

Impact of Brand Equity and Purchase Intention on Dietetics and Nutrition Consultation Service

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Abstract: The market value of a brand is reflected by brand equity. It signals consumers' recognition and preferability toward certain brands. In a highly competitive market, brand equity becomes crucial as it can lead to customer loyalty and product resilience. Strong brand equity helps a company to stand out among competitors and can significantly influence financial performance by driving higher sales volume and profitability. As more Malaysians shift their lifestyles and become more health-conscious after the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand in the healthcare market has expanded massively. By focusing on the healthcare market, especially on dietetics and nutrition consultation services, this paper seeks to evaluate how brand equity influences consumers' intention in making purchases. Four dimensions of brand equity will be investigated, consisting of perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association and brand image. A total of 194 data were collected using the convenience sampling method in the Subang Jaya region, Malaysia. The findings of this study showed that perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand association have a positive significant impact on purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services while brand image was found to be insignificantly influencing purchase intention. This provides insight and implications for the dietetics and nutrition consultation services market and practitioners, especially in formulating their marketing strategies.

Keywords: *Brand equity, Purchase intention, Dietetics, Nutrition consultation services, Healthcare market, Marketing strategies*

1. Introduction

In a highly competitive market, brand equity becomes a crucial differentiator for businesses. A company requires strong brand equity to retain customers. How consumers perceive a brand, put trust in its quality and have higher preferability towards one brand over another are significant factors in business. A product with higher recognition has a higher value in the market. It will give a company a significant advantage as it could intensify its financial performance, especially in terms of sales volume, profitability and market share. Building and maintaining brand equity is crucial for long-term success and competitive advantage in the marketplace (Kellar & Lehmann, 2009; Sohaib et al., 2022; Shi, 2022). Brand equity is often regarded as an essential element in shaping a consumer's inclination towards a specific brand, hence influencing their purchasing decisions. A robust brand possessing substantial brand equity has several advantages, such as enhanced profitability, the possibility for brand expansion, effective communication, increased consumer preferences, and heightened purchase intentions (Le-Hoang et al., 2020).

As Malaysians become more health conscious, the market for healthcare and wellness products is growing at a rapid pace in this country. According to The Sun (2023), due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 79% of Malaysians have become more aware of their health. While FurleyBio (2023) reported that the retail sales for vitamins and dietary supplements in the Malaysian market have increased substantially from RM940.4 million in 2005 to RM7.481 billion in 2022. As more and more people embrace a proactive approach to their well-being, shifting their lifestyle to be more active and healthier, and seeking more dietetics and nutrition consultation services, the industry continues to respond with diverse healthcare product offerings. With more industry players, the market competition will be bigger. When it comes to healthcare products, a well-established brand will likely be more trusted by consumers particularly one that they can assure of its safety, effectiveness, and reliability.

Henceforth, brand equity plays a crucial role in enhancing a product's market value. Strong brand equity helps a brand to establish trust and assurance among consumers. There is no research on the dietetics and nutrition consultation services industry from the aspect of consumers' purchase intention in Malaysia. The findings from

this paper would be beneficial for the industry players and healthcare marketers to understand the market better and to assist them in formulating marketing strategies to strengthen their brand equity and product recognition. To achieve this objective, this paper seeks to evaluate how brand equity influences consumers' intention in making purchases for dietetics and nutrition consultation services. Four dimensions of brand equity will be investigated consisting of perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association and brand image.

2. Literature Review

Brand Equity and Purchase Intention

Mat et al. (2020) defined purchase intention as the extent of customer's willingness to spend their money to buy goods and services which depends on internal and external factors. One of the factors that gained interest from many scholars is brand equity. In marketing, brand equity is an important concept that reflects how consumers perceive the values of goods or services. It is the recognition that a brand gains due to its market worth (Rungsisawat & Sirinapatpokin, 2019). Previous studies showed brand equity has a strong influence over purchase intention (Rizwan et al., 2021; Senthilnathan & Tharmi, 2012; Ashil & Sinha, 2004). However, brand equity does not only relate to how consumers think, feel and act towards a brand. Scholarly articles also emphasize how brand equity brings both tangible and intangible benefits to a company, along with consumer loyalty, product pricing, profitability and market share (Mikul & Mittar, 2023; Wood, 2000; Foroudi et al., 2018; Jeon, 2017). Various dimensions of brand equity have been studied by past researchers. Through comprehensive literature reviews, Shariq (2018) has identified 11 essential dimensions of brand equity. The 11 brand equity dimensions highlighted were 1. Quality 2. Associations 3. Loyalty 4. Awareness 5. Image 6. Personality 7. Attitude 8. Trust 9. Satisfaction 10. Esteem 11. Attachment. However, the significant impact of the dimensions varies among different studies.

