

# The Influence of Brand Image of Perodua Axia on Consumer's Decision Making

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## **Abstract**

The escalating competition in the automobile industry indicates that companies can no longer depend solely on providing functional attributes of their products but also communicating strong brands that can create special image in the eyes of the consumers. While the role of communicating image and personality of brands as some key factors in many brand communication literature has been studied, there seems to be an issue of lack of major and critical studies in particular on buying behavior. Therefore, this study investigated how communicating brand image of Perodua Axia can influence the consumers' decision to purchase. A sample of 330 consumers of Perodua Axia brand who live in Kuala Lumpur were surveyed using convenience sampling procedure. On analysing the data using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21, the results provided support for the conceptual framework. Therefore, the results indicate a significant relationship between brand personality and brand image and consumers' buying decision. It shows that the brand manager of Perodua Axia should not solely depend on providing functional attributes of the products but also effectively communicate the distinctive features of the brand so as to create special image in the eyes of the consumers and enhance their trust on the brand and influence buying decision.

**Key words:** *Brand personality, brand image, perceived brand quality, brand experience, brand trust and consumers' buying decision*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Communicating strong brands that can create distinct image in the eyes of the consumers due to intensifying competition in the automobile industry. This is because communicating strong brands allow the creation of wide range of competitive advantages for the company including increasing consumers' trust on the brand, boosting profit margin and the opportunity for brand extension (Yee, San & Khoon, 2011). Thus, effectively communicating the brand image to the consumers has become a key strategy to the survival of many organizations operating in the highly competitive automobile business in recent years. However, the role of communicating image and personality of brands as some key factors in many brand communication literature has been studied in several studies, there seems to be an issue of lack of major and critical studies in particular on buying behavior. Besides, many consumers seem to have low perception about local national automobile brands and this affects the consumers' purchasing decision as against foreign brands because local brands are considered to have low performance and quality unlike the Japanese and European imported brands that seem to have stronger brand image due to their high customers' satisfaction in terms of quality, safety, fuel economy, design and innovation. Therefore, it is important to identify the consumers' perception about Perodua Axia brand, so as to help the local company effectively communicate its brand uniqueness (Yee, San & Khoon, 2011; Zolkify, 2013) and influence consumers' purchasing decision thereby enhancing the local automakers ability to compete favourably with the Japanese and European brands. Therefore, this study aims to achieve the following objectives: to determine the influence of brand image on consumers' purchasing decision concerning Perodua Axia and to determine the influence of brand personality on consumers' purchasing decision concerning Perodua Axia.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Consumers' decision making**

A major challenge faced by every company is how to influence the purchasing behaviour of consumers in favour of the product they offer. For the case of Perodua, for example, it means getting the consumers to purchase or lease its cars. However, while companies ultimate goal is to influence consumers' decision making in favour of the products being offered, most company knows that the actual purchase is only a part of an overall process. This indicates that consumer decision making is the end result of a long detailed process that may include an extensive information search, brand compositions and evaluation and other activities. Thus, consumer behaviour involves the process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services aimed at satisfying their needs and expectations. In certain conditions, consumers' decision making also strongly influenced by social networking sites (SNS), such as Facebook and Twitter which have opened up new opportunities for all people to communicate with each other and may offer a welcoming and comfortable environment in seeking advice and information (Rashid and Rahman, 2016). In the past years of the marketing environment, consumers had exposures to only limited types of marketing channels, and studies have looked into only on these limited environments of consumers in making their decisions to purchase.

Consumer decision making is defined as the processes involve in identifying consumers' needs, collecting product information, evaluating the available alternatives and make purchase decisions (Belch & Belch, 2009). Supporting this claims, Marc Mancini developed a consumer behaviour model known as the Buyer's Readiness Stages Model. According to Mancini, people undergo through six basic stages such as awareness, knowledge, liking, preference and conviction before they finally purchase the desired products or service (Sunday & Bayode, 2011). Understanding the consumer purchase decision making process before launching a communication campaigns is relevant because it helps to communicate the product features and benefits so as to influence the consumers' purchasing decision in favour of the advertised brand (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2004). However, each of these stages involved are determined by the consumers' lifestyles, psychological and socioeconomic conditions.

