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The Influence of Brand Story Towards Perceived Brand Image on Malaysian Airline Industry

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ABSTRACT

The public's perception towards brands varies from one to another. Consumers' purchasing behaviours keep changing over the years, and people are no longer interested with a one-way flow of communication when it comes to purchasing, or in simpler words, consumers "don't like to be sold". Brand story is one of the strongest marketing strategies that most of the big companies apply to grow their business as well as to portray a good company image. Studies show that the influence of brand story is powerful in building a positive brand image, for it can empower and motivate the audience, convey purpose, and enhance customers' purchasing experience. The purpose of this paper is to identify the respondents' perception of brand story, to ascertain their levels of perceived brand image, as well as to examine the relationship between the perception of brand story and perceived brand image. A survey through the use of a questionnaire was carried out, and 384 respondents participated, and the results indicate a significant value on the relationship between the influence of brand story and perceived brand image.

Keywords: brand story, brand image, airline industry, Malaysian airline industry, marketing strategy

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Introduction

Running a business seemed challenging and complex in the past, but with the advent of modern technology, everything has become more achievable and a lot easier (Ramesh et al., 2019). Technological advancement such as the Internet and social media platforms has lowered the barriers in creating businesses and opened up many opportunities for people to start their own business (Costa, 2019). In fact, people are able to start businesses on social media platforms even without having to register with the Companies Commission of Malaysia.

The Internet has also given opportunities to entrepreneurs to continue expanding their market worldwide (Paun, 2020). The evolution of social media continues to spearhead the developments in the business world year after year (Holt, 2016). As new brands are continuously introduced and launched not only in Malaysia but also worldwide, companies need to be very effective in highlighting their unique selling proposition to the market and in differentiating themselves in today's competitive marketplace (Wertz, 2019). For these companies, social media can be viewed as a "double-edged sword", a tool which can grow or kill a business (DeJarnette, 2012).

Many industries are currently struggling, including the airline industry in Malaysia as well as in other countries. Airline companies such as Pelangi Air and Rayani Air, which were established in Malaysia,

failed in their attempts to stay in the market, despite having a good market with a high demand. On the other hand, Malaysia Airlines, despite its status as a national carrier, has suffered from notable issues in its management and branding. The airline faces difficulty to compete with new players, such as Qatar Airways and Emirates, on international routes. These Middle East based airlines have different strategies in branding their services that include competitive price and award-winning services. Hence, it is important for organisations to keep updated with the latest trends and relevant marketing strategies that appeal to the audience (Peek, 2019). In 2019, Forbes Nonprofit Council stated in their published online article that “today’s technology allows brands to leverage technology to bring information to them in a way that google alerts has been utilised to keep us up with trends”. With the right marketing strategy, it could turn a bankrupt company into a successful company (Olenski, 2016).

An important example is AirAsia which failed in their business in the early stage in 1996 until 2001, but their business was put to a reset using brand stories (AirAsia, 2020). AirAsia portrays a unique story about their airlines to the public as a low-cost carrier to enhance their brand image (Niyomsart & Khamwon, 2015). The story behind the slogan of “Now everyone can fly” is very meaningful, and it has become a significant symbol of AirAsia. Every business has its ups and downs, but it is just a matter of how they stand up to gain back their customers and build a stronger brand image in the eyes of the public (Daye, 2019).

Branding is the most powerful tool in business (Silva, 2020). By having strong branding, whatever value that the competitors offer to the customers, they will always stick to their preferred brand no matter what happens (Hall, 2018). In branding, to stay current on how to evolve a company's brand image to fulfil the present needs and expectations of consumers in a pandemic or ad-hoc situation is very essential (Pedersen & Ritter, 2020).

Branding is not as easy as giving a name to a particular business (Wheeler, 2020). There is a big difference between setting up a company that sells a product or service (the definition of business) and creating a brand that will last for many years to come and to introduce to the world, values that the brand has to offer (Costa, 2019). Running a business is easy, people can set up a business anytime with the use of social media but to sustain the business is not easy (Mukherjee, 2018).

Businesses will have no potential to stay long in the market if the purpose of running a business is just for the sake of making money and not attached to a corporate chain (Costa, 2019). Once the products and services are not relevant to the market anymore, all the efforts that companies have invested to build their brand can drastically affect the company’s reputation.

Previously, a brand associates with the name that is given to a particular product or service to differentiate one product from another, or in other words, a brand is known as a trademark. In this modern world, a brand is what the prospect thinks of when he or she hears a brand name. It can be in the form of factual and emotional. Factual is referring to the packaging of the product, the logo, and the corporate colour (McLaughlin, 2012). While, emotional can be in the form of how the brand appeals to customer’s hearts (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). For instance, flying with premium airlines such as Malaysia Airlines will get free food and drinks (Factual), and we will not starve (emotional).

In simpler words, brand refers to the perceptions that a person has about that one product or service. To have a long-lasting impact on business, “how we are selling” needs to be more than “what we are selling” (Orlob, 2018). Business leaders and strategists have increasingly emphasized the importance of long-term vision, core values, and emotionally compelling narratives that move audiences to action (Harvard Business Review, 2014). Statistics found that only half of small businesses without a brand can survive for a duration of 5 years from the start of the business (Otar, 2019).

A business needs a brand to push the business forward and to build something that can give value to the customers and to attract customers no matter what they are selling (Park, 2019). It is the most powerful thing for all businesses to grow. Howard Schultz, the former CEO of Starbucks, stated that “In this ever-changing society, the most powerful and enduring brands are built from the heart”. A brand holds the company's story, vision, and purpose. It keeps the audience loyal and committed to a certain brand no matter how people try to take the brand down (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). To conclude, a strong brand

could bring changes to business and no matter how big or small the changes are, customers will keep following the brand (Smithson, 2015).

Background of Study

The public's perception towards some brands varies from one to another (Smith, 2015). Different people experience brands differently with the unique value of some brands that makes them stick to the brand. However, in the growing era of the internet and social media, there are so many brands that exist in the market (Llewellyn, 2019). Due to that, the way businesses promote and market their products and services must evolve to be sustainable.