Brand Association

Brand association is connected to brand equity because it improves the understanding and awareness of a brand (Rungsisawat & Sirinapatpokin, 2019). According to Chakraborty (2019), brand association describes how consumers view their connections with a brand. It includes any information that consumers think of when they hear or see a brand name based on their experiences, knowledge and interactions with the brand. Brand association becomes important in marketing because consumers are inclined to choose brand names that they associate with positive product features and attributes. Rizwan et al. (2021) stated that if consumers associate a health brand with being natural and effective, they are more likely to purchase products from that brand, believing the products will be beneficial for their health. Lee et al. (2019) also found a positive link between brand association and purchase intention. However, customers' association with a brand can only be developed once they are aware of the brand (Dada, 2021).

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness indicates the extent to which individuals become aware and familiar with certain brand names (Ramadhan et al., 2020; Chakraborty, 2019). It happens when consumers recognize and can remember a specific name of a product or service. Brand awareness is related to purchase intention as it conveys significant information about a brand in a customer's perception. Customers exclusively purchase brand names that are familiar to them, and they are only familiar with brands that they perceive as being of high quality (Rizwan et al., 2021). Advertising or promotional strategies are often used in the market to distinctly create a positive image of the brand in the minds of consumers. According to Nurhayati and Hendar (2020), brand awareness assists customers in purchase decision-making, especially when they are having difficulty in deciding to buy products or services that offer a similar quality. Rahmi et al. (2021) and Supiyandi et al. (2022) found a positive influence between brand awareness and purchase intention where a higher purchase intention can be influenced by a higher brand awareness. However, Azzari and Pelissari (2020) found that brand awareness alone does not directly affect purchase intention, instead, its impact becomes significant only when mediated by three other brand equity dimensions: associations, loyalty and perceived quality. They concluded that brand awareness is important as the initial step in creating brand value for consumers. In addition, Rizwan et al. (2021) found that brand awareness is positively related to purchase intention for health takaful products in the United Arab Emirates.

Brand Image

Brand image refers to a set of connections (Chi et al., 2020) and mental representations (Benhardy et al., 2020) that consumers have in their minds about certain brands. These were created by experiences and interactions consumers had with the brand (Kotler, 2001). Stronger favorable exposures that are retained in customer memory will create a stronger brand image and hence brand equity (Chi et al., 2020). Previous studies on the effect of brand image on purchase intention however showed mixed results. Pandey and Srivastana (2017) found that brand image contributed the highest value to the purchase intention of healthcare products where consumers considered it as the priority. Cuong (2022) also found a positive relationship between brand image buying decisions and rebuying intentions. However, Saputro and Setyaningrum (2023) indicated that brand image did not affect purchase decisions. The study highlighted the impact of brand image in influencing purchase decisions weakened in a pandemic situation as compared to other variables.

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality refers to a consumer's overall impression of a brand of goods or services that shows how effectively a brand meets customers' wants, expectations and requirements (Lee et al., 2019; Padhy & Sawlikar, 2018). Garrido-Morgado (2016) stresses that consumer's perception of product quality is a cognitive factor that influences their purchasing decisions, making them more likely to buy the product with superior characteristics. A highly perceived quality product enhances the perceived value of a brand, while a low perceived quality product can damage the reputation of a brand (Vera, 2015). In the healthcare industry, perceived quality is regarded as a crucial element of brand equity (Chahal & Baha, 2010). In fact it is the strongest factor that influences consumer's intention in making purchase decisions (Qiyu Yu, 2023; Lee et al., 2019). As consumers become more health-conscious, they seek products that not only promise efficacy but also deliver on quality.

Hypotheses of the study are developed as follows:

H1: Brand association has a positive effect on purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services.

