

Enhancing Social Sustainability via Branding Strategies among Personal Care and Cosmetics Customers: The Moderating Role of Brand Visibility

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Abstract: Sustainability has existed since the day it was originated by the Brundtland Commission in the year of 1987. The term sustainability has been vaguely defined and it creates different interpretations. In line with today's economic situation, organizations increasingly perceive sustainability as an opportunity for them to gain a competitive advantage. In the current era, most of the powerful brands aspire to achieve the same social goal; hence business leaders and marketers are now facing a problem in maintaining its social sustainability. Most studies investigate social sustainability goals from the perspective of business operations. Results from the field study involving 420 customers from six (6) premier shopping malls across Kuala Lumpur demonstrated evidence for construct validity and reliability based on the multiple regression analysis, the result of the study of this study shows that only the Branded House strategy and Halal strategy were proven to have significant relationship with social sustainability. In terms of testing the hypotheses involving the moderating roles of the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable, 2 out of 4 hypotheses were supported in which brand visibility moderates the relationship between Halal branding and social sustainability, whereas brand visibility moderates the relationship between stand-alone strategy and social sustainability. The implications of this research are, the organization needs to consider corporate dominant strategy and Halal strategy to ensure long-term business operation and this research also provides additional insight on social sustainability model by investigating the branding strategies namely corporate dominant, brand dominant, mixed branding and Halal branding.

Keywords: *Branding Strategies, Brand Visibility, Social Sustainability*

1. Introduction and Background

Personal care and cosmetics products have been established in the world for thousands of years and they are commonly used by consumers of all ages, in every part of the world (Juraimi et al., 2023). Personal care and cosmetics products range in many forms, for example, powders, body makeup, soap, shampoo and toothpaste (Kumar, Massie & Dumonceaux, 2006). Today, it is a fact that the cosmetics industry is a profitable, creative, innovative fast-paced industry. To ensure the success of the brand, innovation is the key (Kumar et al., 2006). Since consumers are being exposed to various kinds of personal care and cosmetics products, the companies are competing against one another to capture consumer's attention. In the Malaysian cosmetics market, this industry has been growing rapidly with the total revenue amounting to US\$2.68 billion in the year 2022 (DHL, 2022). Table 1 below showcases the world's biggest cosmetics companies in the year 2020 and these five (5) companies are amongst the strongest brands in this industry.

Table 1: World's biggest cosmetics companies 2020: Top five by revenue

Companies	Net Revenue (Billion)
L'Oreal	\$ 33.93
Unilever	\$ 25.38
Procter & Gamble	\$ 19.41
Estee Lauder	\$ 14.29
Shiseido	\$ 8.73

Source: Cosmetics Technology (2021)

In today's competitive era, customers are being exposed to the same products and services, but offered by different brands, and service providers. Hence, branding plays a crucial role in attracting the customer to purchase the product and use the services. The main reason for branding and brand management is to create differentiation for the products and services offered by the organization. There are studies on branding focusing on product brands (e.g. Alizadeth, Moshabaki, Hoseini & Naiej, 2014). A successful brand can be viewed as a product that is easy to recognize, a good service, a person or place that the customers perceive as relevant, sophisticated, unique and most importantly, matches their needs. This is further supported by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) that customers would like to have a relationship with brands that share the values of the organization and portray a higher purpose. Conceptually and theoretically, an organization uses branding as a mechanism to build sales by identifying products and services.

Branding also acts as an initial step to build customer awareness by naming the offer but to differentiate the offer from the other service providers who are selling and providing the same service and products. In a nutshell, branding is all about being different and staying competitive amongst its competitors. According to Claye, Crawford, Freudt, Lehmann and Meyer (2013), there are three (3) major reasons why branding is crucial in today's market. Firstly, branding influences the decisions made by customers. This is where most organizations perceive business marketing and branding are all about producing greater products and services offered at reasonable and competitive prices amongst its competitors (Harvey, 2017).