On the other hand, consumer purchasing behaviour keeps changing over the years, and it can be seen that people are no longer interested in a one-way flow of communication when it comes to purchasing, or as the saying goes consumers "don't like to be sold" (Silva, 2019). The consumer also wants to know the uniqueness of the product or services compared with the competitors (Hope, 2018). The more unique the brand is the better reception it will get from the consumers.

In the consumer's point of view, their purchasing experience and the value of the product are important, apart from the price of the product itself (Hughes et al., 2019). When a brand carries a strong brand image, customers will always support the brand because they believe that the brand would always deliver the best to their customers (Thimothy, 2017).

With the challenges to sustain businesses, there are a few airline companies that have collapsed in the market such as Pelangi Airways and Rayani Air because they do not have a clear direction in terms of the purpose of their brand, what their brand stands for, and the story behind their brands (Marion, 2015). Consumers tend to buy products or services from a brand that carries a positive brand image as they feel that the brand is sincere in creating value to the customers (Chen & Seng, 2016). In this situation, marketing plays an important role in building a strong brand image and public trust towards the product and services that the brand offers (Smithson, 2015).

One of the strongest marketing strategies used by big companies to grow their business is to enhance its brand story to the audience (Sullivan, 2019). When it comes to the importance of building a positive brand image, many people always associate the idea of brand image and brand story to only the Fashion industry. The idea of the brand story and brand image is very broad, and it can even be applied to the area of airline industries.

With support from the government and strong funding, only three airlines are now operating in Malaysia which are Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia, and Malindo Air. Before AirAsia was crowned as the leading airline company in Malaysia, it struggled to establish its position in the market as Malaysians were used to Malaysia Airline (Ping et al., 2019). However, AirAsia has emerged to become one of the leading and most successful airline companies in Malaysia using meaningful brand-storytelling even though it took years for them to build their brand image. AirAsia has also managed to transform its business strategy using brand storytelling (Yashodha et al., 2012).

The main factor that contributes to the success of AirAsia is all about the beautiful story behind the brand AirAsia that they present to the public. There is a very meaningful story that AirAsia portrays behind a very simple slogan "Now everyone can fly" and the story has brought the image of AirAsia to the next level of achievement as we can see today (BBC News, 2010).

To conclude, brands can create loyalty through meaningful consumer's purchasing experience and emotional connections. The more favourable the brand image is, the higher the perceived product quality, consumer satisfaction, and loyalty will be (He, 2011). A meaningful story behind a successful brand leads to having a positive brand image, and it will then influence the consumers in their spending decisions. There are so many stories of loyalty, customers, pricing, obstacles as well as seasonal stories that are produced by AirAsia to convey the message to the public. In a nutshell, a brand story is powerful in building a positive brand image because it can empower and motivate the audience, convey purpose, and enhance customer's purchasing experience (Ryu et al., 2019). It is also a powerful tool to be used to clear out the negative thoughts about people towards a brand (Aaker & Aaker, 2016).

Problem Statement

All businesses in the world are exposed to the possibility of being in a crisis which could negatively impact an organisation's image and reputation. As claimed by Šontaitė-Petkevičienė (2014), a crisis can be defined as a sudden and unexpected event which could threaten to disrupt an organisation's operations and cause both financial and reputational threats. Any unexpected crisis that happens to an organisation could lead to the downturn of an organisation as well as giving an impact on the organisation's brand image itself. In correspondence to Othman and Yusoff (2020), there are three related threats that can be generated by a crisis are public safety, financial loss as well as image and reputation loss.

Malaysia Airlines came under a lot of scrutiny in the way it handled crises. Two of the most notable examples were in 2014 when MH370 aircraft went missing on its journey from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing and the crash of MH 17. The airline received a lot of negative criticism during the MH370 incident as lot of inaccurate information was relayed which led to confusion among the victims' families and the public. It was reported that Malaysia Airlines Public Relation Team showed a very poor performance in failing to communicate and in prioritising the concerns of victims' families (Zafra & Maydell, 2018, 2018).

The situation became worse when the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Razak confessed in an article for the Wall Street Journal that, at the onset of the plane's disappearance, the government was focused and concerned on trying to find the aircraft that they had failed to prioritise communication (Xuan et al., 2017). This had a negative impact towards Malaysia Airlines's brand image as it gave an impression to the public that the airline did not prioritise communications, and they took many hours to inform the passengers' family members regarding the tragedy (Zafra & Maydell, 2018). As a result, many people stopped travelling with Malaysian Airlines. With a tarnished reputation, the loss-making carrier was at risk of bankruptcy. These factors also play a significant contribution to the downfall of public confidence and public trust on the brand itself (Scholz & Smith, 2019).

For Malaysia Airlines to recover, it is very important for the company to come out with a brand-storytelling strategy to save the company's image and deal with the unexpected crisis. To strengthen the company's image, Malaysia Airlines has had to drastically change their business models to stay competitive and maintain a good image so that they can continue to sustain their business after the unexpected crises such as MH 370 and MH 17 (Yusman, 2020).

Besides safety issues, service and quality issues have also given an impact towards the airlines company's brand image and reputation (Han et al., 2019). Competition in the airline industry is very intense especially when it comes to budget airlines in Malaysia. There are about 3 budget airlines that are constantly competing: AirAsia, Malindo Air and Firefly. To stand out among the competitors, lowering the price of their product alone is not enough. Kotler and Keller (2010) claim that pricing strategies have a significant influence for the marketing organisation and when people choose to fly with an airline, they will first look at the pricing factors (they will choose the airlines that offer the lowest price). Hence it would be reasonable to assume that the customers would opt for AirAsia since it usually offers the lowest price compared to the other airlines. However, many businesses are not aware the price that they set for their product and the service that they offer must come hand in hand. Hence even when AirAsia offers a flight ticket at the lowest price, yet the service that they provide is not up to standard, the customer may not take up the offer. Jahmani (2017) supported this statement by saying that when an airline continues to provide good services, it would help the airline to retain customer loyalty. However, in most cases, customers may not receive the level of service they expect (Athirah, 2011).