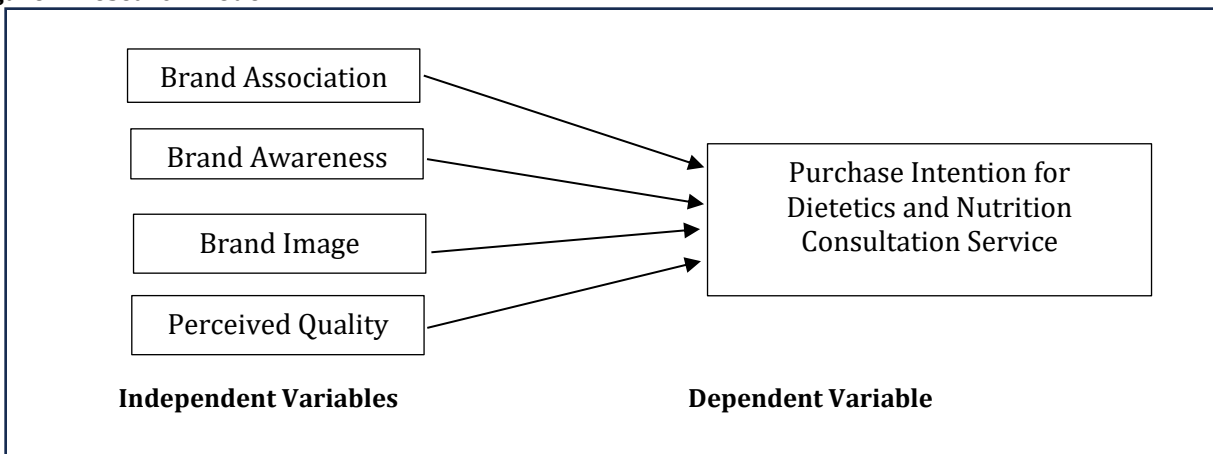
H2: Brand awareness has a positive effect on purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services.

H3: Brand image has a positive effect on purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services.

H4: Perceived quality has a positive effect on purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services.

The research model of the study is presented in Figure 1 below. The four dimensions of brand equity examined are: brand association, brand awareness, brand image and perceived quality. These dimensions are the independent variables in this study. Whereas the purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services is the dependent variable.

Figure1: Research Model



3. Methodology

This is a quantitative cross-sectional study. Data was collected using the convenience sampling method through an online survey in the Subang Jaya region, Malaysia. The minimum sample size required of 119 was calculated using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2007) with an effect size of 0.15 and power of 0.95 for 3 predictors. A total of 194 respondents have participated in the data collection process. As the data were collected based on a single source, common method bias Kock and Lynn (2012), and Kock (2015) were assessed using the Full Collinearity test as shown in Table 1. As the VIF is less than 5 indicates single source bias is not a serious issue with our data.

Table 1: Full Collinearity Test

Variables	VIF
Brand association	3.301
Brand awareness	2.902
Brand image	3.804
Perceived quality	2.805
Purchase intention	2.634

Measurement items for constructs used in the questionnaire were adapted from previous studies. Five items to measure brand awareness were adapted from Rungtornsupatt and Sirinapatpokin (2019) and Foroudi (2018); six items to measure perceived quality were adapted from Rungtornsupatt and Sirinapatpokin (2019), Foroudi (2018) and Zhou (2021); four items to measure brand association were adapted from Rungtornsupatt and Sirinapatpokin (2019), Pourazad (2019) and Karulkar (2021); seven items to measure dietetics purchase intention were adapted from Rungtornsupatt and Sirinapatpokin (2019), Foroudi (2018) and Konuk (2018).

Data analysis was conducted by applying the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) technique. The PLS-SEM analysis consists of a measurement model and a structural model. The measurement model assesses reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, while the structural measurement tests the developed hypotheses.

The demographic characteristic analysis results are presented in Table 2. Approximately 60% of the respondents are female and a majority of them are within the age range of 18 to 30 years old. Almost 80% of them were from the B40 group. Half of the respondents work in the private sector.

Table 2: Demographic characteristic analysis

Variable	Frequency (n = 194)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	112	57.73%
Male	82	42.27%
Age		
18 to 30 years old	138	71.13%
31-40 years old	20	10.31%
41-50 years old	19	9.79%
51-60 years old	13	6.70%
61 years old and above	4	2.06%
Race		
Malay	159	81.96%
Chinese	17	8.76%
India	13	6.70%
Others	5	2.58%
Monthly Income		
Less than RM 4,849	152	78.35%

RM 4,850 - RM 10, 959	34	17.53%
RM 10,960 and above	8	4.12%
Occupation		
Government Sector	15	7.73%
Private Sector	106	54.64%
Self Employed	13	6.70%
Students	42	21.65%
Others	18	9.28%

4. Data Analysis

The PLS-SEM technique was used to assess the effects of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and brand image on purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services. Normality test examined using WebPower power analysis, the multivariate Mardia's skewness ($\beta = 5.987$, $p < 0.001$) and kurtosis ($\beta = 48.037$, $p < 0.001$) indicating non-normality of data can be applied using PLS-SEM technique.

