



Creating Resilient SME Through Brand Identity

(Case Study of Bumiputera Fashion Entrepreneurs in Malaysia)

Siti Fatimah Hashim¹, Rosita Mohd.Tajuddin² and Amer Shakir Zainol³

Department of Post-Graduate Studies, Faculty of Art & Design,
University Technology Mara (UiTM) Shah Alam, 40450 Selangor, Malaysia

Corresponding email ct2.ar08@gmail.com, rosyta.mt@gmail.com

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Abstract

Brand always be a phantom to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. SMEs consist of almost 90% of businesses in Malaysia become the golden mines if being managed and handled well. Thus, the government of Malaysia has developed many entrepreneurship programs and allocation of funds to assist them to be competitive and resilient locally as well as globally. Brand has been one of the main agenda in enhancing businesses performance since the government has identified the lack of experience and exposure among SMEs towards branding. This research paper focuses on the Bumiputera SMEs that operate fashion businesses in Malaysia. Currently, fashion businesses in Malaysia are facing tough competitions due to international brands come in the market. For that purpose, brand identity is used as the conceptual framework for exploring any possibility in finding answers in creating resilient Bumiputera fashion (BF) SMEs for enhancement in business performance. The independent variable: Internal Elements consist of Corporate Identity and Organizational Identity meanwhile External Elements consist of Corporate Image and Reputation; the dependent variable sees enhancing in business performance as a way to be resilient in the market. A case study of eight (8) independent entrepreneurs who are BF SMEs in Klang Valley representing the business community in getting the field data for further analysis and findings. This paper aims towards establishing the conceptualization of brand identity building by proposing brand identity as a dynamic and strategic tool constructed by influencing inputs from stakeholders. Hence, the research study proposed an innovative managerial framework to challenge the establishing approaches of brand identity mainly for creating resilient BF SMEs for enhancement in business performance in Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

After so many years and efforts taken by the Government in the development of the Bumiputera Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to be more competitive and resilient in the market, they are still having problems to compete with others (Mahathir, 1970; Kechot & Khalifah, 1999; Ahmed et al 2005; Shukor, 2006). There are many reasons for Bumiputera SMEs failures in making pleasant appearance in Malaysia market (Khairudin, 2007; Foziah, Aziz & Sudin, 2006). The failures however are representing the general perspective in

socioeconomic of Bumiputera as a whole. Therefore, Bumiputera SMEs should look for strategic tools to assist them to be resilient entrepreneurs in order to enhance their business performances.

Branding in Malaysia Context

In Malaysia, brand has always been the centre of discussions in any forum concentrating on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (L.K. Yew & E.T. Gomez, 2014). The government of Malaysia keeps pushing SMEs as they are seen as potential to Malaysia economic growth in the years to come (The Star, 2009). Muhammad et al. (2010) had notified the function of SMEs in a country economic enhancement. The government found that SMEs have contributed up to 33.1% of the national economy and the government has targeted that SMEs will assist the country in contributing up to 41% by the year 2020 (SME Corp. 2014). Therefore the potential annual growth of SMEs in Malaysia should be extended from 6.3% to 9.3% annually (Prime Minister Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, 2015). This forecast is based on the government SME Master Plan which was introduced in 2012 with the main goal was to improve the contribution of SMEs from 33.1% to 41% by the year 2020 and at the same time will push the employment increment rate from 59% in 2010 to 62% in 2020 (SME Corp. CEO, Datuk Hafsa Hashim, 2015).

The majority of SMEs fails to realize the important of brand for being resilient in businesses growth (Churchill and Lewis, 1983; Saleh and Ndubisi, 2006; Kobia and Sikalieh, 2010; Wang et al., 2012). SME's only see branding as advertising activities like brochures, buntings, banners, newspaper advertisement, billboards and TV commercials as well as online appearance in social media. This is actually normal since they are lack of understanding of brand gives meaning to their businesses as well as to their products or services (Boyle, 2003; Krake, 2005). However advertisement activities should not be stopped either because advertisement is creating a first impression towards a brand before a customer deciding to buy. In a way, a successful advertising campaign will assist SMEs in developing their brands. At the same time, SMEs should also focus to improve the quality of their products or services (Akhtar, 2010).

In terms of developing a brand, many SMEs need funds and they cannot afford it. Opoku et al. (2007) agreed that the situation has led to SMEs not giving priority into building a strong brand image. In fact, many SMEs in Malaysia gave up half way through the building process once they see no immediate increment in sales and considered the process as liabilities. However, the Malaysia government in its 11th Malaysian Plan (11MP) announced the allocation of funds approximately RM1.4 billion solely for SMEs development (SME Annual Report 2008; The Economic Plan Unit, Prime Minister Dept., 2014). Thus, SMEs should take the chance on the allocation especially in developing a good and strong brand which meant to their business enhancement activities.

