

The Influence of Product Quality and Service Quality on Brand Leadership: An Empirical Study of Petrol Station Outlet Users

Khairul Anuar Abdul Shukor¹, Siri Roland Xavier^{2*} and Azrul Fazwan Kharuddin³

^{1,2,3}Universiti Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of product quality and service quality on brand leadership. Brand leadership refers to a technique and strategies that organizations use to market a product and service. Current researchers focus on the brand equity dimension and yet less examine the relationship between product quality, service quality, and brand leadership, especially in petroleum industries. Therefore, a petrol station outlet user was selected to conduct this case study due to its importance in driving economic status and demonstrating the relationship between product quality, service quality, and brand leadership. The result of this study strengthens the research performed by Hanaysha, J., (2013). A survey questionnaire was administered to petrol users in Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, and Putrajaya. A convenience sampling survey technique was used in this study and 390 questionnaires were successfully collected from petrol users. In this research study, all data collected from the questionnaire summarized using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structure) software and used structural equation modeling (SEM) to validate the measurement model and test hypothesis. Results indicated that product quality and service quality have a significant positive relationship with brand leadership.

Keywords: Brand Equity, Brand Leadership, Product Quality, Service Quality

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing business competition in a diverse market has become important for firms to create brand awareness and brand management. Brand management becomes a significant approach to establish customers' good positive perceptions and loyalty. According to Murphy, J (1992), branding is a strategic process by the marketer to lead the brand with quality value, satisfying service, generating consumers' loyalty, and the reliability of the product or services. In other words, consumers shall generate loyalty towards the brand if the promised quality, value, and reliability are fulfilled. Through this idea of the brand concept, Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000) have developed a brand leadership model that guides companies to design and build a strong brand for the sustainability of their products and services. As mentioned by Reizebos (2003), to create such a benefit to customers' perception of the brand, the brand must be meaningful to customers. Customers require a good perception of certain products and services to develop customers' trust. Quality is the

main factor to develop consumers' perspective, as stated by Aaker (1991), "consumer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or services with respect to its intended purpose, relative to the alternative."

Quality in the customer's context is not very technical. Instead, it is based on perceptions of the product or services whether it is tangible or intangible. In the other words, it is about how customers feel about the specific product brand. Therefore, the brand manager needs to understand the influence of product quality and service quality on brand leadership as a strategy to remain competitive. Indeed, product quality and service quality are both important elements that drive the success and the image of a brand. Despite the importance of product quality and service quality, there is limited research about the significant role of product quality and service quality in developing brand leadership, particularly in the petroleum industry.

The petroleum industry is one of the main industries that contribute to the economy and gross domestic product (GDP) of the country, as in the case of Malaysia. Generally, the petroleum industry is divided into three major sectors that are: (1) Upstream, (2) Midstream, and (3) Downstream. Upstream refers to activities of exploration, field excavation development, and production operation. Midstream sectors are involved in activities such as transportation, processing, and distribution. Downstream refers to activities such as manufacturing, refining, research development on petrol-chemical and wholesale and marketing (petrol station). This study shall focus on downstream activities more specific on wholesale and marketing (petrol station) as a medium to examine the relationship between product quality, service quality, and brand leadership.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of product quality and service quality on brand leadership; this would strengthen the finding to demonstrate the positive relationship between product quality, service quality, and brand leadership performed by Hanaysha et al 2013. However, the medium of the study changes from automotive (Hanaysha et al 2013) to petrol station outlet (Petroleum Industry).

2.1 Brand Equity

The concept and the importance of brand equity have been widely discussed among both researchers and practitioners. Brand equity is generally accepted as a critical success factor to differentiate a company from its competitors. Aaker (1996) combines customer's behavioural and perceptual approach to evaluate brand equity. Aaker's brand equity derives from customer perception. In fact, it is focused on customer satisfaction and builds a strong brand for the company to deliver product quality and service quality at a higher level. This creates a brand value to the company and the willingness of customers to pay premium price (Yoo et al. 2000). Whilst, brand equity dimension stated by Keller, et al (1993) focuses on how to develop customer relationship. The relationship is based on customer response on the quality of the product or services. This shows both scholars have a common perspective on quality as a dimension of brand equity (Janiszewski and van Osselelaer, 2000). Indeed Keller, et al., (1993) suggested that brand equity derives from two sources: (1) brand awareness and (2) brand image. Both sources are influenced by quality, favourability, strength and uniqueness of product or services. This shows that quality in product and services has a serious

impact in brand equity and leads brands to compete in a competitive market. The success of brand equity leads to raising the brand equity to the level of management and leadership (Aaker, 2000).