In the current era, most of the powerful brands aspire to the social affairs of the customers, hence, business leaders and marketers are now facing a problem which is to distinguish their companies, products, and services in an environment where social sustainability plays a major role in creating a stable marketplace (Raphael & Mitch, 2008). There are numerous problems in this study. First and foremost, there are certain brands in the market known for not contributing to social sustainability affairs; hence, consumers tend to develop a skeptical outlook and unfavorable attitude towards the brand for a certain period (Mattar, 2016). Furthermore, according to Alizadeh, Moshabaki, Hoseini and Naiej (2014), organizations are having difficulties choosing which branding strategies suit the business operation, hence creating difficulties to influence the customer to purchase their brands instead of their competitor's brands. Most of the studies on business sustainability focus on the perception of the organization. With the concept of triple bottom line, the concept of business sustainability, which also includes social sustainability, was investigated from the organizations' perception because the organizations know the business operation as compared to the customers or stakeholders. When it comes to the concept of brand visibility, the problem arises when most of the customers question the authenticity of the information being showcased on social media because there is so much misleading information that has been portrayed on social media (Azwar, 2017). Henceforth, this paper aims to investigate the relationship between branding strategies on social sustainability and to examine the moderating effect of brand visibility

2. Literature Review

Social Sustainability: According to Dyllick and Hockerts (2002), the social dimension can be divided into two (2) categories. Firstly, the human capital. In this category, human capital focuses on aspects such as cognitive skills, the motivation and loyalty of personnel and business partners. On the other hand, social capital involves the quality of public services such as educational infrastructure, or the inculcation of entrepreneurship amongst the employees. For an organization to socially sustain in the market, according to Klimkiewicz and Oltra (2017), an organization must adopt social costs to maintain and grow the capital stock and most importantly to enlarge the range of products and services for its consumers. This will uphold the consumer's perception of the organizations as the contributor to society. A major problem with this definition is that organizations often cannot uphold the expectations of all stakeholders at the same time. Businesses are increasingly focusing more attention on the social dimension of business sustainability development due to the drastic shift in stakeholder pressures from environmental and economic to social-related concerns (Holliday, Schmidheiny & Watts, 2002). The social dimension of business sustainability encourages organizations to adopt or practice the philosophy of stewardship (Persley, Meade & Sarkis, 2007). Social stewardship requires an organization to promise and provide an improved quality of life to all by taking precautions that are related to settling the challenges faced by the society in which the organization operates. Some organizations try to take precautions that will resolve some common issues such as poverty alleviation,

enhancing work conditions, health systems, or education platforms that will showcase their concern for society (Closs, Speir & Meacham, 2011).

The second category is social capital which relates heavily to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). According to Hsu (2011), the organization's investment in CSR is perceived as a tool that will assist the organization to achieve its sustained competitive advantage (SCA) as it would improve the welfare of the surrounding communities (Okanga, 2017). In this view, the competitive advantages derived from investing in CSR may not be showcased in the economic sustainability of an organization. According to Bhattacharya and Sen (2004), customers do not act on CSR initiatives frankly as opposed to how customers act to market promotions, discounts and offers. The main difference between CSR activities and other marketing strategies lies in the organizations, the customers and the social issues that need to be addressed. In the social dimension of business sustainability, according to Smith (2003), CSR refers to the organization's obligation to the societies or those who are directly or indirectly affected by its policies or business operations.

Branding Strategies: The main reason for branding and brand management is to create and leverage differentiation for the products and services offered by the service provider. There are studies on branding focusing on product brands (e.g., Alizadeth, Moshabaki, Hoseini & Naiej, 2014). A successful brand can be perceived as a product that is easy to recognize, a good service, a person or place such that the customers perceive as relevant, sophisticated, unique and most importantly, fulfills their needs. This is further supported by Aaker (2017) that customers would like to have and foster a relationship with brands that share the values of the organization and portray a higher purpose. Conceptually and theoretically, an organization uses branding as a catalyst to build and strengthen sales by identifying products and services.

Branded House Strategy: Branded house can be best defined as the only corporate brand name that is utilized and visible in all sorts of communications of the organization/products or services whether for internal or external communication. Furthermore, the branded house is perceived as a "company brand" and this will become the main discriminator of the branding strategies (Junior, 2018). According to Kapferer (2008), a branded house is identified by a single and one unique brand level, and it is linked with the corporate name, and that of the organization itself. The organization that adopts or practices this strategy must then fall into line with the value of the brand and will continue to be the carrier of the brand. Few industries follow this strategy such as banking, insurance, and consultancy agencies. According to Knox and Bickerton (2003), there is a vast definition of branded house such as the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of an organization's exclusive business model.