Recently, there have been many complaints and issues regarding the service quality provided by AirAsia, and it also went viral on social media. The complaints indicate that AirAsia passengers were disappointed with the quality of service provided by AirAsia. Credible and trusted review websites such as www.tripadvisor.com and www.airlinequality.com share a variety of reviews and complaints from passengers who had experience flying with AirAsia.

As reported, most of the complaints received were about unfriendly flight attendants, the lack of assistance from AirAsia's customer service especially at the self-check in system at the airport, flight attendants moving passengers' hand-carry bags without informing them, and extremely bad flight delays. In fact, on many occasions, passengers were not even informed by the airlines that the flights were delayed. These complaints show that AirAsia is not customer friendly, and it can be said that the service quality provided by AirAsia is poor which could trigger an unexpected crisis to the company, and consequently, put the company's image and reputation at risk (Puspawigati, 2019).

To conclude, it is very important for AirAsia to improve their service quality so that they are able to increase positive user-generated feedback and reviews which can help spread positive stories of AirAsia, thus, building positive brand reputation. Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia must put extra effort to come out with strategic brand story planning to reduce further losses or put the companies' image at risk. This would be the right time for these companies to fully utilise brand stories as part of their marketing strategies to maintain their brand image in the eyes of the public. Therefore, this study aims to identify how the different components of brand story improve a company's brand image.

RQ1: What is a brand story as perceived by the public?

RQ2: What are the levels of perceived brand image by the public?

RQ3: What is the relationship between the perception of brand story and perceived brand image?

Therefore, to answer the research questions, three objectives have been developed below:

RO1: To identify the perception of the brand story among the public

RO2: To identify the levels of perceived brand image by the public

RO3: To examine the relationship between the perception of brand story and perceived brand image

Literature Review

This article discusses the relationship between public perception on brand story and perceived brand image. In explaining the relationship, the researchers have applied two empirical concepts derived from a few scholars on brand story such as Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) as well as scholars in brand image such as Ramesh, Saha, Goswami, Sekar, and Dahiya (2019) as well as Guci et al. (2020).

The Essence of Storytelling

In general, a story is defined as a series of events in a specific order, with a beginning, a middle, and an end (Bennett & Royle as cited in Delgado-Ballester & Fernández-Sabiote, 2016). People learn to understand the world around them through stories. Stories have existed in their lives for hundreds of thousands of years, and it contributes to their understanding of how things around them work (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019). Stories are a powerful form of communication that enables them to grab people's attention, persuade, empower, inspire, engage, and change the behaviour of the people who are exposed to them (Yılmaz et al., 2018).

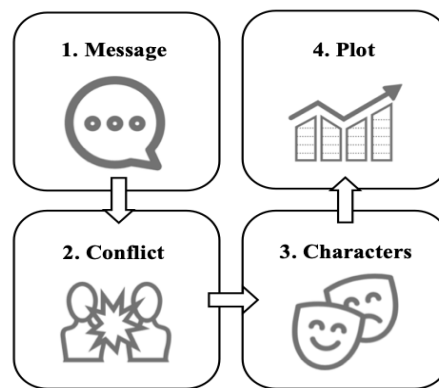
The strategy that focuses on creating, delivering stories and ultimately informing people about the company's brand is called brand stories. In business perspectives, storytelling is defined as a way of ensuring that the brand is in tandem with the company's goals and values which are shared within the organisation as well as to convey messages to potential customers so that the customers would buy their products and finally build a positive image towards their brand (He, 2011).

To develop a good story is not simple as it requires skills and knowledge, and Fog et al. (2010) introduces the four elements of storytelling as a guideline for businesses and brands to use to develop a good story. The first element introduced is the use of a key or central message of the story. Key messages are very important in developing a good story as it reflects the key theme of the message throughout the story, and it portrays a positive image of the brand itself (Fog et al., 2010; Paquette et al., 2017).

The second element is the conflict that occurs in the story, which acts as a driving force and the change that disturbs the harmony of the story. Conflicts in a story trigger the emotional need for the person to solve the conflict, and interesting stories are delivered through conflict and resolution (Andersson & Schill, 2019). Thirdly, characters are needed in every story to enhance the story and to create a conflict; it requires a hero who will in turn create an antagonist (Paquette et al., 2017). The last element is the plot of the story which refers to the flow and progression of the story. The plot is used to grab and maintain the customers' attention towards the story that is delivered so that they are aware of the sequence of events. Figure 1 shows the four elements in building a good story, adapted from Fog et al. (2010).

Figure 1

The elements of storytelling adapted from Fog et al. (2010)



The use of interesting stories that appeal to the emotions, promise added value, and grab the attention of customers can set a brand or business apart from its competitors (Andersson & Schill, 2019). Some studies have shown that there are a few successful relaunches and companies that made a comeback through the use of persuasive brand stories (Fakiha, 2018). For instance, Polaroid Corporation is one of the reviving brands that used storytelling to relaunch their brand in the market after a major downfall by emphasising on the element of visual history in their storytelling (Lathrop, 2008).

A story consists of a structure that enables brands to keep their brand and audience together (Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). Storytelling is very powerful in communication, advertising, and branding in persuading external and internal audiences, such as the consumers and stakeholders (Delgado-Ballester & Fernández-Sabiote, 2016). An expert from the field of cognitive psychology claimed that people remember stories 22 times better than pure facts (Stanford VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab, n.d).

In a nutshell, everyone loves a good story. However, due to the increasing numbers of brands and the evolution of digital marketing, companies tend to emphasise on the “*Buy Now*” message that links to their product page straight away rather than communicating and engaging with the audience through stories. Delivering a story is not limited to verbal means as it can also be told using words, images, or both.