2.2 Brand Leadership – The New Imperative

The brand leadership concept was introduced by Aaker (2000) to enhance the brand management process with the ability of the brand to continually achieve excellence and competitiveness in the market. Current researchers make a contribution to brand leadership literature in several ways. First, the researchers offer to concrete operational definition of brand leadership by relating to brand equity dimension for example the element of brand evaluation and the importance of brand recognition strategic to the product or services and in organization branding context (Cheng et al. 2007). Second, researchers offer a reliable and valid measurement tool with brand leadership that can be systematically measured from consumers' perspectives. This allows researchers to explore the theoretical relationship between brand leadership and other brand equity construct, for example, perceived quality (Miller and Mills 2011).

Building a brand is a useful advantage for industrial capture larger market shares and obtain leadership position status within competitive players (Keller, 2008). Indeed, for a brand to obtain a brand leadership position, it is essential to have different products or services with something valuable, unique, and of good quality. Hanaysha et al (2013) have demonstrated that brand leadership can be sustained by being dependent on the ability to provide product quality and service quality. This relationship shows that brand leadership is significant for firms to pay attention. Thus, this study serves to demonstrate that product quality and service quality are important elements of success in brand leadership.

2.3 Product Quality

According to Shaharudin, M.R., et. al., (2011) contemporary researchers and practitioners have considered product quality as one of the strategy positioning tools that significantly influence customers' buying decisions. Supported by Hilman, H. (2015), and Eze et. al., (2012) has expressed that product quality is one of the brand strategic techniques that can be utilized for building sustainable competitive advantage and improving managing brand leadership. Thus, to achieve that practically by offering a quality product with meaningful characteristics and improving customer requirements.

The typical definition for product quality was introduced by Zeithaml (1998), as “the perceived superiority in a product as compared with competing alternatives forms the customer’s perspective product quality, product value, consumer trust, consumer relationship value and commitment as representing important aspects of business relationships”. Whilst Insch and McBride (2004) have stated there are three elements that represent product quality: (1) design quality, (2) manufacturing quality, and (3) overall quality. Further, Kotler, P. and Armstrong, G., (2010) have defined a product quality as the ability to demonstrate a product in its function, it includes the overall reliability, durability, featuring, performance, and acceptable cost. Thus, product quality is one of the critical brand success factors in any industry. In fact, Otubanjo (2013), believed product quality is one of the significant factors to enhance brand leadership. Therefore, product quality plays an important role to develop the leading brand in a competitive market. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is offered:

H1: Product quality has a significant relationship with brand leadership.

2.4 Service Quality

Providing superior quality in services is important for any service provider including a petrol station and it is a fundamental strategy for long-term brand success in a competitive market. According to Gronroos, (1984), service quality is the outcome of an evaluation process where the customer will compare between what they expect regarding service and their perception about the service that they have received or experienced. Offering a good service quality shall impact customer justification for selecting a certain brand over another. Indeed Hilman, H., (2009) strongly stated any firm to obtain in a competitive market should focus on differentiating their services from other competitors by providing quality of services to its respected customers, thus in return in the long run shall build a positive brand image and brand perceptions.

Modern literature has defined service quality from many different perspectives. Classic definition on service quality made by Meffert and Bruhn (1996), "the service quality is the capability of a provider to shape the character of a primarily intangible service requiring the participation of the customer to meet specific standards based on customer expectations". According to Haywood-Farmer, (1998) service quality means when a service organization meets customer preferences and expectations consistently.

However, contemporary studies on service quality have focused on pure services context for example education, hospital service, automotive service, and banking sectors. In addition, the relationship between service quality and brand leadership has received less attention. Therefore, this study is to fill the gap by examining the relationship between service quality and brand leadership. Supported by Varghese (2010) has given a shred of strong evidence on the relationship between service quality and brand leadership. Further, offering a quality of service to customers represents the key driver for building brand leadership. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Service quality has a significant relationship with brand leadership.

