

The Impact of Firm's Capabilities on Digital Brand Performance of SME's Online Business

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ABSTRACT

In online business, firms are very sensitive to any changes in the market including internet application for business operation usage. The growth of online business in Malaysia is not in line with the interest of digital brand performance to improve the competitiveness of the companies and maintain their position in the market. Hence, this study aims to investigate the factors that influence digital brand performance in SME. This study employed Resource Based View (RBV) theory which is a unifying framework for the fundamental determinant of digital brand performance. The study examines the relationship between firm's capabilities (innovation capability, branding capability, market-sensing capability, human and organization capability) and digital brand performance. A total of 155 SMEs online business participated in this study. The result of this study found that both market sensing and human and organization capability have significant impact on digital brand performance in SMEs context. Recommendation and suggestion for future research were also discussed to improve digital brand performance for Malaysian SMEs online business.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the enormous challenges in digital business, SMEs who are still using traditional ways to market products including on how companies communicate with customers and services will have a negative impact on the

company's performance. Generally, physical interaction between product and customer will be reduced by doing online business. Then, brand becomes important to explain product quality and benefit by selling product or services through online. According to Hsiao and Chen (2013), companies are able to stay competitive in the market by focusing more on branding. It shows that companies in the specific industry adopt technology such as online business to growth their business. In line with that, brand in digital context are become more important to ensure companies competitiveness (Helm & Jones, 2010). Hence, several studies have emphasized the importance of brand in online business area (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2008; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Baumgarth, 2010; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

SME are characterized by an absence of standardization and formal working relationship, usually have a flat organizational structure, and limited staff development. These characteristics have made SMEs more flexible to environmental changes and research found that small firms are perceived of as being significantly more 'flexible' than large firms (Levy, 1998). In Malaysia, SMEs has been empowering under Malaysia Economic Transformation (ETP) to increase the impact of SMEs towards national GDPs. According to SME corp annual report 2016/2017, SMEs have expanded at an average annual rate of 7.2 per cent on 2017 compared to the overall economic growth 5.3 per cent during 2016. Interestingly, a recent statistic by Malaysia Statistical Department reported that SME's have contributed 37.1 per cent of GDP which is RM435.1 billion on 2017. The growth is supported by SME performance across all sectors of the economy.

The number of SMEs online business has been increased from 24 000 company in 2015 to 31 000 company in 2016 (The Company Commission of Malaysia, 2017). The Economic Intelligence Unit (2016) reported SMEs are not

been able to realize the full potential of the values brought about by online platforms even though SMEs in Malaysia have been adopted the internet in their business. This will have a negative impact on their online business performance in the long run. Previous study of SMEs in the context of online business has been seen SMEs as a divergent group of business with specific characteristic in technology adoption such as digital competitiveness (Chwelos et al., 2001; Barry & Milner, 2002). Most surprisingly, Baumgarth (2010) found that SME's is not a brand orientation firm although brand itself has been proved as a factor that contributed to the growth of business. For instance, previous research has found that brand is important and contributed to the success of company (Glynn, 2012; Keranen et al., 2012; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of firms' capabilities towards digital brand performance. Based on extant literature, four factors are proposed to affect digital brand performance namely innovation capability, branding capability, market-sensing capability, and human and organization capability. The paper begins with a literature review. It then describes the methodology, reports the empirical findings and discussed their implication. Finally, it addresses the limitation of the study and provides direction for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent study by Heini and Heikki (2015) has suggested creating a new comprehensive method and unique image of a company to measure brand performance in this digital age. Therefore, in order to close this gap, this study develops a conceptual model by integrating the Research-Based View theory (RBV) to investigate the impact of firm's capabilities on digital brand performance of SME's online business.

