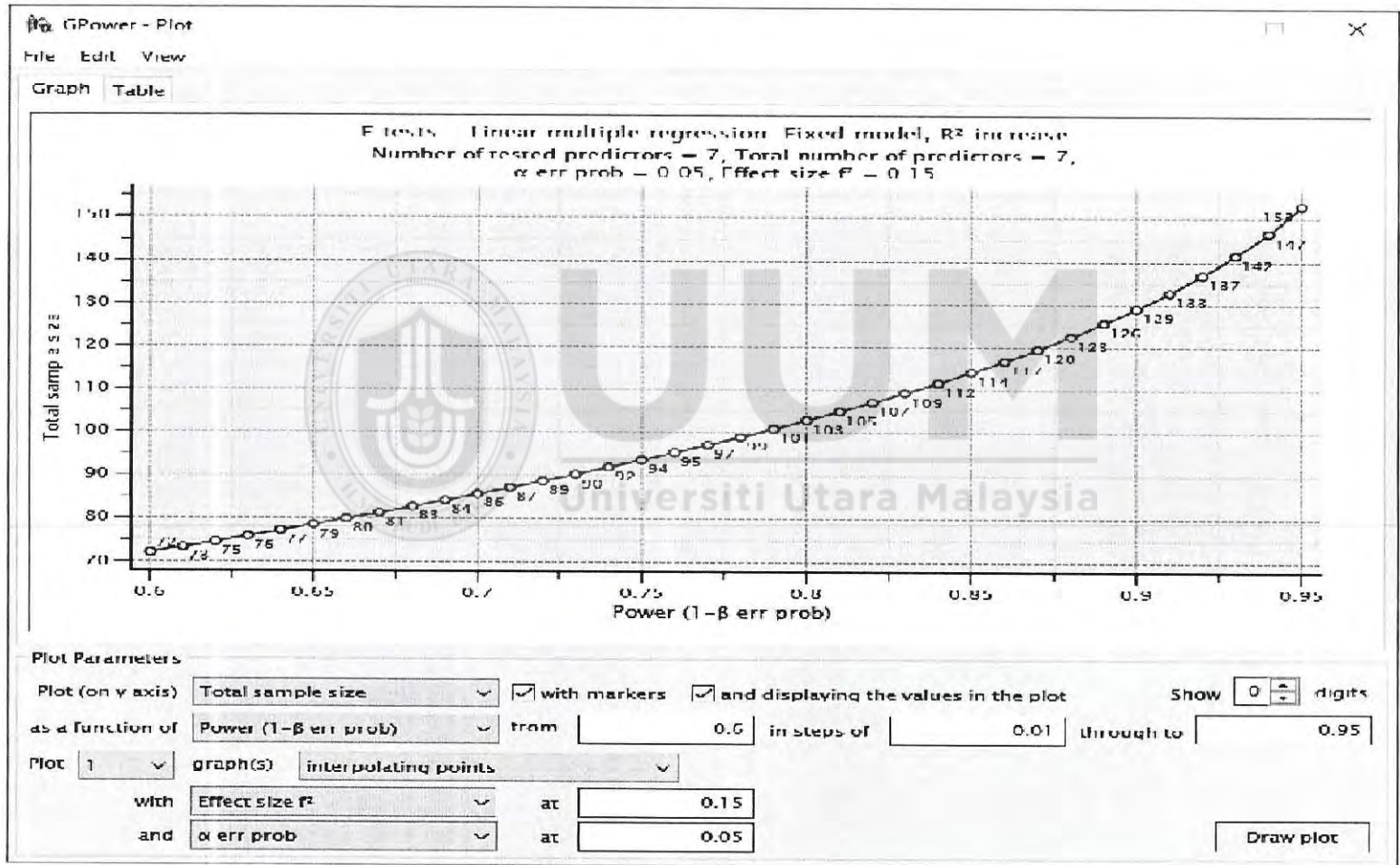


UUM
Universiti Utara Malaysia

Thank you

Appendix B

Output of power Analysis



Appendix C

Smart PLS Output - Measurement Model.