Malaysia government also has taken many major moves in promoting brand development culture especially focusing on SMEs. For example, the Small and Medium Enterprise Corporation (SME Corp.) as one of the government agencies in collaboration with SIRIM QAS International Sdn. Bhd. have developed the National Mark of MALAYSIAN BRAND certification scheme that promotes the development of Malaysian brands to the international standard. The certification, launched by HRM Raja Dr. Nazrin Shah, The Regent of Perak in 2009, requires quality, excellent and distinctive products or services that meet high standard criteria to get the endorsement of the certification. The assessment body ensures the companies need to have at least 3-star rating under SME Corp's Score rating program and have ISO9000 quality standard in their hands before they have the rights to use and display the Malaysian Brand mark on their products, packaging or any marketing activities. It obviously be seen that the government's move on the certification is an effort to support SMEs brand's owners to reach and compete in global platform (SME Corp., 2009).

The Needs of Brand Identity for Creating Resilient Bumiputera SMEs in Malaysia

Malaysian government wants to assist SMEs in Malaysia to expand their businesses since it will boost the Malaysia economy. Based on the statistic from Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM, 2014), there were approximately 1 million companies and more than 5 million businesses which are sole proprietorship and partnership being registered by end of 2014 and the number is keep increasing. In fact, Askiah (2010) also acknowledged that in Malaysia 90% businesses fall under proprietorship and partnership category.

However in Malaysia business competitions especially among SMEs, the quantity of successful Bumiputera SMEs are quite laid back. This scenario is quite disparaging and worrying since the government has always supported them through the New Economy Policy (NEP) which was first being introduced 1971. The NEP's main agenda is to terminate poverty and stabilize the disparity of socio-economic gap among major races which Bumiputera that consists of Malays and other indigenous from Sabah and Sarawak and non-Bumiputera consists of Chinese and Indians (Vejai, 2007).

History had taught that socio-economic gap among races will create disappointment and develop big conflicts in a society. The May 13th, 1969 riot on socio-economic disparity, led to a turmoil among races in Malaysia especially between Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera (Gomez 2012; 2013). In 1970 statistic showed that due to

the policy of economic segregation between Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera in British Colonial era, 49.3% of Malaysians were living under poverty. (Thillainathan, 1976; Hwang, 2003; The Economic Plan Unit, Prime Minister Dept., 2010). Based on the situation, the government had taken drastic actions by developing an economic policy to increase 30% of Bumiputera equity called New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1971 – 1990, New Development Policy (NDP) from 1991 – 2000, National Vision from 2001- 2010 and New Economic Policy 2011 until present (The Economic Plan Unit, prime Minister Dept., 2010).

The only way to achieve the 30% Bumiputera equity is through business activities. There are positive relationship between business assistance from the government and the SMEs enhancement in business growth and performance (Berry and Sweating, 2005). Therefore the government, has developed many entrepreneurship programs under few agencies like Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Berhad (PUNB) and Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (PNS). Realizing that Bumiputera enterprises always have limitation in raising funds for business, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak in September, 2013, announced the additional funds allocated for TEKUN and AIM in MP10 of RM700 millions and RM300 millions respectively. He also announced the formation of ‘Skim Permulaan Entrepreneur Baharu Bumiputera’ (SUPERB) with the funds of RM100 millions to grant creative and innovative young Bumiputera entrepreneurs especially for fresh graduates who want to start their careers in business (Sinar Harian, 2013).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many scholar realised that Bumiputera SMEs poor performance in business was not only due to lacking of fund but also management skills (William, 1975; Miller, 1983; Zaidatol & Habibah 2004). Amran et al. (2010) highlighted that Bumiputera SMEs did not have strategic entrepreneurship in their businesses. Many scholars understood that SMEs did not possess quality management skills and competency (Gray, 2002; Thuruk and Wenekers, 2004; Runyan et al., 2008). In fact, poor performance in SMEs is due to lack of emphasizing on brand management practices and financial resources which made SMEs do not have strong brand (Opoku et al., 2007).

Fashion industry in Malaysia is very competitive and dynamic. Thus, the BF SMEs encounter fierce competition from both international as well as local rivals. Many tourists come to Malaysia to shop since Malaysian retailers able to offer high fashion with competitive prices compared to other neighbouring countries due to tax-free policy imposed by the Malaysia government. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2012), over 80% of Malaysia’s tourists come from Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Brunei, the Philippines and Australia. Malaysia is duty-free and that has spurred the growth of shopping tourism especially from mainland China. Ermenegildo Zegna, had revealed that 52% of its sales in Malaysia are made to foreign shoppers. International brands also look for the traffic generated by the lure of this growing global market which has been estimated to be worth USD96 billion (Esmod Dubai analysis for Bloomberg, 2013).

Studies had showed that Bumiputera SMEs were left behind in the fierce market competition due to not having strong corporate brand (Ragayah & Zulkifli, 1998; Amran et al., 2010). In many cases, they do not have corporate brand to identify who they are and what they do in the market. They only rely on sales and marketing activities. Why cannot they make their products attractive to locals as well as to international customers? Is it due to lack of development in brand identity building that led to not being noticed in the market? Do they realize that by building their own brand identity will assist them to be sustained in the fashion business? Based on the whole scenario and problems arisen, a research study needs to be done in order to find out how the brand identity will assist in creating resilient BF SMEs in the market for enhancement in business performance. Thus, below are the main problems concerned that need to be studied;

- i. BF SMEs are unaware of the role of brand identity as a strategic tool to enhance fashion business performance in the market
- ii. BF SMEs need to identify the internal or external elements in brand identity that can assist them in creating resilient quality for enhancing business performance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research objective of this study is mainly to find out the core elements of building resilient Bumiputera SMEs by focusing on the following;

- i. To investigate the role of brand identity building as an important tool to create resilient BF SMEs in enhancing business performances.
- ii. To identify which brand identity elements needs to be prioritized to create resilient BF SMEs in the market.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The major research question is focusing on how to build resilient BF SMEs through brand identity to enhance the business performance. In order to testify the major questions, two sub-questions will be used to further investigate in achieving the essence of the study;

- i. How can BF SMEs consider the role of brand identity as a strategic tool to create resilient fashion entrepreneurs for enhancing business performance?
- ii. What are the elements of brand identity strategy needs to be prioritized towards the enhancement of BF SMEs business performance?

SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF STUDY

Scope and limitation of the study will set the boundaries of the research study to the main area concerned and specific to the focus respondents (Creswell, 2003). The following will point out the particular coverage area as identified data considered as exploratory to the study;

- i. Focusing on the Bumiputera SMEs who run their businesses less than five years
- ii. Limit the scope of the coverage area is in Klang Valley
- iii. The study is limited to those SMEs managed by Bumiputera entrepreneurs who run fashion related businesses

The study was conducted in Klang Valley and Selangor because of its energetic and dynamic economic activities that give benefits to the growth of SMEs in the region consists of Kuala Lumpur and its suburbs, and adjoining cities and towns in the state of Selangor. Based on the Department of Statistic (2011), the region holds a population of 6 million people and it represents approximately 25% of Malaysia population as a whole. As a matter of fact, most of the SME establishments is based in Selangor (19.5%) and Kuala Lumpur (13.1%), followed by Johor (10.7%), Perak (9.3%) and Sarawak (6.8%) therefore, Klang Valley is the perfect coverage area for the purpose of the study (Economic, SMEs Census, Department Statistic of Malaysia, 2011).

SIGNIFICANT OF STUDY

In order to fulfil Malaysia needs especially BF SMEs, this study will outline significant as below;

- i. BF SMEs will consider the role of brand identity as a strategic tool to build resilient quality in their business competitively in the market and lead to positive business performance.
- ii. To assist BF SMEs to identify which brand identity element to be significant towards the enhancement of business performance.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this research study, few terms need to be defined cohesively in order to understand the whole scenario of the study.

Bumiputera (Indigenous) in Malaysia Economic Scenario

Basically, the people of Malaysia is called as Bumiputera means the sons of soil who refers to Malays along with Sabah and Sarawak multi-ethnic indigenous. Meanwhile non-Bumiputera who refers to Chinese and Indians. Shamsul (2001) said that the 'Bumiputera' term was introduced to emphasize the exclusivity rights, privileges and special position of the indigenous of Malaysia provided in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, in Article 153. Fukunaga (2010) referred to ethnic Malays and other indigenous people as Bumiputera who comprise 65% of Malaysia's population.

During the British Colonial era, they ruled the country based on the segregation practices according to racial groups so that the people were lived in separated areas and worked in different fields (Shukor, 2003). At that time, the non-Bumiputera Chinese dominated the economy through trading and manufacturing whereas the Indians dominated the economy through professional occupations and the Bumiputera left behind in the economic domination (Kechot and Khalifah, 1999; Gomez, 2013). The repercussion of the colonial period had given a tremendous effects on Malaysia socioeconomic after the independency in 1957. The segregation had shaped Malaysians into different status in society (Gomez, 2012) therefore, created the imbalance between the Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera socially and economically (Othman et al., 2005). There was agreement between Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera in the Malaysian Federal Constitution (Article 153), in exchange of the rights of citizenship, cultural and language of the non-Bumiputera, the Bumiputera is allowed to have the

special privileges in in politics, education, public service, religion, language as well as economy supported by government with the purpose of harmonizing the imbalance (Gomez and Jomo, 1999; Searl, 1999).

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

The endorsement of new definition for SMEs was done by the National SME Development Council (NSDC) which was chaired by the Prime Minister , YAB Dato’ Sri Mohd. Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak together with key Ministries and Agencies members during 14th Meeting on 11 July 2013. The whole definition of SMEs will be seen as the table below;

TABLE 1
DEFINITION OF SMES IN MALAYSIA

Category	Micro	Small	Medium
Manufacturing	Sales turnover of less than RM300,000 OR full-time employees less than 5	Sales turnover from RM300,000 to less than RM15 million OR full-time employees from 5 to less than 75	Sales turnover from RM15 million to not exceeding RM50 million OR full-time employees from 75 to not exceeding 200
Services and Other Sectors		Sales turnover from RM300,000 to less than RM3 million OR full-time employees from 5 to less than	Sales turnover from RM3 million to not exceeding RM20 million OR full-time employees from 30 to not exceeding 75

Endorsed by: Economics and Policy Planning Division of SME Corporation Malaysia, 2014

Entrepreneurship

Many scholars have different views in defining entrepreneurship. Witt and Venkataraman (2000) defined entrepreneurship as the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated and exploited. As with the discovery of the opportunity, the decision to exploit an opportunity not only depends on the objective nature of the opportunity itself, but also on subjective aspects that have to do with the potential entrepreneur (Block & Wagner, 2010). According to Eckhardt and Shane (2003), they defined entrepreneurial as situations in which new goods, services, raw materials, markets and organizing methods can be introduced through the formation of new media relationship. Most of the time entrepreneurs have been associated with developing new revenue streams, enhancing profits and growing existing revenues where intellectual capital can be used to create new opportunities and penetrate new markets.