The measurement model analysis results of convergent validity of loadings, average extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) are presented in Table 3. The outer loading values \geq , CR values ≥ 0.7 and AVE values ≥ 0.5 support the convergent validity.

Table 3: Measurement Model

Variable	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Brand association	BAS1	0.829	0.914	0.727
	BAS2	0.874		
	BAS3	0.845		
	BAS4	0.862		
Brand awareness	BAW1	0.708	0.910	0.590
	BAW2	0.804		
	BAW3	0.820		
	BAW4	0.781		
	BAW5	0.729		
	BAW6	0.748		
	BAW7	0.783		
Brand image	BI1	0.848	0.931	0.692
	BI2	0.818		
	BI3	0.851		
	BI4	0.799		
	BI5	0.827		
	BI6	0.846		
Perceived quality	PQ1	0.682	0.917	0.650
	PQ2	0.753		
	PQ3	0.869		
	PQ4	0.860		
	PQ5	0.880		
	PQ6	0.771		
Purchase intention	PI1	0.645	0.894	0.551
	PI2	0.644		
	PI3	0.599		

PI4	0.741
PI5	0.867
PI6	0.829
PI7	0.825

Furthermore, discriminant validity was measured using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) criterion (Henseler et al., 2015) and the HTMT values were greater than 0.85 (as shown in Table 4). The convergent and discriminant validity results indicate that measurement items are valid and reliable.

Table 4: HTMT Criterion

	Brand association	Brand awareness	Brand image	Perceived quality
Brand association				
Brand awareness	0.844			
Brand image	0.877	0.819		
Perceived quality	0.767	0.744	0.835	
Purchase intention	0.791	0.763	0.777	0.802

The structural model was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 re-samples (Ramayah et al., 2018) for path coefficients, t-values, p-values and confidence intervals. The results of the structural model are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Std. Beta	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	PCI LL	PCI UL	f ²
H1: Brand association -> Purchase intention	0.230	0.091	2.521	0.006	0.078	0.38	0.044
H2: Brand awareness -> Purchase intention	0.239	0.076	3.141	0.001	0.113	0.36	0.055
H3: Brand image -> Purchase intention	0.137	0.091	1.508	0.066	-0.008	0.288	0.013
H4: Perceived quality -> Purchase intention	0.277	0.101	2.745	0.003	0.112	0.445	0.078

The R² value of 0.620 indicates that 62% of the variation of purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services is explained by 4 predictors in the study. The path coefficient results shown in Table 5 indicate that brand association ($\beta = 0.230, p < 0.01$), brand awareness ($\beta = 0.239, p < 0.01$), and perceived quality ($\beta = 0.2773, p < 0.01$) were found to be positive, which significantly influences the purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation service. Thus H1, H2 and H4 were supported.

The effect size of brand association, brand awareness and perceived quality on purchase intention were small. Hypothesis H3 was not supported, which concludes that brand image has an insignificant effect on purchase intention. The predictive relevance of the model is assessed using PLSpredict (Shmueli et al., 2019). As shown in Table 6, a majority of the items' PLS-SEM RMSE values were less than LM RMSE values, indicating the model has a moderate predictive power.

Table 6: PLS Predict

Item	PLS-SEM		LM	PLS-SEM - LM
	Q ² predict	RMSE	RMSE	RMSE
PI1	0.161	0.881	0.92	-0.039
PI2	0.202	0.841	0.88	-0.039
PI3	0.196	0.859	0.816	0.043
PI4	0.322	0.813	0.889	-0.076
PI5	0.445	0.781	0.82	-0.039
PI6	0.436	0.779	0.838	-0.059
PI7	0.461	0.746	0.779	-0.033

Discussion

Three brand equity dimensions (perceived quality, brand awareness and brand association) were found to have a positive significant impact on purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services. The results revealed similar findings to previous studies (Lee et al., 2019; Rahmi et al., 2021; Qiyu Yu, 2023; Supiyandi et al., 2022). The findings agreed with Qiyu Yu (2023) and Lee et al. (2019) where perceived quality has the most influential effect. However, brand image was found to be insignificant in purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services. The result aligned with Saputro and Setyaningrum (2023) but contradicted with studies from Pandey and Srivastana (2017) and Cuong (2022).