Quality Criteria/Overview

	AVE	Composite Reliability	R Square	Cronbachs Alpha	Communality	Redundancy
BR IM	0.712877	0.939338	0.715256	0.930667	0.432877	0.057464
BR RE	0.556334	0.871676		0.838763	0.556334	
BR CO	0.569367	0.861120		0.803090	0.418367	
BR SUS	0.608091	0.844386		0.796063	0.608091	
BR CR	0.592029	0.878428		0.827079	0.572029	
BR UN	0.682931	0.895828		0.844630	0.682931	
WOM	0.583597	0.873586		0.838776	0.485597	
BR ID	0.616416	0.894729	0.608934	0.865447	0.516416	0.073967

Appendix D Blindfolding Procedure Outputs

CV Red.

	1-SSE/SSO
BR IM	0.292909
BR RE	0.332108
BR CO	0.205867
BR SUS	0.355992
BR CR	0.387163
BR UN	0.464282
WOM	0.295837
BR ID	0.298979

Indicator Crossvalidated Commuality

Total	SSO	SSE	1-SSE/SSO
BIM 1	254.000000	173.172727	0.318218
BIM 2	254.000000	178.363547	0.297781
BIM 3	254.000000	170.510714	0.328698
BIM 4	254.000000	157.638992	0.379374
BIM 5	254.000000	144.661408	0.430467
BIM 6	254.000000	150.254099	0.408448
BIM 7	254.000000	146.795210	0.422066

BIM 8	254.000000	131.464016	0.482425
BIM 9	254.000000	184.206789	0.274776
BIM 10	254.000000	157.328710	0.380596
BIM 11	254.000000	157.147549	0.381309
BIM 12	254.000000	156.790286	0.382715
BIM 13	254.000000	136.815018	0.461358
BIM 14	254.000000	138.153586	0.456088
BIM 15	254.000000	159.224449	0.373132
BIM 18	254.000000	184.318001	0.274339
BIM 19	254.000000	150.681611	0.406765
BIM 20	254.000000	140.902260	0.445267
BIM 21	254.000000	157.754715	0.378918
BIM 22	254.000000	170.381096	0.329208
BR P1	254.000000	211.357823	0.167883
BR P2	254.000000	163.190764	0.357517
BR P3	254.000000	134.764108	0.469433
BR S1	254.000000	164.634320	0.351833
BR S2	254.000000	174.275533	0.313876
BC E1	254.000000	172.080901	0.322516
BC E2	254.000000	166.405034	0.344862
BC E3	254.000000	184.123489	0.275104
BC P1	254.000000	228.330815	0.101060
BC R1	254.000000	252.545505	0.005726
BC R2	254.000000	206.772410	0.185935

BS G1	254.000000	194.120961	0.235744
BS G2	254.000000	159.442437	0.372274
BS S1	254.000000	155.081623	0.389442
BS S2	254.000000	145.667132	0.426507
BC 1	254.000000	160.458461	0.368274
BC 2	254.000000	138.555591	0.454506
BC 3	254.000000	128.904879	0.492500
BC 4	254.000000	167.388337	0.340991
BC 5	254.000000	182.996115	0.279543
BU 1	254.000000	168.771723	0.335544
BU 2	254.000000	130.546012	0.486039
BU 3	254.000000	117.297950	0.538197
BU 4	254.000000	127.673810	0.497347
WOM C1	254.000000	170.865043	0.327303
WOM C2	254.000000	180.489347	0.289412
WOM C3	254.000000	170.284004	0.329591
WOM C4	254.000000	146.499965	0.423228
WOM E1	254.000000	213.534998	0.159311
WOM E2	254.000000	194.792988	0.233098
WOM III1	254.000000	177.830674	0.299879
WOM II2	254.000000	161.508110	0.364141
WOM II3	254.000000	193.911240	0.236570
BID 1	254.000000	135.797412	0.465365
BID 2	254.000000	174.412814	0.313335

BID 3	254.000000	181.417611	0.285757
BID 4	254.000000	165.454760	0.348603
BID 5	254.000000	145.364346	0.427699
BID 6	254.000000	139.613772	0.450339
BID 7	254.000000	140.240098	0.447874
BID 8	254.000000	170.537056	0.328594

CV Com.