Research-Based View

Previously, there are several researches highlight how the firm can achieved competitive advantage by exploring the RBV in company perspective and developed their strategies. For instance, using RBV theory Barney and Clark, (2007) and combining the extension of dynamic capabilities (Dosi et al., 2000; and Winter, 2003) has found firm resources and organizational capabilities which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991) as sources of sustained competitive advantage. The RBV theory helps manager in their decision-makers process to frame an organization's strategy in response to a rapidly changing market which is particularly pertinent for high-tech industries. In the other hand, in RBV theory also highlight the important of brand initiatives as company tangible resources (Rao et al., 2004). It has evidently showed the significant of brand for company survival and growth of organizations (Adams et al., 2006).

According to RBV Theory, firms perform well and create value when they implement strategies that exploit their internal resources and capabilities. According to Barney, et al., (2001) RBV Theory explain and categorize the firm's resources as follows: all assets, capabilities, firm attributes, organizational processes, knowledge, information and others which regulated by firm and allows firms to plan and employ strategies that will enhance effectiveness and efficiency. Thus, from all these categories, SMEs should have in place to empower their company in order to sustain and increases their competitive advantage.

The RBV Theory propose that firm's specific characteristic capabilities to produce core resources (difficult to imitate), which determine the performance differences among competitors. On the other hand, relationship between resources and capabilities of a firm and its outcomes has been one of the main research questions of the marketing literature.

From this traditional perspective, the RBV Theory proposes that performance of a firm is essentially dependent on its resources and capabilities, and that competitive advantage curtails from the possession and effective organization of key resources and capabilities (Greenley & Hooley, 2005).

Firms Capabilities

Early studies by Grant (1991), capabilities were referring to resources in that firm. These resources are embedded in the organization, specific, and very hard to transfer. All these resources were ultimately play important role in company competitive advantage (Tommaso et al., 2017) and increase company productivity (Makadok, 2001). Previously, firm resources are often referred to as capabilities where study by Tyler (2001) takes the resources such as physical, human and organization as most competing firms assets. In the other hand, study by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) define firms capabilities as firms ability to utilize their available resources as its main assets. Besides that, Helfat and Peteraf (2003) define firms capabilities as "the ability of an organisation to perform a coordinated set of tasks, utilising organisational resources for the purpose of achieving a particular end result". Marketing research then suggests that firms in dynamic environments with high levels of information processing, communication and knowledge transfer are more likely to develop competencies resulting in a technology innovation compared to firms in the same type of environment with lower levels of cooperative resources (Hans, 2016)

The relationships of capabilities and performance are a central issue to strategy and marketing management. Owing to its importance to the theory and practices, many scholars have paid attentions to this issue and have examined the relationships from different approaches. Some scholars focused on investigating performance implications of different type of organizational capabilities

in terms of R&D capability (Calantone et al., 2002; Coombs & Bierly, 2006), and marketing capability (Fang & Zou, 2009; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008; Morgan et al., 2009). In general, these prior studies supported a positive association between firm's capabilities and performance and argued that firms need to develop and maintain unique capabilities to distinguish them from competitors and thus gain superior performance.

Innovation Capability

Innovation capability is considered as one of the most important and efficient strategies to improve production process, management system modification such as the use of internet to increase business performance (Badawy, 2009; Wang & Ahmed, 2004). In the previous research, there are inconsistent results between innovation capability relationships with company performance such as brand. In specific, the studies of innovation capability in the context of brand are still limited even though there is previous study highlight the important of this factor in brand performance (Sladjana, Polymeros, & Marina, 2015; Slotegraaf et al., 2003; Li & Atuahene-Gima, 2001). Thus, hypothesis one were has proposed as followed.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between innovation capability and Digital Brand Performance

Branding Capability

Branding capability has contributed to company competitive advantage in order to elevate the brand and thus, face the competitor in the market. In SME's online business context, branding capability has seen as important asset for company in the technological nature since 20th century. According to Lei et al., (2013) branding capability in SME's company will lead to brand performance of company due to the impact of brand capability to the strength of brand, control the risk of imitation

by competitor and responsive towards customer's changes in the marketplace. This is also supported by the study of Odoom et al., (2017) in the context of digital marketplace for SME's which has found that brand capability has significant relationship with digital brand. According to Kumar and Reinartz, (2016) and Lamberton and Stephen (2016) previous study have stressed the function of branding capability for company to convey value proposition of product due to the availability of customer's interaction in digital environment. The studies found the significant relationship between branding capability and digital brand which suggested to the marketers to take advantage by merging the uniqueness of brand performance in digital era. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between branding capability and Digital Brand Performance.