As perceived quality refers to consumers' subjective assessment of a brand's overall excellence, consumers often associate high-quality products with better health outcomes. In the healthcare industry, perceived quality is one of the important components of brand equity (Chahal & Baha, 2010). Health-conscious consumers are more likely to be attracted and will consider purchasing dietetics and nutrition consultation services from a brand that is perceived to offer superior quality. In terms of brand awareness, where consumers are familiar and can recall a specific brand name, the result showed brand awareness to positively affect purchase intention. In the context of health care, consumers seem to feel more comfortable choosing dietetics and nutrition consultation services that they are familiar with, which eventually influence their purchase decisions. As most studies show a positive influence of brand association on purchase intention, this study also found similar results for purchase intention on dietetics and nutrition consultation services. Products associated with positive health outcomes, safe, reliable, and trustworthy attract consumers and can positively sway their purchase decision.

The result indicated that brand image did not affect purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services. Therefore the third hypothesis was rejected. In the study conducted by Saputro and Setyaningrum (2023), they reasoned that brand image was insignificant to purchase intention due to the pandemic situation where consumers considered that it was not important as compared to other variables. In this study, where other dimensions of brand equity seem to have a stronger effect, consumers may prioritize tangible aspects (product quality, product safety, efficacy, reliability, positive health outcomes) more than intangible aspects (brand image) when making a purchase decision on health-related choices. Tangible product attributes (product quality, price) were found to have a positive effect on purchase decisions (Akpyomare et. al, 2012; Chaerudin & Syarafudin, 2021). In addition, some demographic variables (gender, age, culture, health conditions) may lead to differences in the findings. Different consumer segments may yield different contributing factors influencing purchase intention on dietetics and nutrition consultation services.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explores the influence of four dimensions of brand equity towards purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services. As Malaysians become more health-conscious and embrace healthy lifestyles, the healthcare market has expanded tremendously. With a larger market and more competitors, it is important to differentiate one brand from another and to be preferable among competitors.

As brand equity portrays the value and strength of a brand in a market, strong brand equity can lead to greater customer retention and loyalty, higher perceived value, and easier introduction to new products. This can significantly impact a company's financial performance. Thus it is important to understand the dimensions of brand equity that influence dietetics and nutrition consultation services purchase intentions. The result revealed that perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand association significantly impact consumers' purchase intentions, while the brand image does not seem to have a significant influence. This shows that brand equity is highly influenced by how consumers perceive quality and preferability towards certain brands.

The findings provide insight and implications for the dietetics and nutrition consultation services market and practitioners in formulating their marketing strategies in Malaysia particularly. The absence of a significant relationship between brand image and purchase intention for dietetics and nutrition consultation services suggests that consumers prioritize tangible or functional product attributes (eg. quality, efficacy, safety) over intangible or emotional aspects (brand image). Healthcare marketers, therefore, should tailor their marketing strategies to emphasize the tangible benefits. The focus should be more on building trust, awareness, and positive associations that could instill confidence in consumers rather than brand image and perceptions through the three significant brand equity dimensions.

Healthcare practitioners could emphasize perceived quality by maintaining or improving product quality, safety and efficacy. This could be done by highlighting clinical trials, scientific evidence, certification, or endorsement from healthcare professionals to enhance credibility and reinforce the perception of high quality. They could boost brand awareness by doing educational content, social media campaigns, advertising, and signing partnerships with healthcare providers to disseminate information on the advantages or benefits of the brand. Healthcare marketers could also focus the marketing strategy by leveraging positive brand associations. Dietetics and nutrition consultation services must positively be associated with good health and well-being. Thus, highlighting natural ingredients, sustainability and ethical practices could enhance brand reputation. Special attention must also be given to aligning brands to positive health outcomes and prevention to boost brand association.

This study enriches the theoretical foundation and enhances our knowledge of changing consumer behavior in healthcare literature. However, the healthcare industry is unique and various dimensions of brand equity that affect purchase intentions could vary based on age, culture or health conditions. Given the limitations of this research, future studies could explore these nuances to refine marketing strategies in building product brand equity in the healthcare industry.

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