2.5 Relationship Between Product Quality, Service Quality and Brand Leadership

Previous research on product quality and service quality has focused on customer satisfaction and less attention to relate with brand leadership (Hilman, H. 2015). Evidence shows that offering a quality product or service is the main factor to enhance brand leadership (Varghese, 2010 and Otubanjo 2013). Thompson (2013) and Beverland et al. (2007) further demonstrated that product quality and excellent services would promote favourable brand image and play an important role in differentiating a brand from its competitors.

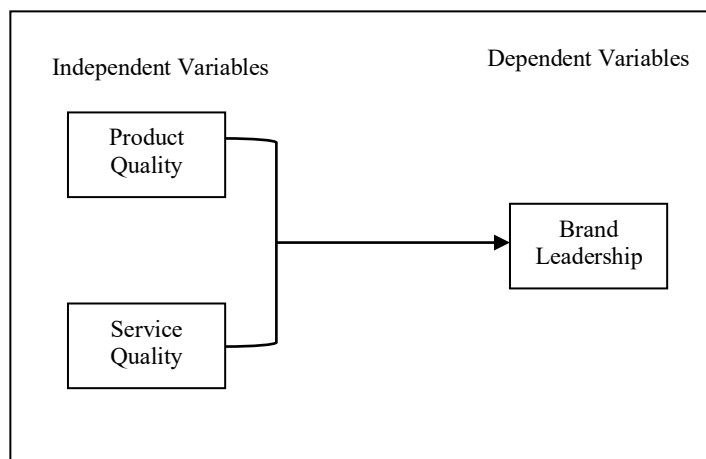
Jahanshahi, A. A et. al., (2011) highlight that brand leadership management is important to both internal and external customers. Shaharudin, M. R., et. al (2011) further argued that good brand leadership management will not benefit multinational companies but also small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Hence, generally, firms need to think of branding and brand leadership as a tool to sustain competitive brand advantage. Hanaysha J, et. al. (2013) highlights other factors that contribute to brand leadership such as loyalty, brand image, product quality, and service quality.

Researchers propose to examine the influence of product quality and service quality on brand leadership. Thus, the positive relationship between product quality, service quality, and brand leadership are believed to be able to strengthen the literature finding on the relationship of the variables. This helps the firm to understand the important factors required to retain their brand (product/services) as competitive advantages.

2.6 Research Framework

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework for this study was developed as per Figure 1. This conceptual framework was adapted from Hanasyha J. et al. (2013). There are two qualities that were measured in this study: Product Quality and Service Quality. Then these two qualities were linked to brand leadership to measure positive or negative relationship of product quality and service quality on brand leadership. From the research framework, the independent variable for this study is product quality and service quality. While the dependent variable or outcome is the brand leadership.

Figure 1: Research Framework. (Hanasyha et.al., 2013)



3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study is to examine the influence of product quality and service quality on brand leadership thus strengthening the findings made by Hanasyha J. et al. (2013). Petrol users were selected as a medium to conduct this study. Product quality and service quality are represented as independent variables whereas brand leadership represents the dependent variables. The data was collected by distributing a set of questionnaires to petrol users in Shah Alam, Kuala Lumpur, and Putrajaya of Malaysia. In this study, the questionnaire was adapted to suit the objective of this study (Hansyha et al. 2013) and (Garvin D. A. 1998). This is because the reference items have acceptable reliabilities, with Cronbach's alphas of more than 0.70, and were tested previously in different industry sectors but the same study concept. All constructs were measured using a Five-Point Likert scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree and (5) strongly agree.

IBM SPSS® and AMOS® software has been used for model fitting and analysis purposes. The analysis used in this study was Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Discriminant Validity (DV), and Structural

Equation Modeling (SEM). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is commonly used in a social investigation to test whether the steps are in line with the investigators' objective or required to modify (Azrul et. al. 2020).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, 500 questionnaires were distributed to random petrol users in the Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, and Putrajaya region of Malaysia. However, only 390 questionnaires were returned representing a 78% response rate of the overall study. As stated by DeMaio (1980), it is not expected to obtain a maximum response in studies where participation in the survey is voluntary. Whilst, Baruch & Holton (2008), claim that the average aggregate response rate to be a benchmark must be settled at about 50%. Thus, the data collected is acceptable for analysis. The demographic characteristics of respondents are shown in Table 1. The majority of the respondents are female (50.8%). In terms of age, 50.3% of the respondents are between 31 – 40 years old.