Market-Sensing Capability

Market sensing capability are found to better understand the customer in the digital era of business when SME's turn up their business into online orientation (Gulati et al., 2012). The study of customer in market sensing would be able to help manager to align their business by managing their production and fulfil their customer's satisfaction. According to Wagner et al., (2017) and Puranam et al., (2014) firms need to be observant of the needs and preference the consumer which is different from traditional organization (offline business). The studies also highlight the relevance of market sensing capability where it will contribute to an organization's ability to respond to a changing business environment. Therefore, market sensing capability may be considered as firm's capabilities related method to achieved digital brand performance in the market and with various interest groups. Previous study by Osakwe, et al., (2016) about SME's brand in Africa has suggested to companies endeavour for market sensing capability regarding to the

important sense which contributed branding strategy of digital era. This indicates that market sensing capability tends to establish efficient and effective brand performance. Based on the above discussion, this study proposed third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between market-sensing capability and Digital Brand Performance.

Human and Organization Capability

According to Ash and Burn (2003), human and organization capability have significant relationship in online business context where the company will have interaction between customers or among firm in the marketplace. Moreover, past study by Saini and Johnson (2005) argue that human and organization capability playing important role in firm performance through digital platform. The capabilities consist of technology expert, strategic flexibility, and building trust with the customer. The argument has been supported by another study conducted by Lin and Lee (2005) where human and organization capability should take place in organization such as developing organizational learning and knowledge in order to adapt to a new innovation system like e-commerce during that time. In addition, the important of human and organization capability have been highlighted in the previous studies by Caloghirou et al., (2004) and Raman et al., (2006) where they will facilitate the company to adapt to technology system such as e-commerce. The human and organization lead the company to have superior performance although companies need to transact their operation with the new approach such using digital in their operation system. From these studies, human and organization capability are resulted from learning culture and knowledge accumulation. The construct has been proving to empower the firm capability particularly in information technology or digital context. Hence, these studies proposed the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between human and organization capability and Digital Brand Performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Before actual data collection took place, a pilot test was run on 20 respondents. The purpose of the pilot study was to assess the reliability of and ability of the respondents to understand the instrument. This pilot test has done during Digital SME's Seminar in Kota Kinabalu. Amendments were made to the instrument before final data collection. The data collection from survey involves information gathered from individuals (manager or brand/marketing executive) using the structured questionnaires which consist of six sections. The questionnaire is divided into two set which is set 'A' for English version and set 'B' for Malay version. Firstly, the respondent will be asked which language they prefer to answer and more convenient. The provided screening question at the beginning of the questionnaires is to ensure this study captured the right respondents that conduct online business and has been adopted e-commerce in their business operation. The respondents were asked to measure the variables using five-point Likert scale anchored at 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic and Profile of Respondents

Demographic characteristic of 155 respondents were presented in Table 1. There was about highest percentage of Bumiputera company (62.6%) rather than Non-Bumiputera company (37.4%). The majority of company size was small company (69%) and follows by micro company (31%). There were mostly six years to ten years of operation (58.7%) and earned an income RM300 000 to RM500 000 (53.5%). 66.5% were SMEs operating their business in domestic market level and 37.4% were have 6 per cent to 10 per cent average market share.