Fashion Related Business

In business, fashion is frequently related to textiles and garment industries. However, fashion also distinctively describes as symbolic and intangible characteristic concerning about finished products with the utmost usages to end users as a lifestyle. It could be leather ware products like handbags, shoes, etc. as well as fashion related products like accessories of jewellery, glasses, watches, cosmetics, fragrances, health cares, etc. (S. D’Amico l et al., 2013).

Consequently, fashion is well defined as a value driven by demands in the market related to the modern lifestyle needs of a group of people who advantageously competitive in interconnecting the relationships. Aagerup (2011) classified fashion as kinds of products category that representing consumers’ identity together with its brands distinguish. Fashion actually brings out the ideas on behalf of consumers who have positive lifestyle influence on others (Kinra, 2006).

FASHION BUSINESS IN MALAYSIA

After a successful tourism campaign in 1999 with the famous brand tagline of 'Malaysia Truly Asia', many industries in Malaysia stepped into a new bright dimension. In twelve-year period, tourists came to Malaysia reached to a record of 24.6 million and that was 400% increased which gave in USD1 billion in every three weeks in 2010 alone!

Malaysia government also has initiated many efforts to welcome the tourists to Malaysia by developing many facilities through action plans. Entry Points Projects (EPPs) have few missions been accomplished like Duty-Free Shopping, Vibrant Shopping Precint like Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) and Premium Outlets. So far, the executed plans have positive results once Kuala Lumpur was positioned as the fourth among the top best shopping cities in the world after New York, Tokyo and London (CNN travel Survey, 2012). Before the launching of MTTP in 2010, the tourism expenditure on shopping itself gave in USD5 billion (RM16.2 billion) and increased to USD5.7 billion (RM18.6 billion) in just two years! It shows the increment of tourism expenditure by 30.7% (Tan Sri Muhyiddin Mohd. Yassin, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia at World Tourism Conference, 2013).

Based on the current economic mainstream, the flow of fashion industry also grows consistently. Therefore, the dynamic growth has driven the demands for luxury goods especially when Malaysia Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increase of 5% in 2014 compared to previous year. At the same time the culture of carrying luxury accessories strongly boost, therefore the standalone boutiques in the prestigious Pavillion, Bukit Bintang, KLCC and Garden Midvalley which placed the luxury international brands present Louis Vuitton, Prada, Coach, Gucci, Alexander McQueen and Dior, etc. to Malaysia fashion scene (Euromonitor International, 2015). The retail and wholesale industry gave in 12.7% to the Malaysia Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and with the sales value approximately hiked up to 43% which equivalent to RM13.3 billion (Economic Transformation Program (ETP) Annual Report, 2014). On the other hand, the report also forecasted the increment of 7.1% of retail and wholesale trading in 2015 where the situation predicted based on the flow of tourism industry as well as the dynamic domestic consumption.

The retail and wholesale industry should not overlook on Muslim consumers who are increasing look for Islamic fashion items. Statistic showed that worldwide Muslim consumers has spent approximately USD266 billion on clothing in 2013 and the amount is increasing in 2019 where they are expected to spend approximately USD484 billion (Global Islamic Economy 2014-2015 report commissioned by Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard, 2015). Definitely, the forecast growth parallel with the drastic increasing in numbers of Muslim population worldwide by 3 billion in 2050 (Pew Research Centre, 2015).

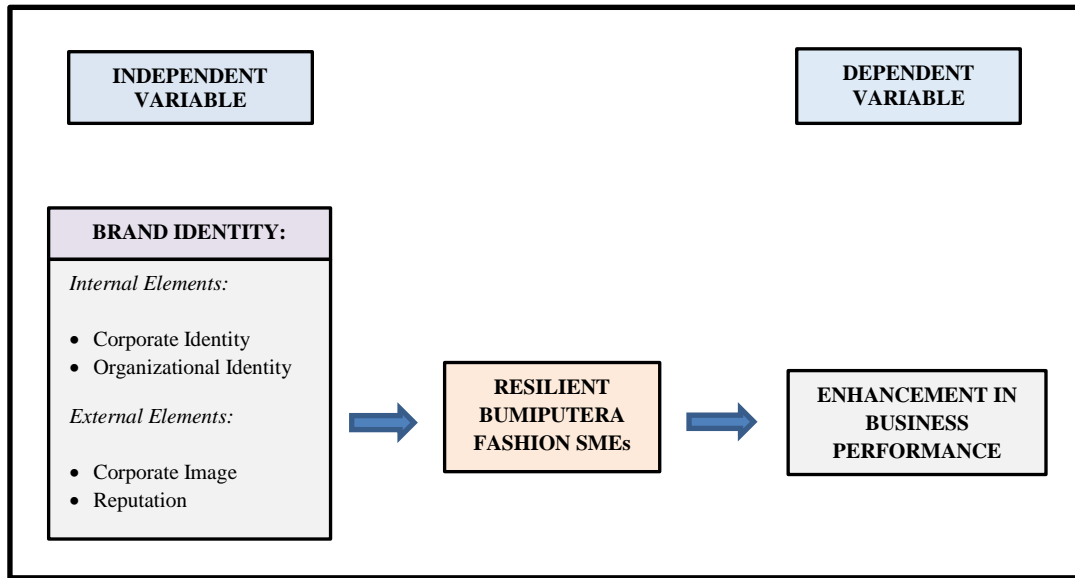
The vast market on the net also another alternative to cater particularly in Malaysia fashion business. Few studies have been conducted previous years to analyse the flourish of online business in Malaysia due to the market is getting bigger and intimidating. A study done by AC Nielsen and Paypal (Marketing Interative.com, 2011) acknowledged that online shopping in Malaysia has increased to transactions worth RM1.8 billion in 2011 with the estimation of 1.1 million online shoppers. This figure proved that it was 70% higher than 2010. However, the figure is drastically rising based on a study done by Fashion Business Company in 2015 where they found out that approximately RM4.76 billion was spent online by 18 million regular netizers in Malaysia. It can be seen that for business to kick start, the online business is lucrative with low cost entry and unlimited scalability, thus many businesses offer online shopping to customers. Fashion and accessory items are the most favourite among the online shoppers therefore 46% of online sites selling fashion and accessories, 20% selling Electronics and 18% selling Health and Beauty items (Milo and Seng Heng Market Research, 2014).