The analysis on Petroleum Company branding preferred choices revealed that 160 (41.0%) respondents' preferred choice was Petronas. Closely followed by Shell with 158 (40.5%) respondents. There were 48 (12.3%) respondents whose preferred brand was Petron, 18 (4.6%) respondents chose BHP, and 6 (1.6%) respondents chose Caltex as their preferred petroleum brand.

Similarly, the engine oil brand preferred choice showed that 106 (27.2%) respondents chose Petronas Syntium engine oil, 122 (31.3%) respondents were choosing Shell Helix engine oil, while BHP Syn Guard and Caltex Havoline engine oil both have 2 (0.5%) respondents each. The majority of respondents preferred to use other specific engine oil brands representing 158 (40.5%).

The responses to the survey revealed that the availability of other services and location nearer to home or route is an important aspect in consumers' decision to drive into a petrol station. Proximity to home or route shows 36.9% of customers drive into petrol stations and followed closely by the availability of other services at petrol stations, which is 36.4%. Aside from that, about 15.9% of respondents make up decisions based on a factor such as avoiding traffic conditions at petrol stations. The product brand and the loyalty card show very low decision-making to drive into a petrol station. Statistically, it shows that consumers' decision to drive into the petrol stations is due to proximity to home location or route during traveling.

Table 1: Survey Respondents' Demographic Frequencies

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Chart
Gender			
Male	192	49.2	
Female	198	50.8	
Age			
Below 20 years old	2	0.5	
20 - 30 years old	78	20	
31 - 40 years old	196	50.3	
41 - 50 years old	86	22.1	
51 years old and above	28	7.2	
Religion			
Islam	370	94.9	
Christian	4	1	
Hindu	14	3.6	
Others	2	0.5	
Education			
Secondary School	78	20	
Diploma	156	40	
Bachelor's Degree	118	30.3	
Master's Degree	24	6.2	
Others	14	3.6	
Ethnic Group			
Malay	366	93.8	
Chinese	2	0.5	
Indian	14	3.6	
Others	8	2.1	

4.1 Goodness of the data

A confirmation factor analysis was conducted to measure adequate of the items constructs. The results show that the value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling is equal to .845 for product quality, .797 for service quality, and .852 for brand leadership. According to Hair et al (2018), it is suggested that if the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) is greater than 0.6, the sampling is adequate to proceed with factor analysis. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) for all sampling was found to be significant ($P=.000$), which confirms that the inter-correlation matrix contains sufficient variance to make all the factor analysis valid. Moreover, to support the sampling validity, the factor loading and commonalities based on principal components analysis with varimax for all 18 items were measured. The results show that the commonalities for all items are ranging from 0.534 to 0.868, which can be interpreted as the proportion of variance of each item that was explained by three factors, which are Product Quality, Service Quality, and Brand leadership. Principal

components analysis was used to identify and compute all items into specific factors components that should be 0.5 (50%) or better as suggested by Garson (2012) and Azrul et. al. (2020).

In addition, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated to test the reliability analysis of measures across all construct items. The results revealed that all the variables have acceptable reliability (internal consistency), for product quality is 0.865, followed by service quality which is 0.786, and brand leadership is 0.836. According to Hair et al. (2018), when the co-efficient alpha is greater than 0.70, it indicates that high internal consistency of all instruments, hence convergent validity is supported.

Composite reliability (CR) was also calculated to determine the consistency of construct validity of sampling measure the value for product quality variable is 0.865, service quality variable is 0.786 and the brand leadership shows a value of 0.836. Therefore, all variables are reliable as a measurement tool in this study because the composite reliability value is above the provisions of 0.6 (Suprpto, W and Stefany, S, 2020).