Stand-alone strategy: This strategy involves an independent set of stand-alone brands, where the main objective is to maximize the impact on the market it offers (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). According to Rao et al., (2004), this strategy does not leverage its main name or corporate name for branding its products and services. Instead, the organization will choose individual brand names to position its brand in the market. In this strategy also, each brand under this strategy will operate independently to boost its market share and financial return. In such a branding strategy approach, the underlying theory is that the total sum performance of the range of independent brands will be higher as compared to the situation where the brands were managed by a single master brand

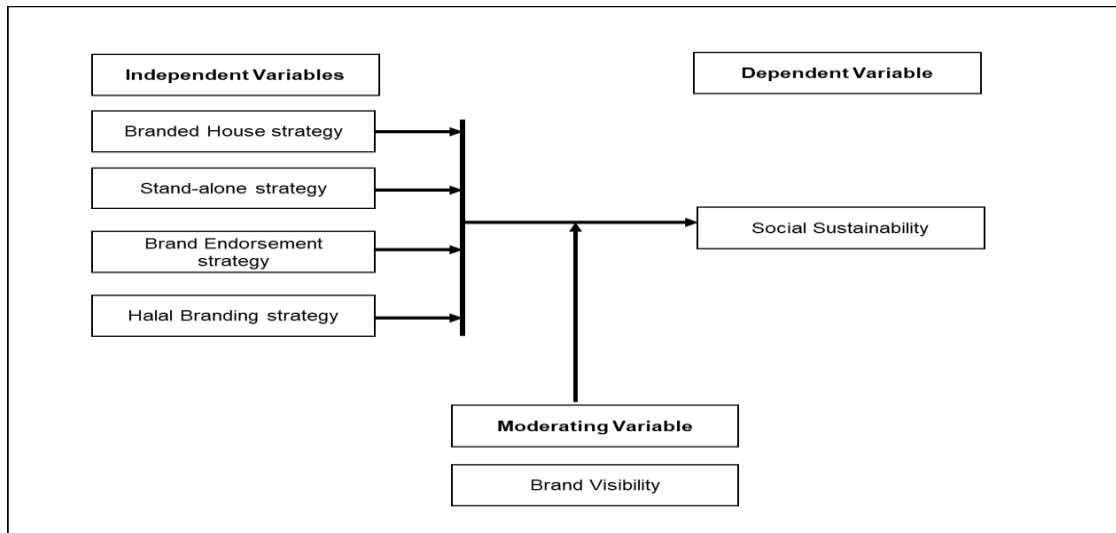
Brand endorsement strategy: In this branding strategy, two (2) brand names, which are corporate or main and individual products brand names are combined to vary the visibilities to brand the products and services offered by the organization. According to Rao et al., (2004), in a brand endorsement strategy, the organizations engage a set of house or family brands, such as subsidiary names, in their portfolio and this is an addition to using the corporate name for certain services and products offered by the organizations. Brands with names other than the organization's name are typically durable and will bring value to the organization.

Halal Branding strategy: The term Halal is derived from an Arabic word that is linked to the Islamic Faith. Halal in its generic sense, can be defined as allowed or permissible (Lada, Tanakinjal & Amin, 2009). The terminology of Halal should be understood by every Muslim. This is also further supported by Wilson and Liu (2010) a basic theory of understanding what Halal is all about and it's central to every Muslim's belief, in

which, the term falls under the umbrella of what is measured to be the evidence that is known by necessity. On the other hand, the antonym of Halal is Haram. Haram seems to resonate in the eyes of the customers with a strong sentiment feeling (Wilson & Liu, 2010). This is due to the conscious engagement in Haram activities, without any regrets, carrying the risk of punishment, which is stipulated in the Islamic law or the hereafter. Ahmad (2015) termed Halal Branding as “The term “Halal” is derived from the Arabic and it mentions the Islamic Belief which is practiced by the Muslims. The term also can be defined as the things or action that is permitted as stipulated by the Shariah Law the term Halal branding is also can be defined as the set of brand perceptions in the customers’ mind, and the understanding of the concept of Halal that is linked to Muslim’s faith and commitments.