Perceived Brand Image by The Audience

Brand image changes and develops over time. In today's competitive environment, portraying a good brand image is paramount to effectively position a product in the market (Mao et al., 2020). This is because brand image has a significant influence on consumer behaviours (Zhang, 2015). Despite the changes in consumers' lifestyles and the way information is processed, brand image would remain as a dominant factor in consumer's purchasing decision making. Communicating a brand image to the audience has been regarded as an important marketing activity (Gardener & Levy as cited in Huang, 2010).

Many people assume that brand image is similar to the concept of brand awareness. Brand image differs from brand awareness in that brand awareness comes before brand image, as awareness is a precondition to the existing brand image. Once sufficient brand awareness has been established, marketers can focus more on crafting a positive brand image (Falck, 2018). The main purpose of marketing activities would always be to influence consumers' perceptions and their attitude towards a brand, establish a brand image in consumers' minds and stimulate consumers' purchasing behaviour of the brand (Zhang, 2015).

In general, brand image is defined as a perception of how people perceive a certain brand (Alhaddad, 2015). Brand image can be seen as a key element indicating how consumers feel about a brand and whether a positive relationship exists between the brand and consumers (Plumeyer et al., 2019). Hence, by having a good brand image, it helps to distinguish a brand from its competitors.

Consider the example of McDonald's. McDonald's is one of the biggest fast-food restaurants in the world. McDonald's franchise spreads all around the world, and in Indonesia, McDonald's has made Burger King, their biggest competitor, to close its restaurants (Andreani et al., 2012). The success of McDonald's has been driven by its strategy in maintaining its brand image worldwide.

One way to make customers loyal and satisfied with a certain brand is to build a positive brand image, and that is what McDonald's has been doing. They have created a strong and positive brand image that make customers feel and think that their product is always better than its competitors. To build a good brand image, we need to know how to compose a good brand story because a good brand story helps to build a favourable image for a brand (Huang, 2010).

Forming a positive brand image is very difficult as the brand image is formed in many ways. Researchers found that there are 2 different views on the formation of the brand image. In Keller's point of view, brand image is formed through all the experiences a consumer has with a particular brand which consists of direct experience, online surfing, word of mouth, articles in the media, and assumptions that the consumer creates based on the brand name or the logo, country of origin and distribution channel (Keller, 2012).

Keller (2012) strongly agrees that direct experiences are the best way in forming strong brand attributes and benefits, followed by word-of-mouth, and he believes that advertising forms the weakest brand associations. Furthermore, to create a positive brand image, companies should take marketing actions that link strong, favourable, and unique associations to the brand in consumer's memory (Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2017).

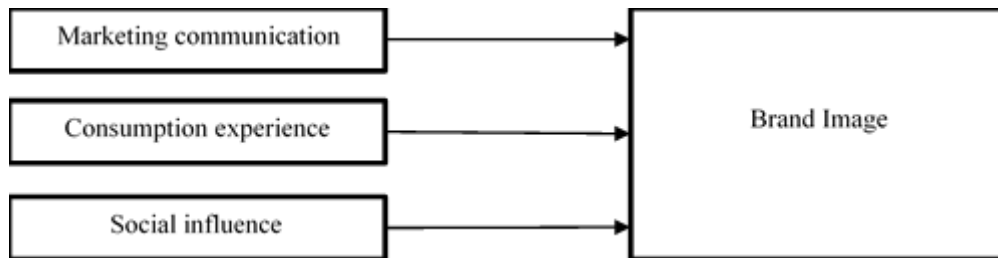
Besides that, Riezebos (2003) also suggested that brand image is formed in multiple ways simultaneously. Furthermore, in his theory, he introduces that there are two types of images forming processes which are known as inductive and deductive inference (Rosengren et al., 2010). Inductive Inference refers to the processes that are influencing the consumer's image creation of a brand (Knape & Lundell, 2011).

The inductive inference process, as shown in Figure 2, explains that the consumer's brand image is formed in three different ways which are through personal consumption, through social influence, and through brand's marketing communication exploration such as advertising. Deductive inference refers to an image which is formed based on existing images of the brand (Hultman et al., 2015).

Keller (2012) perceived advertising as the weakest form of image forming, yet Riezebos argues that the image forming advertising is the first consumer's contact that they have with a brand. That is why the first impression is crucial for the success of a brand, and it is hard to change afterwards (Falck, 2018).

Figure 2

Process of Inductive Inference on Brand Image (Riezebos, 2003)



Marketing communication is the first process of inductive inference on brand image, and it is the process where brands start to communicate their brand identity through the use of advertising to portray a good brand image (Knape & Lundell, 2011). Image creation of a particular brand can be formed through the first impression that the audience gets, and it is formed in a way that the image creation (brand image) links the image created by the consumers (how consumer perceived the image as) with the identity the company wants to communicate (Hultman et al., 2015; Riezebos, 2003).

Besides that, Knape and Lundell (2011) also stated that in the process of consumption experiences, marketing communication must be consistent, and if it is not consistent, the image of a brand will change in the consumers' minds. Lastly, social influence is the process that uses word of mouth as a communication tool to form an image of the brand. This forming process could affect the public's expectations towards a brand in a positive or negative way because sometimes people have not experienced the brand, but they have high expectations towards the brand (Falck, 2018).

Methods

To answer the research questions, quantitative research was applied. 384 respondents were selected by using non-probability sampling. A questionnaire was developed by using Google Form, and the form comprises two sections with a 5-point Likert Scale to measure their agreement on the statements given. A total of 45 questions were prepared to measure the brand story and perceived brand image based on the literature review discussed.

The questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp and social media in two steps. The first step was a pilot study involving 30 respondents to check the reliability and validity of the instruments followed by an actual study that involved 384 respondents. Data collection was conducted for 6 weeks starting from mid-December 2020 until January 2021. Results from the pilot study indicated that the questionnaire was reliable (Cronbach alpha = 0.935) and valid (KMO-Bartlett = 0.729, sig. 0.000).