### **Brand image**

Brand image is defined as consumers' perceptions of products which reflect their memory about the product. It is considered as consumers' opinions and confidences on the product quality produced by the company and its honesty in delivering on its promises. It is known as the consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards products as defined by the uniqueness of a brand. Given this, the good impressions about a brand can occur when the brand has unique advantages, good quality, popular, trustworthy and willing to provide the best service. This indicates that while a strong positive brand image will give the company a long-term success in terms of increased sales revenue and market share, a poor brand image may negatively affect the survival and success of the company (Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 2004; Alamgir, Nasir, Shamsuddoha & Nedelea, 2010). This is because consumers consider the attributes of the brand in terms of quality, performance and other indicators prior to purchasing it. This indicates that a positive brand image will enable the effectiveness of the company's marketing programme influencing the consumers to like the advertised brand, thereby creating unique association to the brand that always exist in customer retention.

### **Brand personality**

Brand personality is a vital part of the overall brand image and it can be used to differentiate a company's brand from the competing brands in the automobile market. According to Aaker (1997), brand personality can be defined as a set of human characteristics associated with the brand. It serves as a symbolic interpretation of a company's values, beliefs and cultures (Keller, 2006). While explaining the concept of brand personality, Jennifer Aaker Ruther developed the brand personality theory in 1997 using the ideas from animism and anthromorphism theories to explain the humanlike characteristics that customers associate with brands. Basically, these two theories indicate that human characteristics can be attributed to non-human objects or ideas such as products (Avis, Aiten & Ferguson, 2012). Given this, the brand personality theory indicates an exploration of how organizations and their products have a personality and the way the consumers can identify with brands.

Since a brand's personality serves as a symbolic interpretation of the company's values and cultures, the theory can help create ideas in the minds of consumers so as to enable them identify with the chosen brand, thereby creating favourable brand image. However, there seems to have been much debate among scholars on whether or not the concept of brand personality attributes is academically legitimate. Opponents of the brand personality theory have argued that the concept is not sufficiently enough supported by studies to claim the concept as valid. They further argue that consumers cannot actually view brands to have human-like personality attributes instead they emphasize that it is marketers who plant such ideas in the minds of the consumers (Hren, 2013). However, proponents of the brand personality concept argue that the personality attributes of brands enable consumers to self-express through the use of the brand and that the brands serve as symbolic functions of the customers' personality characteristics.

### **Relationship between brand image and consumers' purchasing decision making**

Strong brand image plays a crucial role in influencing consumers' purchasing decision making. This is because a favourable brand image can positively change consumers' buying behaviour in favour of the products or services (Shehzad *et al.* 2014). In supporting this claim, the study of Malik *et al.* (2013) found that favourable brand image has a strong positive influence on the customers' decisions making in car choices. This is because people are conscious of their social status and they prefer to buy branded products. Thus, when consumers intend to buy automobile products, they usually choose the product with preference to strong brand name and company reputation based on trust and previous experiences because of the favourable attitudes towards the brands. This indicates that there is a strong relationship between favourable brand image and consumers' purchasing decision in the automobile market. To this end, the company can build long term profitable relations with the customers by enhancing its brand name. However a competing perspective casts the relationship between brand image and consumers' purchasing decision on a more negative light. According to this pessimistic view, brand image may not serve as a significant determinant of customers' intention to buy products in the automobile industry where price and design seem to play more a prominent role in influencing consumers' buying decision. In supporting this pessimistic view, the study of Inglis *et al.* (2006) found that there is no significant underlying relationship between brand image and returns on investment. According to this finding, it is not significantly clear whether strong image influences the consumers' intention to choose a product over others.

### **Relationship between brand personality and consumers' purchasing decision making**

Proponents of brand personality assert that companies can differentiate themselves by positioning their brands apart from the competing brands. According to these scholars, strong personality attributes has the ability to rub-off on consumers and this basically has the ability to influence the consumers to favour the brand when making purchasing decisions. For example, the study of Park & John (2010) shows that consumers tend to buy products with strong personality because after using such products, they feel like sharing similar attributes with it. However, there still seems to be some doubts in the field of marketing as to whether this

finding of the study were fabricated by marketers rather than based on evidence of the actual existence of brand personality attributes. This indicates that the personality attributes related to brands differs for each consumer based on his/her perceptions of the brand (Hren, 2013). Thus, each consumer will contribute different personality characteristics to each brand.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The target population of this study is the consumers of Perodua Axia brand living in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. A sample of 300 respondents are selected by using a convenience sampling technique and surveyed through face to face questionnaire. This sample size was selected because of a number of reasons. First, this sample size was selected based on the convenience of collecting and analyzing a relatively manageable sample size. Secondly, this sample size was selected because it tends to provide adequate representation of the target population. Supporting this claim, Bryman and Bell (2011) assert that since it is difficult to include every member of the population,

It is feasible to select a manageable sample size to represent the rest population. Thirdly, the sample size was selected because it is believed to be adequate enough to provide statistically sound results. This is because the study of Fosgate (2009) argues that the probability of a study to yield a statistically sound conclusion is based on a large sample size. The research instrument used for this study is a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed by using SPSS Version 21.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Respondents' demographic profile**