Brand visibility (known and getting known): According to Bhasin (2016), the term brand visibility is perceived as the single, and the most dominant way that a customer can receive from the organization. The message that the customer received from the organization is about the product and this is ultimately to gain trust from the customers. Brand visibility allows, encourages and motivates customers to have an eagle view of the products and this includes Brand attributes. In any organization, to increase brand visibility, the managers will engage several media agencies with a focus on home media, television, online marketing and social media. According to Taneja and Toombs (2014), the organization utilizes social media tools and perhaps networking sites to promote the services and products offered by the organization via electronic forms to create brand visibility. In view of this, various authors have discussed and supported the importance of social media and how it helps the organization to build the visibility of their products and services. According to Harris and Rae (2011), if organizations are actively working and managing their social media platform, they could maximize and leverage the opportunity to build their brand in the desired way that is aligned with their goals. Besides having brand visibility, social media is also a platform for an organization to create differentiation and it will gain a competitive advantage against its competitors.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of this study



3. Methodology

Research Design: This research used a correlation type of research to investigate the relationship between three variables, namely the independent, dependent, and moderating variables. The independent variable for this study is branding strategies, the dependent variable is social sustainability and the moderating variable is brand visibility. Correlation type of research will allow us to identify the branding strategies that can contribute towards social sustainability

Research Population: The population of this study was the personal care products and cosmetics male and female customers as both male and female are using personal care and cosmetics in their daily routines. The venue for data collection was at six (6) premier shopping malls in the Klang Valley or known as Greater Kuala

Lumpur (GKL) namely, Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC), Starhill, Berjaya Times Square, Lot 10, Sungai Wang Plaza and Pavilion Kuala Lumpur.

Research Population: For this study, the assumptions were a 95% confidence level, a .5 standard deviation, and a margin of error (confidence interval) of +/- 5%. If the confidence level is 95%, therefore the Z Score = 1.96.

$$\begin{aligned} & ((1.96)^2 \times .5(.5)) / (.05)^2 \\ & (3.8416 \times .25) / .0025 \\ & .9604 / .0025 \\ & 384.16 \\ & 385 \text{ respondents are needed} \end{aligned}$$

According to the rule of thumb by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 1.79 million population needs 384 respondents. To ensure that the respondents represent the entire population of this study, the figure is rounded up to 420 and divided equally among telecommunication service provider customers

4. Results and Discussion

Profile of Respondents: Table 2 displays a summary of the characteristics of the total sample of personal care and cosmetics customers who participated in the study.

Table 2: Demographic and Geographic Information Pertaining to XXX

Variable	Descriptive	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	210	50.0
	Female	210	50.0
Age	Below 18 years old	9	2.1
	18-23 years old	49	11.7
	24-29 years old	154	36.7
	30-34 years old	120	28.6
	35-44 years old	62	14.8
	45-49 years old	21	5.0
Preferred brand	50 years old and above	5	1.2
	Mary Kay	58	13.8
	Wardah Beauty	27	6.4
	Simply Siti	46	11.0
	Loreal	42	10.0
	Procter & Gamble (P&G)	34	8.1
	Unilever	48	11.4
	D'Herbs	50	11.9
	Sari Ayu	18	4.3
	Revlon	47	11.2
Others	50	11.9	
Duration of usage	Less than a year	43	10.2
	One year	71	16.9
	Two years	104	24.8
	More than two years	202	48.1

Table 2 indicates the demographic profile of the respondents most of the respondents were female 217 (51.7%) followed by male 203 (48.3%). In terms of age, out of 420 respondents, 154 (36.7%) respondents were 24-29 years old, 120 (28.6%) respondents were 30-34 years old, 62 (14.8%) respondents were aged between 35-44 years old, 49 (11.7%) of the respondents were 18-23 years old, 21 (5.0%) of the respondents were 45-49 years old, 9 (2.1%) of the respondents were below 18 years old and lastly, 5 (1.2%) of the respondents were 50 years old and above. In terms of the brand preferences among the respondents, majority of the respondents, 58 (13.8%) preferred to use Mary Kay. There were an equal number of