BRAND IDENTITY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework is an analytical tool used to make conceptual directions and structure ideas theoretically through assumptions, principles, and rules that holds the ideas broadly together. There are correlation between the entrepreneurship and business performance that had widely discussed by scholars conceptually (Covin and Slevin, 1991) and empirically (Covin and Slevin, 1989). However, in this study, the conceptual framework mainly focuses on the role of brand identity as a strategic tool to build resilient BF SMEs for enhancing business performance. Based on the leveraging on the literatures, this section proposes a brand identity framework which the framework focuses on establishment of brands identity (Kapferer, 2008).

A conceptual framework based on a grounded theory approach through literature studies has developed a conceptual framework of brand identity as a strategic tool based on the independent variables and dependent variable shown in (Figure 1) as below.

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF BRAND IDENTITY



Internal Elements

Internal elements consist of Corporate Identity and Organizational Identity as the independent variables in the conceptual framework of brand identity.

Corporate identity refers as the expressions of building strategic vision of brand identity from within through visual identity which easily perceived by customers. Olins (1979) stated that a corporate identity was established once a corporation knew who and what its important goals and how to be managed and recognized. Hence, the corporate identity is achievable with proper corporate behavior, culture and expression.

Most of the literatures on organizational identity develops the idea that identity is a dynamic establishment formed in interaction with organizational image (Gioia, 1998) and organizational culture (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Organizational identity is made up from mental representations of how organizational members define themselves as a social group in terms of practices, norms, and values. At the individual level, every employees reflects the common understanding of what the organizational norms, values, and practices are meanwhile at the organizational level, brand identity is treated an organizational asset which is durable or illustrated for success (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

External Elements

External elements consist of Corporate Image and Reputation as the independent variables in the conceptual framework of brand identity building.

Corporate image is a valuable asset that companies need to manage well (Abratt & Mofokeng, 2001). Positive corporate image resolves the negative influence of competitors and enable organizations to gain higher levels of profit competitively in the market (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). In fact, many firms started to realize the importance of actively attracting and retaining highly skilled, quality employees as a necessary component of their competitive advantage in imposing the appropriate image of the organization in order to gain the higher level of customers' satisfaction in their services (Pfeffer, 1994; Teece, 1998).

Corporate reputation is the minds of stakeholders (Fombrun, 1996). Through a management perspective, corporate reputation has long been recognized as an important source of competitive advantage and as a value-added resource which delivers continuous and better market performance (Deephouse, 2000). Several research studies have been carried out previously on the consequences of corporate reputation regarding the value-added resources (Chun, 2005; Walker, 2010). Firms with higher reputations are linked with sound financial performance (Roberts & Dowling, 2002), higher customer loyalty (Bartikowski, Walsh, & Beatty, 2011), and, greater satisfaction of key stakeholders such as customers (Walsh & Beatty, 2007), employees (Chun & Davies, 2010) and investors (Helm, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION – QUALITATIVE STUDY METHOD

This research was an explorative study. The purpose was purely to explore the research questions focusing on the real-life scenario of BF SMEs and getting better perspective towards their problems in Malaysia competitive market. The Conceptual Framework of Brand Identity as strategic tool was to create resilient entrepreneurs in order to enhance business performance. Brown (2006), said that exploratory study opted to concentrate on new problems which little or no research done so far. However, the study does not focus on looking for a final or conclusive solution but rather exploring the research topic with different levels of in-depth perspective.

For this research purposes, the exploratory research used qualitative approach in conducting the research methods. Qualitative research did not use statistical approach but instead, concentrated on the understanding the nature of research problems characteristic (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (2011), mentioned that generally researchers presumed the social norms through interpretation and contextualization mainly from respondents' beliefs and practices. Qualitative data is definitely rich and complex that put it through the generalization of geographical areas as well as the sample population.