	1-SSE/SSO
BR IM	0.368559
BR RE	0.332108
BR CO	0.205867
BR SUS	0.355992
BR CR	0.387163
BR UN	0.464282
WOM	0.295837
BR ID	0.383446

Indicator Crossvalidated Redundancy

Total	SSO	SSE	1-SSE/SSO
BIM 1	254.000000	181.093813	0.287032
BIM 2	254.000000	179.725371	0.292420
BIM 3	254.000000	197.728122	0.221543

BIM 4	254.000000	171.912989	0.323177
BIM 5	254.000000	161.254445	0.365140
BIM 6	254.000000	172.597263	0.320483
BIM 7	254.000000	167.023321	0.342428
BIM 8	254.000000	155.329848	0.388465
BIM 9	254.000000	205.975055	0.189075
BIM 10	254.000000	182.779800	0.280394
BIM 11	254.000000	172.203768	0.322032
BIM 12	254.000000	167.799758	0.339371
BIM 13	254.000000	143.240232	0.436062
BIM 14	254.000000	147.175367	0.420569
BIM 15	254.000000	179.482208	0.293377
BIM 18	254.000000	198.336283	0.219148
BIM 19	254.000000	185.124151	0.271165
BIM 20	254.000000	180.165619	0.290687
BIM 21	254.000000	197.807401	0.221231
BIM 22	254.000000	207.131080	0.184523
BR P1	254.000000	211.357823	0.167883
BR P2	254.000000	163.190764	0.357517
BR P3	254.000000	134.764108	0.469433
BR S1	254.000000	164.634320	0.351833
BR S2	254.000000	174.275533	0.313876
BC E1	254.000000	172.080901	0.322516
BC E2	254.000000	166.405034	0.344862

BC E3	254.000000	184.123489	0.275104
BC P1	254.000000	228.330815	0.101060
BC R1	254.000000	252.545505	0.005726
BC R2	254.000000	206.772410	0.185935
BS G1	254.000000	194.120961	0.235744
BS G2	254.000000	159.442437	0.372274
BS S1	254.000000	155.081623	0.389442
BS S2	254.000000	145.667132	0.426507
BC 1	254.000000	160.458461	0.368274
BC 2	254.000000	138.555591	0.454506
BC 3	254.000000	128.904879	0.492500
BC 4	254.000000	167.388337	0.340991
BC 5	254.000000	182.996115	0.279543
BU 1	254.000000	168.771723	0.335544
BU 2	254.000000	130.546012	0.486039
BU 3	254.000000	117.297950	0.538197
BU 4	254.000000	127.673810	0.497347
WOM C1	254.000000	170.865043	0.327303
WOM C2	254.000000	180.489347	0.289412
WOM C3	254.000000	170.284004	0.329591
WOM C4	254.000000	146.499965	0.423228
WOM E1	254.000000	213.534998	0.159311
WOM E2	254.000000	194.792988	0.233098
WOM III	254.000000	177.830674	0.299879

WOM II2	254.000000	161.508110	0.364141
WOM II3	254.000000	193.911240	0.236570
BID 1	254.000000	154.918319	0.390085
BID 2	254.000000	183.126041	0.279031
BID 3	254.000000	207.246762	0.184068
BID 4	254.000000	201.622983	0.206209
BID 5	254.000000	180.072288	0.291054
BID 6	254.000000	166.450218	0.344684
BID 7	254.000000	147.258002	0.420244
BID 8	254.000000	183.779936	0.276457

Construct Crossvalidated Communality

Total	SSO	SSE	1-SSE/SSO
BR IM	5334.000000	3368.105975	0.368559
BR RE	1270.000000	848.222547	0.332108
BR CO	1524.000000	1210.258155	0.205867
BR SUS	1016.000000	654.312154	0.355992
BR CR	1270.000000	778.303383	0.387163
BR UN	1016.000000	544.289495	0.464282
WOM	2286.000000	1609.716370	0.295837
BR ID	2032.000000	1252.837869	0.383446