respondents, 50 (11.9%) preferred to use D’Herbs and other personal care and cosmetics brands such as Simple and Himalaya. 48 (11.4%) of the respondents opted to use Unilever, 47 (11.2%) of the respondents preferred to use Revlon, 46 (11.0%) of the respondents preferred to use our local cosmetics brand which is Simply Siti, 42 (10.0%) of the respondents preferred to choose Loreal, 34 (8.1%) of the respondents preferred to use products under Procter & Gamble (P&G), 27 (6.4%) of the respondents chose to use products originated from Indonesia, Wardah beauty. Lastly, 18 (4.3%) of the respondents preferred to use Sari Ayu. The last element of the demographic profile of the respondents was the duration of usage by the respondents. 202 (48.1%) of the respondents have used their personal care and cosmetics brand for more than two (2) years, 104 (24.8%) of the respondents have used their personal care and cosmetics brand for two (2) years, 71 (16.9%) of the respondents have used their personal care and cosmetics brand for one (1) year and lastly, 43 (10.2%) of the respondents have used their personal care and cosmetics brand for less than a year.

Table 3: Correlation analysis

No	Variables	SD	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	6
				Branded House	Stand alone	Brand Endorsement	Halal branding	Brand visibility	Social sustainability
1	Branded House	3.86	0.68						
2	Stand Alone	4.02	0.57	.568**					
3	Brand Endorsement	4.07	0.58	.464**	.466**				
4	Halal branding	4.00	0.67	.221**	.243**	.263**			
5	Brand visibility	3.71	0.66	.415**	.321**	.337**	.216**		
6	Social sustainability	3.64	0.68	.367**	.235**	.239**	.202**	.580**	.497**

The degrees of correlation by Pearson correlation coefficient were used in interpreting the correlation between the variables. Table 3 displays the interpretation of correlation coefficients. The results of correlation analysis indicate the inter-correlation among the variables entailed in this research study.

As for social sustainability, the branded house has moderate positive relationship ($r = .367, p < 0.01$), stand-alone has weak positive relationship ($r = .235, p < 0.01$), mixed branding and Halal branding also have weak positive relationship ($r = .239, p < 0.01$) and ($r = .202, p < 0.01$), respectively. The dimensions of branding strategies are also significantly correlated with the moderating variable; namely, brand visibility. The correlation coefficient between branding strategies and brand visibility are as follows; branded house has a strong positive relationship ($r = .415, p < 0.01$), both stand-alone and brand endorsement have a moderate positive relationship ($r = .321, p < 0.01$) and ($r = .337, p < 0.01$), respectively. However, Halal branding has a weak positive relationship ($r = .216, p < 0.01$).

As illustrated in Table 4, the regression table indicates a significant F score ($F = 18.789, p < 0.01$) which further indicates that the group of independent variables (branded house, stand-alone, brand endorsement and Halal branding) significantly produce joint effects on the regression model. However, the F-statistic is not sufficient to conclude this study. R-Square (R^2) explains the variance in the dependent variable which was contributed by the independent variables. The regression table above shows R^2 of 0.153 which indicates that 15.3 % of the variance in the business sustainability (social sustainability) is sufficiently explained by four (4) dimensions of branding strategies (branded house, stand-alone, brand endorsement and Halal branding). Based on the above findings, only two (2) variables of branding strategies (branded house and Halal branding) are significant to influence social sustainability.

Broman (2017) stated that branded house contributes to social sustainability as this strategy is perceived as a way for customers to identify themselves with different organizations. Corporate branding allows the organization to be the center of attraction, symbols and most importantly, a social platform that helps its customers to develop their identity. Furthermore, a branded house will introduce the customer-brand identification concept and this can be achieved when the customers feel and value its sense of belongingness to the organization. Lastly, Hsu et al. (2010) further supported that corporate branding contributes to social sustainability via the engagement and individualized touch with the customers; hence, organizations are able to create an intimate connection with customers when they provide their opinions and feedback on their products and services provided by the organization.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Standardized Coefficients Beta
Branded House	.312**
Stand Alone	.000
Brand Endorsement	.063
Halal branding	.117*
R	.392
R2	.153
Adjusted R2	.145
F Change	18.789
Significance F Change	.000
Durbin Watson	1.834

There is a growing awareness of Islamic consumption and greater empowerment of Islamic consumers with the emerging demand for Halal products and services. Temporal (2011) mentioned that Halal branding contributes to social sustainability as it allows the organization to further educate and expose its customers to Halal products and services. From the view of a Muslim-to-Muslim marketing and branding perspective, to have customers who accept a Halal brand is very important but from a Muslim to non-Muslim perspective, top quality is a vital issue. Social sustainability comes in when the organization creates products and services that are high in quality which can be accepted not only by Muslim customers but also non-Muslim customers. Rezai et al. (2008) stated that Halal branding contributes to social sustainability as the organization ensures that products and services offered are bound by the Shariah law and only leverages permissible ingredients so that society will not be in doubt of the products and services.