Findings

In this section, interpretation of researcher's frequency results of the independent variable will be showcased (The Influence of Brand Story). Table 1 measured the respondents' understanding of brand story. Based on the following table, respondents' preference that a great brand story is a consumer-based story holds a mean score of 4.06 and standard deviation of 0.873. Next, the result shows that a great brand story is a story that has a key message and holds a mean of 4.09 and standard deviation of 0.880. Besides that, product-centered stories have a mean of 3.58 and standard deviation of 1.072.

It is also recorded that a great brand that is delivered by celebrities has a mean of 2.96 and standard deviation of 1.253. Other than that, the reason behind Malaysia's failed carrier in the market due to the way they talk about their airlines to the audience holds a mean of 4.30 and standard deviation of 0.856. Result shows that the statement "Many successful airline brands in Malaysia and remarkable people in

the world start with a great story before they become successful” holds a mean of 4.43 and standard deviation of 0.872.

In addition, compelling stories comprising key messages in developing brand stories have a mean of 4.09 and standard deviation of 1.026. It is recorded that compelling stories comprising plot in developing brand stories hold a mean of 3.83 and standard deviation of 0.855 while compelling stories comprising characters hold a mean of 3.79 and standard deviation of 0.864. The result also shows that compelling stories composed of conflicts hold a mean of 3.65 and standard deviation of 1.044.

This paragraph will then touch on the respondents' understanding of storytelling. The result shows that respondents' interest in spoken storytelling has a mean of 3.85 and standard deviation of 0.907. Meanwhile, respondents' interest in visual storytelling holds a mean of 4.05 and standard deviation of 0.997. Next, respondents' interest in written storytelling has a mean of 3.69 and standard deviation of 1.074.

Furthermore, most of the respondents agreed that consumer-based stories allow them to connect with brands emotionally (standard deviation = 0.954) compared to product packaging (standard deviation = 0.963), product pricing (standard deviation = 1.045), and brand history (standard deviation = 1.073). The result shows that majority of the respondents agreed that they engage with airline brands in Malaysia through consumer-based stories which holds a standard deviation of 0.849 compared to the other three components namely, brand history (standard deviation = 1.003), product pricing (standard deviation = 0.901) and product packaging (standard deviation = 0.897).

From the table below, respondents' use of airline services in Malaysia because of product packaging holds a mean of 3.59 and standard deviation of 0.984. Additionally, product pricing factor has a mean of 3.76 and standard deviation of 0.950. Meanwhile, consumer-based-stories as a factor respondents use services of airlines in Malaysia has a mean of 3.84 and standard deviation of 0.895. Finally, product history as a factor respondents' use services of airlines in Malaysia holds a mean of 3.83 and standard deviation of 0.949.

To conclude, based on the data findings, most of the respondents agreed that consumer-based stories are important elements in developing brand stories compared to stories about product pricing, product packaging and brand history.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis of Influence of Brand Story

Items	Frequency Scale (Percentage)					Mean	Standard Deviation
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somehow Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Key message are important in developing brand stories	8 (1.6)	18 (3.7)	85 (17.5)	96 (19.8)	179 (36.8)	4.09	1.026
Plots are important in developing brand stories	4 (0.8)	21 (4.3)	93 (19.1)	188 (38.7)	80 (16.5)	3.83	.855
Characters are important in developing brand stories	4 (0.8)	18 (3.7)	114 (23.5)	168 (34.6)	82 (16.9)	3.79	.864

Conflicts are important in developing brand stories	11 (2.3)	39 (8.0)	118 (24.3)	124 (25.5)	94 (19.3)	3.65	1.044
Interested in written storytelling	13 (2.7)	40 (8.2)	102 (21.0)	129 (26.5)	102 (21.0)	3.69	1.074
Interested in spoken storytelling	8 (1.6)	20 (4.1)	83 (17.1)	185 (38.1)	90 (18.5)	3.85	.907
Interested in visual storytelling	13 (2.7)	11 (2.3)	71 (14.6)	139 (28.6)	152 (31.3)	4.05	.997
Product packaging allows me to connect with brands emotionally	5 (1.0)	24 (4.9)	122 (25.1)	126 (25.9)	109 (22.4)	3.80	.963
Product pricing allows me to connect with brand emotionally	16 (3.3)	31 (6.4)	108 (22.2)	143 (29.4)	88 (18.1)	3.66	1.045
Consumer based stories allow me to connect with brands emotionally	5 (1.0)	29 (6.0)	91 (18.7)	154 (31.7)	107 (22.0)	3.85	.954
Brand history allows me to connect with brands emotionally	19 (3.9)	23 (4.7)	85 (17.5)	148 (30.5)	111 (22.0)	3.80	1.073
A great brand story is a story that has a key message	1 (0.2)	8 (1.6)	104 (21.4)	117 (24.1)	156 (32.1)	4.09	.880
A great brand story is a story that is delivered by celebrities	71 (14.6)	62 (12.8)	102 (21.0)	115 (23.7)	36 (7.4)	2.96	1.253
A great brand story is a product-centered story	31 (6.4)	15 (3.1)	107 (22.0)	167 (34.4)	66 (13.6)	3.58	1.072
A great brand story is a consumer-based story	2 (0.4)	17 (3.5)	73 (15.0)	158 (32.5)	136 (28.0)	4.06	.873
Failed carrier in the market is due to the way they talk about their airlines to the audience	1 (0.2)	7 (1.4)	74 (15.2)	99 (20.4)	205 (42.2)	4.30	.856
I engage with airline brand in Malaysia through brand history	9 (1.9)	31 (6.4)	103 (21.2)	142 (29.2)	101 (20.8)	3.76	1.003
I engage with airline brand in Malaysia through product pricing	9 (1.9)	16 (3.3)	112 (23.0)	171 (35.2)	78 (16.0)	3.76	.901
I engage with airline brand in Malaysia through consumer-based stories	3 (0.6)	14 (2.9)	105 (21.6)	169 (34.8)	95 (19.5)	3.88	.849