Table 1 below presents the results on the respondents' demographics. On the ethnic composition, the results show that nearly half of the respondents are Malays followed by the Chinese respondents. The Malay respondents outnumber the sample because there are more local Malay consumers than any other ethnic groups. However, the results on the gender distribution show that over half of the sample is female respondents who outnumber the male respondents due to the female consumers' population in the study setting is more than the male population. Further findings show that majority of the respondents are within the age range of 26 -31 years old. This indicates that most of the consumers are young adults who left school early and start work immediately. On the education distribution, the results show that majority of the respondents are bachelor degree holders who studied various programmes at the first degree level. Lastly, the results on the income distribution show that more respondents earn about RM1,601 – M2,300 per month. This is based on the consumers' level of education and experiences which are the main determinants of salary.

**Table 1: Results on the respondents' demographics**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Ethnic composition</b>	Malay	137	41.5
	Indian	59	17.9
	Chinese	71	21.5
	Others	63	19.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gender distribution</b>	Male	128	38.8
	Female	202	61.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age distribution</b>	18 -20 years old	40	12.1
	21 -25 years old	109	33
	26 -31 years old	116	35.2
	Above 31 years old	65	19.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational level</b>	SPM	15	4.5
	Foundation	23	7
	Diploma	58	17.6
	Bachelor degree	132	40
	Master degree	72	21.8
	PhD	30	9.1
<b>Monthly income</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100</b>
	Less than RM1,000	64	19.4
	RM1,000 – M1,600	66	20
	RM1,601 – M2,300	74	22.4
	RM2,301 – M2,900	64	19.4
	Above RM2,900	62	18.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Brand Image**

Table 2 below presents results of the respondents' perception about the Perodua Axia. The results indicate that majority of the respondents agree that Axia creates favourable brand image to them. This is perhaps because the brand conveys excellent support services which creates positive feeling about the product. This indicates that many consumers seem to have favourable view and attitudes towards the brand as defined by the uniqueness of a brand. This strong positive perception about the brand is likely to give the company a long-term success in terms of increased sales revenue and market share as indicated by Hawkins, Best & Coney (2004).

**Table 2: Results on respondents’ perception about Axia**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	4	1.2
disagree	17	5.2
Somewhat agree	97	29.4
Agree	164	49.7
strongly agree	48	14.5
Total	330	100.0

Table 3 below shows the results on the consumers’ perception about the design of Axia. The results indicate that over half of the respondents agree that the design of Axia stimulates their preference for the product. This shows that the design of the car can create favourable impression about the product and shape the consumers’ mind towards preferring the offerings. This supports the study of Lee & Govindan (2014) who confirm that safe car and good designs can significantly influence consumer buying behaviour towards national cars.

**Table 3: Results on how design stimulate preference**

Scale	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	3	.9
disagree	12	3.6
Somewhat agree	79	23.9
Agree	171	51.8
strongly agree	65	19.7
Total	330	100.0

Table 4 below shows the results on the effect of visual appearance on brand recognition. The results show that nearly half of the respondents agree that they can easily recognize the Axia brand because of its visual appearance. This indicates that the appearance of the product can convey positive messages to the consumers because the distinctive features of the car can differentiate the brand from its competing brands. Therefore, the company can use creative visual appeals as a message strategy to attract the consumers’ attention and enable them to easily identify the Axia brand among the competing brands. Train & Winston (2007) confirm that the physical attributes of the product can enable it to stand out among the others and help consumers to easily identify the brand. This indicates that the product features can communicate unique messages to the users and shape their impression about the said product.

**Table 4: Effect of visual appearance on brand recognition**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	1	.3
Disagree	12	3.6
Somewhat agree	75	22.7
Agree	143	43.3
strongly agree	99	30.0
Total	330	100.0

**Brand personality**

Table 5 below shows the results on brand personality. The results show that many respondents are excited to buy Axia brand because of the brand personality. This is because the brand personality serves as a vital part of the overall brand image and it can be used to differentiate a company's brand from the competing brands in the automobile market. This supports the claims of Keller (2006) confirms that brand personality can influence consumers' decision process because it serves as a symbolic interpretation of a company's values, beliefs and cultures.

**Table 5: Results on brand personality**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	4	1.2
Disagree	24	7.3
Somewhat agree	91	27.6
Agree	122	37.0
strongly agree	89	27.0
Total	330	100.0

Table 6 below presents the results of consumers' preference for the Axia brand. The results show that majority of the respondents agree that they prefer the Axia brand because it conveys high value. This indicates that the consumers' brand preference is based on the value they stand to benefit. Keller (2006) confirms that the perceived brand value is likely to influence the consumers' preference for the product. This is because the brand appeals to the lifestyles of the consumers and it enhances their self-esteem and recognition.