GROUNDING THEORY APPROACH – CASE STUDY TECHNIQUE

The grounded theory approach was initiated by Glaser and Strauss in 1960 on the purpose of developing theory about the study of interest. The Grounded Theory was a kind of repetition process where the researcher would generate the research questions as a guide to get developing data which later on being developed between theoretical concepts and data that evolved into centralized category through the coding process in relevant detail identification. Creswell (2008), indicated that grounded theory was a systematic process to generate a theory with a wider conceptual idea interactively about the topic matters. Grounded theory was developed inductively and completely through reading secondary data before forming a conceptual framework to be explored in a study.

The case study technique used in the grounded theory approach was the most effective way to extract data on specific cultural norms of a selected group particularly to have broaden and in-depth interviews of pertaining issues. It was an intensive study context. In fact, many scholars used a combination of unstructured interview and direct observation in their case studies in order to get better results. Basically, case study is an in-depth investigation to explore the connection between cause and effect of the issue arisen. In conducting case study of a cultural group, an ethnographic practice is required in the field of psychology, sociology, political science (Gerring, 2004), business (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), information systems (Darke et al., 1998), education (Stake, 1978), operations management (McCutcheon & Meredith, 1993) and marketing (Easton, 2010).

Sampling

Sampling was a procedure where a number of the selected data taken from a larger set of data population with the assumption that the sample represents to the extension of the whole group. In this research study, researcher had identified the usage of probability sampling as the procedure to gather data pertaining to be in the analysing process. The sampling technique used in this research study was a purposive sampling method that falls under a non-probability sample technique.

In defining the targeted sample population for this study, researcher made the identification based on limitation or scope of studies by focusing on the new emerging entrepreneurs who run their enterprises less than five years, limit the scope of the coverage area is in Klang Valley only and SMEs limited to those managed by Bumiputera entrepreneurs who run fashion related businesses.

The identification of sample population was based on market observation by reviewing in online as well as offline information of BF SMEs in Malaysia market. Through internets, researcher had pools of information in Malaysia particularly in Klang Valley which covered Kuala Lumpur and Selangor territories. At the same time, researcher also made extra mileage by doing market observation in Klang Valley on suitable sample population before applying the probability random sampling in choosing the appropriate respondents for the study. Additional criteria taken into consideration was the popularity and well-established BF SMEs in local fashion industry and operated below than five-year period. This was achieved through analysing the media-social interactives online on which the potential sample population had the same chance to be chosen in random probability procedure.

Make some adjustments on the sample population was necessary for the researcher did not want to overlook the potential rich data probably provided by responsive respondents. Therefore, multi evaluation were done to ensure the samples were not under coverage, over multiple coverage included clustering the sample population according to cities that they were located such as Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, Damansara, Bangi and Klang. In addition, researcher also evaluating the sample population according to the fashion category that they were

involved in the business for example, clothing, accessories, health and beauty, etc. in order to get better chances of exploring the industry capacity in giving relevant data for the study.

The researcher decided that the sample size of potential respondents should be appropriated at eight (8) numbers. Since the study would be an in-depth interview based on the research questions, researcher determined a comprehensive and open-ended questions would lead to full and rich information from the perfect sizeable respondents. The eight (8) respondents participated in the interview were sufficient to discuss thoroughly about the issues of the research study. These respondents were the owners in the existing BF SMEs therefore, they could be relevant in providing reliable information and insights of the research findings.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview questions were developed based on the research questions as below. The major research question was focusing on how to create resilient BF SMEs through brand identity to enhance the business performance. In order to testify the major question, two sub-questions used to go in-depth to get the essence of the study;

- i. How can BF SMEs consider the role of brand identity as a strategic tool to create resilient quality for enhancing business performance?
- ii. How to identify which elements of brand identity strategy to be more significant to the enhancement of business performance of BF SMEs?

From the first research question, researcher go deeper by developing further explorative unstructured questions to collect rich and informative data form respondents to find their consideration towards the role of brand identity as below;

1. May I know how long have you operated your fashion business?
2. Why do you like to be involved in this kind of business? Can you explain further about your customers? Who are they?
3. Do you consider any other kinds of business after you operating this fashion business? Please explain.
4. Do you have any difficulty business? How do you handle the obstacles?
5. Do you have any tool or method for your business performance enhancement? Please explain.
6. Have you made any market survey to identify what your competitors' tools or methods in performing in their businesses?
7. Have you ever heard about brand identity in business? What is your understanding towards it?
8. Before you start operating, have you ever think about your brand and how to make your business to be identified in the market?
9. Do you think that brand identity is important for enhancing business performance?
10. Do you want to consider using the Brand identity building as your tools for business? Why?
11. Do you think brand identity can assist you in building resilient quality in your brand in the market?
12. How is your customers perceive your brand? Do you think they shop at your store because of the brand that you establish in your product line or the whole identity image imposed by your brand name?