I engage with airline brand in Malaysia through product packaging	5 (1.0)	17 (3.5)	118 (24.3)	153 (31.5)	93 (19.1)	3.81	.897
Successful airline brands in Malaysia and remarkable people in the world start with a great story before they become successful	4 (0.8)	14 (2.9)	33 (6.8)	95 (19.5)	240 (49.4)	4.43	.872
I use services of airlines company in Malaysia because of product packaging	10 (2.1)	38 (7.8)	123 (25.3)	143 (29.4)	72 (14.8)	3.59	.984
I use services of airlines company in Malaysia because of product pricing	10 (2.1)	19 (3.9)	113 (23.3)	154 (31.7)	90 (18.5)	3.76	.950
I use services of airlines company in Malaysia because of consumer based stories	1 (0.2)	31 (6.4)	90 (18.5)	169 (34.8)	95 (19.5)	3.84	.895
I use services of airlines company in Malaysia because of product history	7 (1.4)	24 (4.9)	98 (20.2)	156 (32.1)	101 (20.8)	3.83	.949

In this section, interpretation of researcher's frequency result of dependent variable will be showcased (perceived brand image). Table 2 measures respondents' understanding on perceived brand image. From the table below, brand popularity as a key element indicating how consumers feel about airline brands in Malaysia has a mean of 3.91 and standard deviation of 0.942. Meanwhile, brand image holds a mean of 3.98 and standard deviation of 0.801. Brand awareness, seen as a key element indicating how consumers feel about airline brands in Malaysia, has a mean of 4.00 and standard deviation of 0.872. Respondents' preference on the statement saying that "Advertising is the best form of image forming process" has a mean of 4.63 and standard deviation of 0.614

Moreover, this paragraph will touch on the channel in the brand image forming process. Table 2 shows that respondents' perception that brands in Malaysia are formed through social influence hold a mean 4.01 and standard deviation of 0.920; articles in the media has a mean of 3.88 and standard deviation of 0.807; tagline holds a mean of 3.71 and standard deviation of 0.942; advertising holds a mean of 3.99 and standard deviation of 0.934; and lastly, consumption experience (flying experience) has a mean of 4.19 and standard deviation of 0.855. Respondents' perceptions towards Malaysian carriers being formed through image forming process, has a mean of 4.46 and standard deviation of 0.687.

Additionally, respondents gaining trust towards a Malaysian carrier through consumption experience (flying experience) has a mean of 4.09 and standard deviation of .928 while through word of mouth holds a mean of 3.69 and standard deviation of 0.880. Also, marketing communication has a mean of 4.02 and standard deviation of 0.894. According to the results obtained, respondents' awareness towards Malaysian carriers increased through advertising, has a mean of 4.06 and standard deviation of 0.878.

Besides that, social influence increases respondents' awareness has a mean of 3.99 and standard deviation of 0.794 compared to increased awareness through articles in the media which has a mean of

3.91 and standard deviation of 0.885. Lastly, the brand image respondents have towards airlines in Malaysia shaped through positive word of mouth, holds a mean of 4.59 and standard deviation of 0.622.

To conclude, the data in Table 2 shows that most of the respondents agreed that brand image has a significant influence on their behaviour towards the airline industry in Malaysia and their perception is mainly formed through consumption experience (flying experience) compared to advertising, social influence, tagline and articles in the media.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Respondents' Perceived Brand Image

Items	Frequency Scale (Percentage)					Mean	Standard Deviation
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somehow Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Brand image has a significant influence on my behaviour towards the Airline industry in Malaysia	0 (0)	1 (0.2)	34 (7.0)	93 (19.1)	258 (53.1)	4.58	.661
My perception towards airline brands in Malaysia is formed through social influence	3 (0.6)	19 (3.9)	86 (17.7)	141 (29.0)	137 (28.2)	4.01	.920
My perception towards airline brands in Malaysia is formed through articles in the media	2 (0.4)	19 (3.9)	82 (16.9)	203 (41.8)	80 (16.5)	3.88	.807
My perception towards airline brands in Malaysia is formed through tagline	5 (1.0)	30 (6.2)	123 (25.3)	142 (29.2)	86 (17.7)	3.71	.942
My perception towards airline brands in Malaysia is formed through advertising	4 (0.8)	23 (4.7)	76 (15.6)	151 (31.1)	132 (27.2)	3.99	.934
My perception towards airline brands in Malaysia is formed through consumption experience (Flying experience)	1 (0.2)	18 (3.7)	51 (10.5)	153 (31.5)	163 (33.5)	4.19	.855
I gain trust towards a Malaysian carrier through consumption experience (Flying experience)	3 (0.6)	15 (3.1)	87 (17.9)	120 (24.7)	161 (33.1)	4.09	.928

I gain trust towards a Malaysian carrier through word-of-mouth	3 (0.6)	29 (6.0)	121 (24.9)	163 (33.5)	70 (14.4)	3.69	.880
I gain trust towards a Malaysian carrier through marketing communication	3 (0.6)	15 (3.1)	88 (18.1)	147 (30.2)	133 (27.4)	4.02	.894
Brand popularity can be seen as a key element indicating how consumers feel about airline brands in Malaysia	3 (0.6)	20 (4.1)	112 (23.0)	125 (25.7)	126 (25.9)	3.91	.942
Brand image can be seen as a key element indicating how consumers feel about airline brands in Malaysia	1 (0.2)	9 (1.9)	95 (19.5)	174 (35.8)	107 (22.0)	3.98	.801
Brand awareness can be seen as a key element indicating how consumers feel about airline brands in Malaysia	2 (0.4)	17 (3.5)	84 (17.3)	160 (32.9)	123 (25.3)	4.00	.872
My perception towards a Malaysian carrier is formed through an image forming process.	0 (0)	1 (0.2)	39 (8.0)	122 (25.1)	215 (44.2)	4.46	.687
Advertising increases my awareness towards Malaysian carriers.	1 (0.2)	9 (1.9)	103 (21.2)	122 (25.1)	148 (30.5)	4.06	.878
Social influence increases my awareness towards Malaysian carriers.	1 (0.2)	8 (1.6)	93 (19.1)	174 (35.8)	107 (22.0)	3.99	.794
Articles in the media increase my awareness towards Malaysian carriers.	3 (0.6)	17 (3.5)	97 (30.0)	155 (31.9)	107 (22.0)	3.91	.885
Advertising is the best form of image forming process	0 (0)	0 (0)	27 (5.6)	89 (13.8)	266 (54.7)	4.63	.614
Airlines in Malaysia communicate brand identity through the use of advertising to portray a good brand image.	1 (0.2)	3 (0.6)	95 (19.5)	167 (34.4)	118 (24.3)	4.04	.781