**Table 6: Brand preference based on value**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	3	.9
Disagree	26	7.9
Somewhat agree	75	22.7
Agree	134	40.6
strongly agree	92	27.9
Total	330	100.0

Table 7 below presents the results on how users receive compliments based on the Axia brand they use. The results indicate that majority of the respondents claim they receive compliments when using Axia brand. This is because the brand communicates strong brand that is valued by the consumers. This indicates that the need to be recognized by people and receive compliments can serve as a determinant of the consumers' buying decisions as supported by Avis, Aiten & Ferguson (2012).

**Table 7: Results on compliments received based on the Axia brand**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	6	1.8
disagree	22	6.7
Somewhat agree	94	28.5
Agree	118	35.7
strongly agree	90	27.3
Total	330	100.0

To conclude, the study confirms that Axia brand communicates competence to the consumers and they feel excited to buy it because of the personality attributes which conveys high value that appeals to their lifestyles. This indicates that the symbol of the brand can build recognition, attraction and compliments to the users when they drive the Axia brand. The next section will focus on brand experiences.

**Purchase intentions of Axia products**

Table 8 below presents the results on the effect of brand communication. The results show that over half of the respondents agree that brand communication can help consumers easily recognize Perodua Axia. This is because brand communication clearly explains the product features and benefits as well as the appropriate distribution channels to buy the product. Belch

& Belch (2009) assert that brand communication informs the consumers about the product and persuade them to buy them.

**Table 8: Brand communication helps easy recognition of Axia brand**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	4	1.2
disagree	5	1.5
Somewhat agree	39	11.8
Agree	170	51.5
strongly agree	112	33.9
Total	330	100.0

Table 9 below presents the results on the consumers' preference for Axia brand. The results show that most of the respondents prefer to buy Perodua Axia because of its strong brand image. This indicates that brand image is a determining factor of the consumers' buying behaviour. Amini *et al.* (2012) confirm that brand image can influence the consumers' behaviour. According to the study, a brand that communicates value can enhance the consumers' decision to buy the product.

**Table 9: Results on consumers' preference on Axia brand**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	4	1.2
disagree	20	6.1
Somewhat agree	55	16.7
Agree	133	40.3
strongly agree	118	35.8
Total	330	100.0

Table 10 below presents the results on the consumers' decision to recommend the Axia brand to people who seek to buy automobile products. The results confirm that majority of the respondents agree that they would recommend Axia brand to someone who cannot decide which brand to buy in this product category. This is because the consumers seem to have high level of satisfaction with the Axia brand. This indicates that satisfied people are more likely to spread positive words of mouth about a brand and recommend the product to others. Belch & Belch (2009) assert that brand satisfaction will influence consumers to recommend the product to friends and family members.

**Table 10: Consumers’ decision to recommend Axia brand to others**

Scales	Frequency	Percent
strongly disagree	3	.9
Disagree	10	3.0
Somewhat agree	66	20.0
Agree	142	43.0
strongly agree	109	33.0
Total	330	100.0

**Conclusion**

The study has examined rather extensively the influence of brand image on consumers’ buying decision of Perodua Axia brand in Kuala Lumpur and the findings generated from this study clearly justified the first research objective as it was found that there is a significant positive relationship between brand image and consumer’s buying decision of Perodua Axia brand. This indicates that brand image plays a crucial role in influencing consumers’ purchasing decision making. This is because a favourable brand image can positively change consumers’ buying behaviour in favour of the products or services. In supporting this claim, the study of Malik *et al.* (2013) found that favourable brand image has a strong positive influence on the customers’ decisions making in car choices. This is because people are conscious of their social status and they prefer to buy branded products. Given this, when consumers intend to buy automobile products, they usually choose the product with preference to strong brand name and company reputation based on trust and pervious experiences because of the favourable attitudes towards the brands.

Furthermore, the findings generated from the study clearly indicates that brand personality can be differentiate by positioning their brands apart from the competing brands. This is because brand personality attributes influence the consumers to favour the brand when making purchasing decisions. Since a brand’s personality communicates the symbolic interpretation of the company’s values and cultures, the theory conveys ideas in the minds of consumers so as to enable them identify with the chosen brand, thereby creating favourable brand image. This shows that brand image is clearly important to influence the purchasing decision of a brand, therefore further detailed research needs to be executed to increase the awareness among the consumers.

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