Furthermore, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was also measured which can support and better reflect the characteristics of each research variable in the model as suggested by Arbuckle, J.L., (2010). AVE value for product quality is 0.832, service quality is 0.875 and brand leadership shows the result of 0.860. Thus, the overall indicators for each variable are declared reliable as they have an AVE value greater than the minimum score of 0.5 (Suprpto, W and Stefany, S, 2020). All the constructs and measurement results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Constructs and Measurement Results

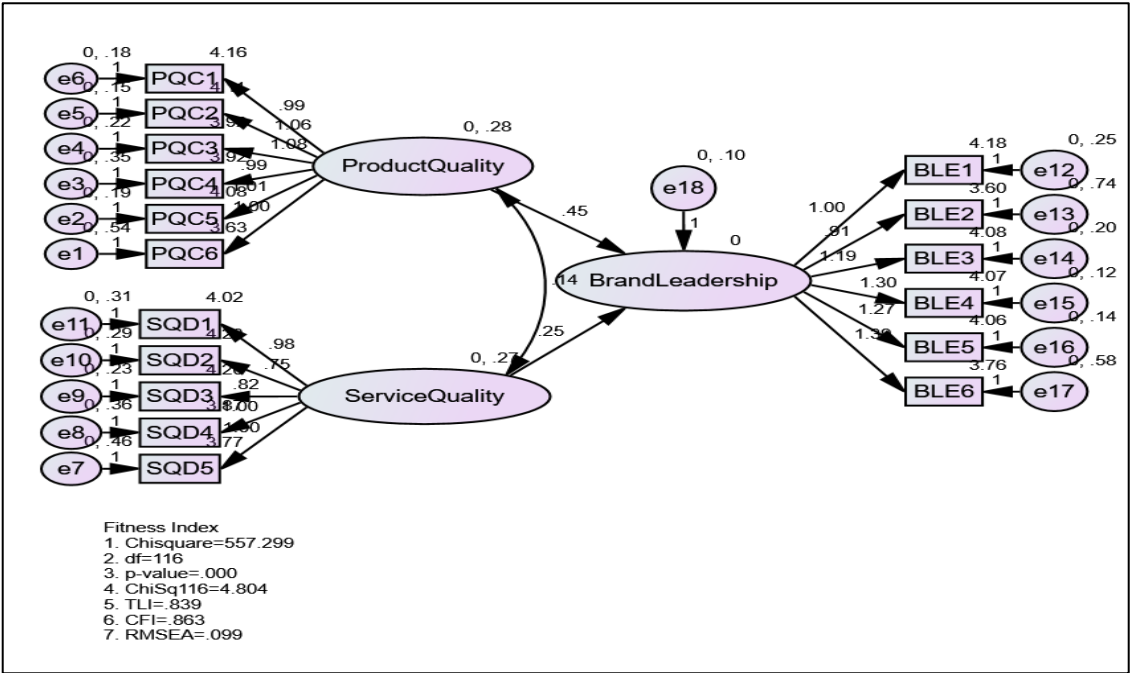
Items	Constructs and Measurement	Cronbach's Alpha, α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Product Quality		0.865	0.693	0.832
PQC1	This petrol brand has good quality			
PQC2	This petrol brand offered better engine protection			
PQC3	I feel more power behind the wheel after filled with this petrol brand			
PQC4	I feel fuel consumption value to price			
PQC5	Engine oil of this brand has good quality for engine			
PQC6	I use this petrol brand because it's recommended by engine specialist/workshop technician			
Service Quality		0.786	0.766	0.875
SQD1	I choose this petrol station brand because the payment method is easy			
SQD2	I choose this petrol station brand because its nationwide.			
SQD3	The petrol station brand and the retails shop available is clean and well stoked.			

SQD4	The loyalty card gives reasonable cumulative points amount to redeem compared to others brand.			
SQD5	The use of specific credit card / e-wallet card gives me value either rebate or off price.			
SQD6	Provided variety of services in petrol station retails shop			
Brand Leadership		0.836	0.739	0.860
BLE1	I believe this petrol brand is one of the leading brands in its category			
BLE2	Advertisement influences my purchasing decision			
BLE3	The petrol brand is growing in popularity			
BLE4	The brand lead with advance in product			
BLE5	the brand lead with advance in service			
BLE6	I am loyal to one petrol station brand because of its reputation			

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is concerned with the model, which comprises all variables together. However, several indices were used to determine the goodness of fit of the model. As shown in Figure 2, the modified structural model has yielded an expected significant chi-square which is (557.299, $p < 0.05$) given the large sample size employed in this research study. Other fit indices were also used to support chi-square and measure the goodness of fit for example (TLI = 0.839, CFI = 0.863, and RMSEA = 0.099). From this result, it can be concluded that the model achieved well for the data, and it is consistent with Hanasyha, J. et al (2013) and Hair et al (2018).