Airlines in Malaysia communicate brand image through the use of advertising to portray a good brand image.	0 (0)	7 (1.4)	85 (17.5)	169 (34.8)	116 (23.9)	4.05	.779
Positive word of mouth shapes the brand image I have towards airlines in Malaysia.	0 (0)	0 (0)	28 (5.8)	101 (20.8)	257 (52.9)	4.59	.622

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was carried out to test the significant relationship between independent variables (the influence of brand story) and dependent variables (perceived brand image). Based on Guilford's Rule of Thumb, Pearson's correlation coefficient is able to construct the degree and strength of the relationship. The Guildford Rule of Thumb was used in this study to determine the strength of the relationship between the influence of brand story towards perceived brand image.

The data classified in Table 3 below indicates that brand story has a significant relationship with perceived brand image ($p=0.000$) with a magnitude indicating low relationship between the influence of brand story towards perceived brand image ($r=.399^{**}$) based on the results given. Therefore, the research indicates that the brand story as perceived by the public has a relationship (has an impact) on the perceived brand image. There is indeed a relationship between the independent variable (the influence of brand story) towards the dependent variable (perceived brand image).

Table 3

Pearson's correlation between The Influence of Brand Story Towards Perceived Brand Image

	Perceived Brand Image	
	r	p
The Influence of Brand Story	.399**	.000

Moreover, results have shown that there is a significant relationship between the influence of consumer-based stories on the usage of airline services in Malaysia with perceived brand image ($p=0.000$). The magnitude strength of the relationship falls under moderate relationship ($r=0.430^{**}$). Besides that, there is also a significant relationship between compelling stories that consist of key messages in their brand stories with perceived brand image ($p=0.000$). The magnitude strength of the relationship falls under low relationship ($r=0.348^{**}$). Besides that, there is a significant relationship between a brand story that has a key message with perceived brand image ($p=0.000$) with a magnitude strength that falls under low relationship ($r=0.396^{**}$).

In addition, many successful airline brands in Malaysia and remarkable people in the world start with a great story before they become successful and have a relationship with perceived brand image ($p=0.000$). The magnitude strength falls under negligible relationship ($r=0.199^{**}$). Lastly, the public's perception towards stories about product pricing that allows to connect with brands emotionally, has a significant relationship with perceived brand image ($p=0.000$) with a magnitude strength that falls under negligible relationship ($r=0.196^{**}$).

To conclude, brand story has a significant relationship with brand image with a magnitude of low relationship. Therefore, the influence of brand story (independent variable) has a correlation with

perceived brand image (dependent variable) whereby the influence of brand story could affect a company's brand image and reputation.

Table 4

Correlation Test between The Influence of Brand Story Towards Perceived Brand Image

The Influence of Brand Story (Independent Variable)	Perceived Brand Image (Dependent Variable)	
	r	p
Key messages in developing brand story	.348**	.000
Plot is important in developing brand stories	.338**	.000
In general, compelling stories that comprise of characters are important in developing brand stories	.381**	.000
In general, compelling stories that comprise of conflicts are important in developing brand stories	.156**	.003
I'm more interested in written storytelling	.212**	.000
I'm more interested in spoken storytelling	.291**	.000
I'm more interested in visual storytelling	.294**	.000
In general, stories about product packaging allows me to connect with brands emotionally	.264**	.000
In general, stories about product pricing allows me to connect with brands emotionally	.196**	.000
In general, stories about consumer-based stories allow me to connect with brands emotionally	.251**	.000
In general, stories about brand history allows me to connect with brands emotionally	.321**	.000
In general, a great brand story is a story that has a key message	.396**	.000
In general, a great brand story is a story that is delivered by celebrities	-.092	.081
In general, a great brand story is a product-centered story	.205**	.000
In general, a great brand story is a consumer-based story	.341**	.000
The reason behind Malaysia's failed carrier in the market is due to the way they talk about their airlines to the audience	.052	.329
I engage with airline brands in Malaysia through brand history	.282**	.000
I engage with airline brands in Malaysia through product pricing	.317**	.000

I engage with airline brands in Malaysia through consumer-based stories	.358**	.000
I engage with airline brands in Malaysia through product packaging	.318**	.000
Successful airline brands in Malaysia and remarkable people in the world start with a great story before they become successful	.199**	.000
I use services of airline companies in Malaysia because of product packaging	.207**	.000
I use services of airline companies in Malaysia because of product pricing	.269**	.000
I use services of airline companies in Malaysia because of consumer based stories	.430**	.000
I use services of airline companies in Malaysia because of product history	.263**	.000

Discussion and Conclusion

Majority of the respondents agreed that consumer-based stories allow them to connect with the brand emotionally based on the data obtained from the question related to the respondents' view on whether consumer-based stories allow them to connect with the brand. To elaborate, this data supported a study by Marsh that stories could help brands to connect with the audience on a deeper level, "Just as stories help people to connect, researchers believe that we connect with brands that we like the same way" (Marsh, 2015). The data obtained also supported the point of view from Urban et al., (2017) in which the scholars mentioned in their study that in a consumer-based story, consumers put themselves in the story that makes them feel strongly engaged with the brand.

In addition to that, a scholar Çınar (2020) highlighted in his study that the best brand stories are always customer stories because their stories have a more significant impact on their ability to connect with the brand. Data findings from the questions related to consumer-based stories concluded that most of the respondents agree that they engage with airline brands in Malaysia through consumer-based stories (mean = 3.88) compared to brand history. In addition, the data also supported the study by Hong and Cho (2016) that people who were exposed to a non-story ad showed the highest negative emotion while those who were exposed to consumer-based telling advertisement had the lowest negative emotion towards the brand. For instance, Coca-Cola is one of the world's valuable brands that is widely known for its powerful brand storytelling techniques to engage with customers (Plessis, 2015).