In order to explore on the second research question about which element was more significant in brand identity that could contribute to the success of the BF SMEs, researcher had developed another set of unstructured interviewed questions for further exploration of data collecting;

1. Do you have any strategy in enhancing your business performance?
2. How do you see your brand in your market? How do they realize that the brand is available in the market?
3. How your customers significantly identify your brand compared to others? Do you have any method or strategy to ensure that your brand is being identified or noticed?
4. Do you impose any strategy in brand identity in your business internally like corporate and organizational identity? Do you extend the strategy in brand identity building externally like corporate image and reputation in the market as well? Please explain.
5. Which element in brand identity that you feel more significant to your success in business performance?
6. Do you think the element that you chose will be the main contributors to your success? Or do you think that your competitors have better ways to their successes?
7. How do you attract customers towards your brands? Do you think that by using normal advertisement and promotions will assist you in attracting more customers to your brand or do you think that by using brand identity will give more success to your business performance? Please explain.

Transcript Case Study Interviews

After in-depth and open-ended interview sessions, researcher did transcript process to translate the recorded verbal data into textual data for further analysis.

In the investigation of case study, a lots of questions been thrown to respondents. However, no such things as correct answers to any particular of questions. Therefore, researcher had to trust the instinct and developed a kinds of persuasive write up based on the answers that sound analytical and practical theoretically. Researcher focused on the vitality of the core ideas and tried at level best to analyse the field data to be relevant accordingly to the research questions. Any irrelevant answers would be obsoleted in the first place.

Researcher understood that in transcript recorded data, conciseness and preciseness were important elements due to the vague and unstructured answers of the in-depth interviews. Researcher ensured that no core messages and recommendation being eliminated in the transcript. Therefore, before putting the verbal data into written words, researcher analysed them into organized data together with supported analytical views and literatures analysis. Good transcript was based on realistic answers and practical to be implemented in the real life. Therefore, the transcript would be transpired for further findings. Whatever the cause, researcher would ensure that the written transcript had a strong back up in rationality and lied on scholar literatures towards the correct path of the research study.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

In analysis of qualitative data, the process included identification, examination, understanding as well as interpretation of meanings in textual data transcript from field data to achieve reasonable answers to research questions of the study. There is no numerical data involved but more focus on the interpretation of meanings. The entire process focused on creativity, strong discipline as well as systematic approach (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). Meaningful patterns and themes must be identified for further observation and reviewing. This is the most critical step in a qualitative data analysis which many researchers look for different kinds of analysis process to assist them in getting the core themes than answering the main objective of the study.

Thematic Content Analysis Process

Researcher used thematic content analysis in getting reliable findings of the qualitative research study. Especially when the core element of the thematic analysis is parallel to the grounded theory approach significantly related to the elements of this qualitative study through concepts, categories and prepositions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The process assisted researcher in generating themes under similar categories based on the research questions being addressed. In thematic networks, the main goal was to explore the understanding of issue catered by research questions with logic basis by organizing the data significantly.

Not all data is meaningful and useful to the related study. Thus, reducing data is compulsory as the first step in the thematic networks analysis by dividing into textual fragmentations in terms of coding framework. Coding field data is actually the process of coordinating raw materials out of transcription in order to give meaningful information (Rossman & Rallis, 2009). Creswell (2009) agreed that even though traditionally codes will be emerged in the process, predetermined codes is more convenient for covering broader theoretical perspective in the research. The procedure was utilized by many scholars in their studies (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In identifying themes, researcher has to rigorously repeat the process multiple times in order to get the appropriate theme classification.

TABLE 2
DEVELOPING FROM CODES TO THEMES

Codes (Step 1)	Issues	Identified Themes (Step 2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tough Competitions • Difficulties • Unknown • Distinguish and Niche market • Online and offline A&P • No identity • Establishment • Business Enhancement • Strong brand • Consistency • Internal brand identity • External brand identity • Working culture • Corporate Vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to sell RTW collections only based on custom-made clothing • Need more working capital to keep bigger stocks • Existence is unknown • Depends on distinguish design to sustain and market niche • Use Social Media and A&P to advertise • Customers perceived only on Brand name and products • Brand identity as a tool to strategize • Market establishment • Business vision and mission, working culture and identity • Existence brand in the market • Image and reputation for awareness • Consistency in building brand identity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Difficulties in selling RTW and keeping ex-stocks 2) New in the market 3) Working capital to operate 4) Products being copied 5) Being frauds in business 6) Niche market for be distinguished 7) Online social networking increasingly used for public appearance and brand establishment 8) The orthodox way of A&P is still effective 9) Brand Identity for business Enhancement 10) Brand Identity makes brand establishment in the market 11) Do not have strong brand identity compared to successful brands 12) Internal Standard of Practice (SOP) build strong reputation 13) Visual Identity for brand identity establishment 14) Customers' satisfaction through vision and working cultures 15) Restructuring internal operation for business reformation image