Table 1 Respondent characteristic

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Company Status	Bumiputera	97	62.6
	Non-Bumiputera	58	37.4
Company Size	Micro	48	31
	Small	107	69
Years of Operation	Less than 5 years	36	23.2
	6 years – 10 years	91	58.7
	11 years above	28	18.1
Average Sales Annual Turnover	Less than RM300 000	38	24.5
	RM300,000 – RM500,000	83	53.5
	RM500,000 – RM1 million	21	13.5
	More than RM1 million	13	8.5
Market Level	International	52	33.5
	Domestic	103	66.5
Average Market Share	Less than 5 per cent	38	24.6
	6 per cent to 10 per cent	58	37.4
	11 per cent to 15 per cent	36	23.2
	Above 16 per cent	23	14.8

Testing the Measurement Model

Factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted were used to assess convergent validity. The loadings for all items exceeded the recommended value of 0.6. Composite reliability values (see Table 2), which showed the degree to which items indicated the latent construct, ranged from 0.7 to 0.95, which exceeded the recommended value of 0.7. The average variance extracted was in the range of 0.565 and 0.705 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5.

Table 2 Factor loadings and reliability

Scale Type	Code	Loadings/weights	CR	AVE
Innovation Capability	G1	0.814	0.877	0.705
	G2	0.914		
	G3	0.784		
Branding Capability	H1	0.829	0.856	0.668
	H2	0.929		
	H3	0.674		
Market-Sensing Capability	I1	0.700	0.734	0.582
	I2	0.821		
Human & Organization Capability	J1	0.757	0.730	0.575
	J2	0.759		
Digital Brand Performance	Q1	0.791	0.873	0.565
	Q10	0.613		
	Q2	0.650		
	Q3	0.688		
	Q4	0.600		
	Q5	0.669		
	Q6	0.747		
Q7	0.710			

Next, the discriminant validity was tested. The discriminant validity of the measure was assessed by examining the correlations between the measures of potentially overlapping constructs. As shown in Table 3, the squared correlations for each construct are less than the AVE by the indicators measuring that construct indicating adequate discriminant validity. In total, the measurement model demonstrated adequate convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Table 3 Discriminant validity of constructs (HTMT)

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
Branding Capability					
Digital Brand Performance	0.173				
Human & Organization Capability	0.188	0.370			
Innovation Capability	0.084	0.185	0.183		
Market-Sensing Capability	0.246	0.447	0.389	0.146	

Testing the Structural Model

Table 4 shows the result of testing the structural model. The VIF values of all constructs ranged from 1.003 to 1.011, which is well below the suggested threshold of 3.3 (Diamantopoulous & Siguaw, 2006), indicating the absence of substantial amounts of multicollinearity. Furthermore, the result show innovation capability ($p = 0.409$, $p \leq 0.05$) is negatively related to digital brand performance. Thus, H1 was not supported. The relationship between brand capability and digital brand performance was next analyzed. It shows brand capability ($p = 0.077$, $p \leq 0.05$) also is negatively related to digital brand performance. Thus, H2 was not supported.

Table 4 Summary of the structural model

Independent Variables	Parth Coefficient	Standard error	t-values	p-value	VIF	f^2	Result
InnoCap – DBP	-0.034	0.148	0.229	0.409	1.003	0.001	Not supported
BrandCap – DBP	0.131	0.092	1.426	0.077	1.003	0.019	Not supported
MSCap - DBP	-0.222	0.084	2.651	0.004	1.011	0.054	Supported
HOcap – DBP	-0.143	0.083	1.792	0.042	1.010	0.022	Supported

Note: $p \leq 0.05$

The relationship analysis of market-sensing capability and digital brand performance shows positive significance where $p = 0.004$, $p \leq 0.05$. Thus H3 was supported. Last, the relationship between human and organization capability and digital brand performance were tested. The result shows the positive significance where $p = 0.0409$, $p \leq 0.05$. Hence, H4 was supported. The summary of hypotheses result has been recorded as followed (Table 5). This study tested effect size (f^2) to determine whether these four exogenous constructs have substantial impact on the endogenous construct (Hair

et al., 2013). In determining the magnitude of the effect size, this study employed the Cohen's (1988) guidelines, in which f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively. The result indicated that innovation capability ($f^2 = 0.001$), and branding capability ($f^2 = 0.019$) had no effect to endogenous construct. However market-sensing capability and human and organization capability had small effect to digital brand performance with f^2 values was 0.054 and 0.022, respectively. Lastly, this study examined the predictive capacity of the model by checking Q^2 value.