Besides that, a majority of the respondents use the services of airline companies in Malaysia because of consumer-based stories (mean = 3.84). This data supported a study by Hong et al., (2018) that consumer-based stories give authenticity, familiarity, and a positive impression on people. On the other hand, this data has rejected Javed and Javed's study in 2015 saying that in a modern and digital world, people are more interested in stories about product packaging compared to consumer-based stories. Javed and Javed (2015) believed that a product would be incomplete without appealing product packaging. Furthermore, the same beliefs also apply to a 2015 study by Rob Marsh, an expert writer and brand strategist, where he concluded that packaging is just like a book cover in which it is the first touch point to encourage the audience to read the book.

Besides these, the data from this study corresponds with Zhang's (2015) study on a brand image that the main purpose of marketing activities would always be to influence consumers' perceptions and their attitude towards the brand, to establish the brand image in consumers' minds and to stimulate

consumers' purchasing behaviour of the brand. The data retrieved proves the study that brand image has a significant influence on respondents' behaviour towards the airline industry in Malaysia (mean = 4.58) which indicates that most of the respondents agree with this statement. The data also supported the study by Mao et al., (2020) that in today's competitive environment, portraying a good brand image is paramount to position the product in the market effectively.

Moreover, most of the respondents agreed that advertising increases respondents' awareness towards Malaysia carriers (mean = 4.06) and the findings have supported Riezebos' (2003) theory of image forming process. According to Riezebos (2003), the image forming strategy (advertising) was the first contact that consumers have with the brand. Moreover, the findings also supported Falck's study in 2018 that the first impression formed through advertising is crucial for the success of a brand and it is hard to change afterward. Marketing communication is the process where brands start to communicate their brand identity using advertising to portray a good brand (Knape & Lundell, 201). In contrast, findings on the statement of "advertising increases respondents' awareness towards Malaysia carriers" has rejected Keller's study in 2012. This is because, in Keller's point of view, he perceived advertising as the weakest form of image forming process and he strongly believed that direct experiences are the best way in forming brand image and creating brand awareness.

Finally, the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement "brand image is a key element indicating how consumers feel about airline brands in Malaysia" compared to brand popularity and brand awareness. The data findings supported a previous study by Alhaddad (2015) that defined brand image as a perception of how people perceive a certain brand and good brand image could help to distinguish one brand from another. This also proves Huang's 2010 study where he mentioned that brand image differs from brand awareness in that brand awareness comes before brand image, as awareness is a precondition to the existing brand image.

To conclude, the findings from the data proved the researcher's hypothesis in which the researcher stated that there is a positive correlation between the perception of brand story towards perceived brand image (Ha: There is a relationship between the perception of brand story towards perceived brand image).

Research Implication

Based on data obtained from the survey, it has been suggested that the public is aware that consumer-based stories are an important element in developing good stories. Moreover, consumer-based stories including reviews and word-of-mouth are found to connect the public with the brands emotionally yet product pricing stories are not preferable even though it can help them in purchasing decision making. This is because the public gains trust towards a Malaysian carrier through word of mouth. Consumer-based stories also create strong engagement between the public and the brand itself, specifically airline brands in Malaysia. In consumer-based stories, consumers put themselves in a story that makes them feel strongly engaged with the brand.

The best brand stories are always customer stories because they are more powerful than other subject stories. When an unexpected crisis happened to an airline company, for example Malaysia Airlines, there was so much news that went viral which consequently, affected the company's image negatively. Furthermore, there was too much fake news and articles that were spread online. As a result, the data obtained proved that the public has more trust on consumer-based stories rather than the news articles that are spread online. This is because most of the respondents agreed that their perception towards airline brands in Malaysia is formed through social influence such as through people around them.

To conclude, businesses or marketers can apply storytelling as part of their marketing communication effort to improve the company's brand image in the eyes of the public as it has been proven, the use of storytelling effectively attracts and engages the public with the brand more.

Research Conclusion

This research has concluded that the first hypothesis (alternate hypothesis) "Ha: There is a relationship between the perception of brand story towards perceived brand image" has been accepted. Results

obtained also indicate that the influence of brand story (IV) has a significant relationship with perceived brand image (DV) with a magnitude of low relationship. Thus, the influence of brand story is positively associated with perceived brand image. Besides that, this research has also concluded that the second hypothesis (alternate hypothesis) “Ha: There is a difference between the perception of brand story and perceived brand image based on socio-demographic” has been accepted. In conclusion, after research has been carried out, from the data obtained, it proves that the brand story does influence the brand image.

Research Contribution

After conducting this research, several contributions can be found from three aspects namely, practical, theoretical and methodological. On a practical level, this research paper can help marketers and businesses to transform their business strategy and have a better understanding of brand story and brand image. This is because, based on the research, not many businesses are aware of the usage of brand story as part of marketing strategy and how brand story can influence the public perception on the brand image. They could apply brand stories as part of their communication and marketing strategy to enhance their company’s good image and reputation in the eyes of the public.

Aside from that, from a methodological aspect, since there are less number of research that has been done on brand story and how it could influence brand image, this study can serve as a useful information to the airline companies such as AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines to improve on their marketing and advertising efforts by focusing on only users who have the experience flying with Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia rather than targeting the public as a whole. The powerful stories from the existing consumers can help to paint a better image of the company. This is because, when it comes to services, the image and reputation that the airlines portray and how it is being portrayed in public plays a huge role in customer’s purchasing decisions.

From a theoretical aspect, this research paper provides new literature and data for future reference with studies related to brand story and brand image in the airline industry from the Malaysian perspective. It has been found that most references such as journal publications are mainly on the fashion industry. Therefore, this research paper could provide new literature for future reference.

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The author(s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

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