Figure 2: Research Framework Structural Model



In fact, to test the offered hypothesis, the covariance and correlation tables were taken from the output of the measurement model performed on AMOS. The results indicated that product quality has significant positive influence on brand leadership where ($\beta = 0.450$, CR = 7.196, $p = < 0.05$). Thus, this means that H1 is supported:

H1 Product quality has a positive relationship on brand leadership.

While for service quality the results indicated that service quality also has a significant positive influence on brand leadership where ($\beta = 0.251$, CR = 0.545, $p = < 0.05$), therefore that H2 is accepted:

H2 Service quality has a positive relationship on brand leadership.

Table 2: Research Findings

	Hypothesized Effect	Std. Estimate (β)	S.E	C.R	P	Support
H1	Product quality has significant relationship with brand leadership	0.450	0.062	7.196	***	Yes
H2	Service quality has significant relationship with brand leadership	0.251	0.055	0.545	***	Yes

Notes: ***: $p < 0.001$; **: $p < 0.01$; *: $p < 0.05$

4.3 Discussion

The focus of this study is to determine the effect of product quality and service quality on brand leadership in the context of petrol station users in a certain specific location of Malaysia, hence adding value from an empirical study by Hanasyha J. et al. (2013). The study was tested using a questionnaire survey and analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) and confirmation factor analysis (CFA). The results indicated that product quality and service quality have a significant relationship with brand leadership. The objective of this study was to examine the influence of product quality and service quality on brand leadership and to demonstrate the relationship between variables. This result was expected because customer perception depends on the petrol company brands that emphasize product quality and value of purchasing. Similarly, Otubanjo (2013) agreed that increasing the level of product quality (service quality) plays an important role to build a strong brand in a competitive marketplace. In the other words, the key to brand leadership sustainability is related to the level of product (service) quality offered by the provider. Additionally, Keller (2008) declared that the leading brand is influenced by the image of product or service quality level among customer perceptions. In addition, in highly competitive markets, with the increasing numbers of brands, delivering products with high quality and offering excellent services to customers not only can improve brand image, but also would enable such product or services brands to sustain competitive advantage in the long run and become the leading brand.

By understanding customer preferences and requirements, petrol station services or any business environment should enhance their product and service quality. Beverland et.al (2007) claimed that leading brands are considered as powerful and influential in gaining customers' attraction through focusing on improving product and service quality. Based on the above discussion, shows the

importance of quality in developing brand leadership. Thus, it is suggested that the petroleum industry should utilize maximum efforts towards improving its product quality and service quality.

5. CONCLUSION

Recent brand leadership and consumer perception studies emphasize the importance of perceived quality as an instructive construct in building brand awareness and brand image to obtain a competitive advantage. This study has aligned and strengthened the past research about the influence of product quality and service quality on brand leadership. In addition, it has demonstrated consistency with prior literature that has shown that product quality and service quality have a positive and significant relationship with brand leadership.

This study exercise has confirmed that there is a positive significant relationship between product quality, service quality, and brand leadership. Hence, it is important for industries or business firms to ensure that consumers are satisfied with the product or services they provide. When consumers are satisfied with the product or services, they will trust and recommend them to others. Indeed, this positive influence will be able to develop brand sustainability in a competitive market. It is suggested that industries or business firms incorporate product quality and service quality into their business strategies.

This study has some limitations. For the sample size, for example, the respondents were only from a specific area (Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, and Putrajaya) of Malaysia, therefore it is suggested for future research to conduct such similar study in other larger areas to gain more data collection. Moreover, this study focuses on quality elements of products and services to relate to brand leadership strategy. An interesting study would involve other brand leadership factors such as brand experience, innovativeness, value, and popularity. By doing so, it would strengthen the results and provide informative information to the petroleum industry or other industries to better understand the possible strategies to develop brand leadership and gain a competitive advantage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the respondents for participation and co-operation in the survey and heartfelt gratitude to reviewers who have provided suggestions to improve the research articles.

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