Table 5: Moderated Regression Analysis

	Standardized Beta		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Independent Variables			
Branded House	.312**	.165**	.401
Stand Alone	.000	-.033	.631*
Brand Endorsement	.063	-.012	.406
<i>Halal</i> branding	.117*	.066	-.716**
Moderator Variable			
Brand Visibility		.512**	1.243 **
Interaction terms			
BHX Brand Visibility			-.440
SA X Brand Visibility			-1.230**
BE X Brand Visibility			-.798
<i>Halal</i> B X Brand Visibility			1.248**
R2	.153	.360	.408
Adjusted R2	.145	.352	.395
R2 Change	.153	.207	.048
F change	18.789	133.857	8.301
Significant F change	.000	.000	.000
Durbin Watson			1.834

Table 5 summarizes the result of the moderating effect of brand visibility on the relationship between branding strategies (branded house, stand-alone, brand endorsement and Halal branding) and social sustainability. The significance F change of the regression model shows a significant value ($F = 8.301$, $p = .000$). However, the significant increment of 4.8% to the effect size is by no means small. Small effects can be important not only because they have practical consequences, because they accrue into larger effects, nor because they lead to theoretical revision but also because they hold even under the most inauspicious circumstances. Based on the findings, brand visibility has two (2) moderating effects on the relationship between the independent variables (stand-alone and Halal branding) and social sustainability. When organizations that practice stand-alone strategy enter the arena of social media, they will carefully tailor their communications to the customers to ensure that they maintain a consistency that reflects the value of the organization. Since stand-alone focuses on niche markets, the products and services need to be of high quality to ensure that organizations stay competitive. Brand visibility moderates the relationship between stand-alone and social sustainability when the organization listens to the needs and wants of their customer via social media and tailors their products and services to ensure that the customers are satisfied with the products and services rendered by the organization (Wang et al., 2017). Wilson (2014) mentioned that brand visibility moderates the relationship between Halal branding and social sustainability when brand visibility is proven as a platform for customers to look for information and use the information for purchase intention. Additionally, most customers rely on social media in their daily lives. Aziz and Chok (2013) stated that social media will assist the organization to create Halal awareness to the customers, hence, creating a strong relationship that will automatically lead to Halal purchase intention.

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

There are a few considerations for potential researchers to consider incorporating into their studies to make the findings more acceptable and generalizable in terms of branding strategies and social sustainability such as leveraging qualitative methods and enhancing the sample size. As product markets continue to change rapidly, it is very important to both marketing and branding managers to seize the opportunity to optimize the available resources to create very comprehensive and reliable branding strategies. The role of branding in sustaining a business and positioning the organization in the global marketplace requires establishing innovative branding strategies. When customers are now the major shareholders of the organization, organizations need to ensure that the brand that they are showcasing is “people-friendly.” Overall, this study aims to gain valuable insight into branding strategies, social sustainability, and brand visibility. The contribution of this study is derived from the resource-based view theory which measures the branding strategies and social sustainability from the view of the customers, which creates a new perspective to the organization.

Conclusion: The framework of this study has been successful in examining the relationships among branding strategies, social sustainability and brand visibility among personal care and cosmetics customers. Overall, the unique contributions of this study have significantly improved the concept of branding strategies by including brand visibility as the moderating variable. This study has also produced an understanding of how organizations should include external customers in their decision-making process.

To sum up this research, branding strategies are the secret weapon of most organizations. It is a fact that branding helps organizations to identify and recognize the products and services. Besides, a good branding architecture allows organizations to connect with customers emotionally. In line with this, branding strategies will assist the organizations to build trust with the target market, create brand loyalty, and most importantly, the organizations would be able to sustain and achieve competitive advantage.

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