According to Hair et al., (2013) Q2 value has preferably between 5 and 10. By using an omission distance of 7, this study found digital brand performance has a Q2 value of 0.113, which was greater than 0 as propagated by Fonell and Cha (1994). Thus, the model has predictive relevance.

Table 5 Summary of hypotheses results

Hypotheses		Result
H1	There is a significant relationship between innovation capability and Digital Brand Performance	Not supported
H2	There is a significant relationship between branding capability and Digital Brand Performance.	Not supported
H3	There is a significant relationship between market-sensing capability and Digital Brand Performance.	Supported
H4	There is a significant relationship between human and organization capability and Digital Brand Performance.	Supported

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examine and empirically test whether certain firm’s capabilities has any impact on digital brand performance. The results on research data which was obtain from Malaysian SMEs online business context found that market-sensing capability and human and organization capability have significance effects on digital brand performance. In other words, greater market-sensing capability and human and organization capability in place will certainly have a great impact to digital brand performance for SMEs. This shows that top management in SMEs has formed their business production through customer understanding (Gulati et al., 2012) and develops their manpower in the company to enhance their expertise. This would help certain company growth as competitive company in digital business context. In addition, having expert in company organization will surely facilitate firms to easily adopt a new system (Caloghirou et al., 2004; and Raman et al., 2006). This finding is also very consistent with many previous studies (Wagner et al., 2017; Osakwe, et al., 2016; Puranam et al., 2014; Saini & Johnson, 2005; Lin & Lee, 2005).

Eventually, innovation capability and branding capability has also negatively significance the relationship with digital brand performance. The number of SMEs

adopt online business has increased year by year and does not affect the innovation and branding capability. In addition, innovation capability has no effect on company aims thus helps to reduce costs that might be due to early adoption stage for SMEs in online business. This negative result has consistently with previous research by Chandler and Hanks, (1994) where SMEs found to refuse several innovation approaches to their operation due to highly cost. The negative result of this study has concerned with the importance of innovation capability as what has been highlight from previous research. Hence, it shows that manager of SMEs should have new or reconstruct their organizational culture of innovation which could be held by understanding the customer demand and revise company general strategies. Therefore, previous study of innovation capability for SMEs by Gonzalo et al. (2018) has also suggested SMEs organization to do some arrangement or changing in their product and services line as what their customer needs. Besides that, branding capability has proved the previous study by Baumgarth (2010) where SMEs was not a brand orientation firm even brand has been proved as a factor that contributed to the growth of business. In order to overcome insignificant of branding capability, previous study by Merrilees et al., (2011) has suggested four approaches (identifying brand meaning; using branding as an operational tool;

communicating consistent brand meaning and; getting staff to support the brand) for SMEs to highlight brand in their operation.

The study only focused on 155 SMEs in Malaysia from different area such as Shah Alam, Cyberjaya, Kota Kinabalu, and Sandakan. Essentially, the results of the study are not able to completely reflect digital brand performance among Malaysian SMEs. Future studies could expand the sample size and collection to different areas in Malaysia including North Coast and East Coast of Malaysia. Moreover, it is strongly recommended for future research to extend the study on market-sensing capability and human and organization capability in digital brand performance. However, the study does makes few types of contributions.

In conclusion, the findings of this study also offer implication and tools to develop SMEs, knowledge-based, and policymakers who focus on economic growth through supporting domestic economic activities. This study has extent the understanding about the theories of Resource-Based View by exploring firm's capabilities and the impact towards digital brand performance in order to ensure Malaysian SMEs growth in this digital business environment. The findings of this study confirm the crucial of market-sensing capability, and human and organization capability in order to archive digital brand performance. It is also crucial for SMEs align their strategies by improving, and synchronized company strategies through customer understanding in digital market environment. For policymakers, this study emphasized the areas (i.e. innovation capability and branding capability) to focus on the development of an effective SMEs blueprint to growth Malaysia economic. In addition, useful information for the related government agencies would lead the formulating government support programs towards strengthening the brand-related knowledge and skills due to limited resources and capacity among SMEs.

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