TABLE 3
DEVELOPING FROM BASIC TO ORGANIZING TO GLOBAL THEMES

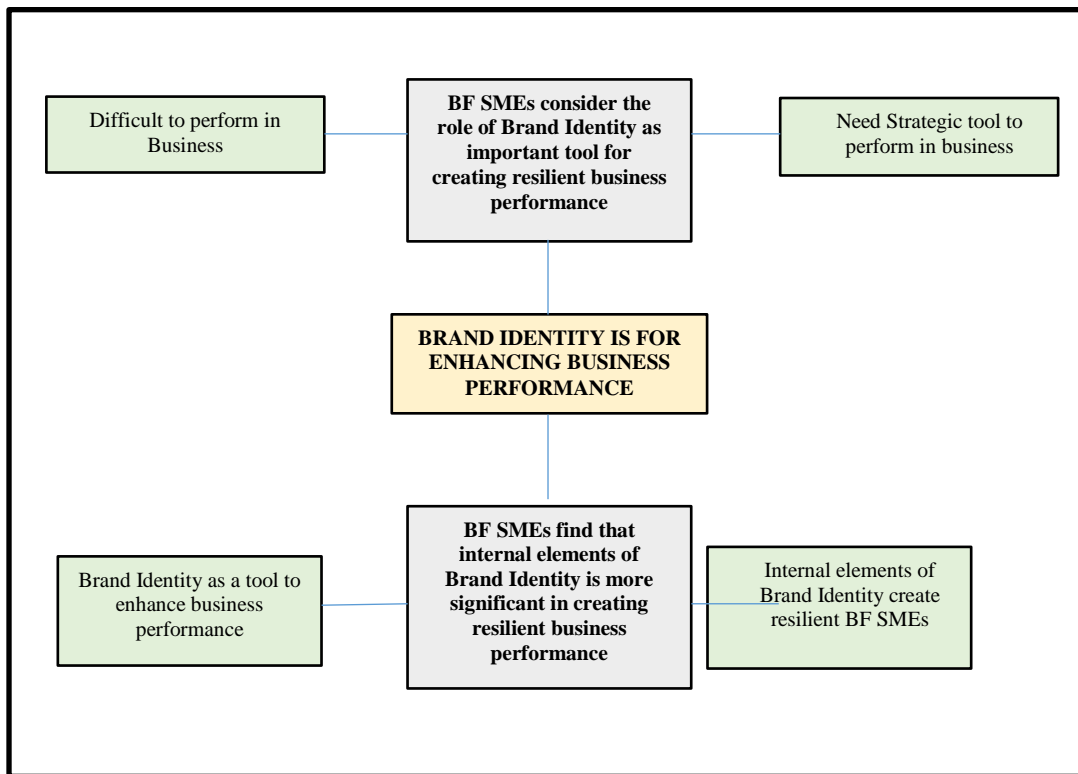
Themes as Basic Themes	Organizing Themes	Global Themes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Difficulties in selling RTW and keep ex-stocks 2) New in the market 3) Working capital to sustain 4) Products being copied 5) Being frauds in business 6) Niche market for be distinguish 7) Online social networking increasingly used for public appearance and brand establishment 8) The orthodox way of A&P Is still effective 9) Brand Identity for business Enhancement 10) Brand Identity makes brand establishment in the market 11) Do not have strong brand identity compared to successful brands 12) Internal Standard of Practice (SOP) build strong reputation 13) Visual Identity for brand identity establishment 14) Customers' satisfaction through vision and working cultures 15) Restructuring internal operation for business reformation image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to perform in Business • Need tools to perform in Business • Brand Identity building as a tool to enhance business performance • Internal elements in Brand Identity create resilience in business performance 	<p>Bumiputera fashion SMEs consider the role of Brand Identity as important tool for creating resilient business performance</p> <p>Bumiputera fashion SMEs find that internal elements of Brand Identity is more significant in creating resilient business performance</p>

Constructing the Thematic Networks

The emerging themes derived from the identifying themes have provided a basis to construct the Thematic Networks at this step. Thus the emerging themes which are called as Basic Themes, should be reasonably grouped into appropriated arrangements and be combined together into similar groupings. The process involved the intercrossed and interrelated to each other in order to explore the grounded theory of the study. Usually more than 1 group will be formed based on the issues arisen and will end up to be the Global Theme supported by Organizing and Basic Themes. The arrangement of the same idea or concept of Basic Themes developed into organizing themes. Further arrangements of the organizing Themes will resume a core or principal of whole concept called Global Themes.

From Table 3, shows clearly how the Thematic Networks is constructed. The 15 Basic Themes are grouped into 4 groupings associating to the conceptual studies. This 4 groupings are interpreting as Organizing Themes which are having the same basis of the Basic Themes related issues. In further constructing process, the 4 Organizing Themes form 2 individual Thematic Networks that conclude the core of Global Themes summarized as the main theoretical idea of the research study.

FIGURE 5
 THEMATIC NETWORKS FOR CREATING RESILIENT BUMIPUTERA FASHION SMES IN ENHANCING BUSINESS PERFORMANCE THROUGH BRAND IDENTITY (ATTRIDE-STIRLING, 1998)



FINDINGS OF QUALITATIVE DATA RESEARCH

Findings in qualitative research study is focusing on the interpretation of the themes emerged from the analysis done at the earlier stage. The interpretation should be supported by strong and enough evidences related to the study. According to Creswell (2009), overall qualitative research is an interpreting study and in many occasions, researchers’ interpretation of the research study always based on backgrounds and experience of their views supported by literatures.

Finding I: BF SMEs Consider the role of Brand Identity as a Tool for Creating Resilient business Performance

Finding I states that BF SMEs consider to use brand identity as a tool or method to assist them in sustaining in their business. The consideration is supported by four organizing themes which can be elaborated and interpreted further as below;

Difficult to Perform in Business

Researcher found that the relatively new BF SMEs are slow in making progress to their existence in the market. They have difficulties in penetrating the market due to two reasons.

They are lack of fund as working capital for business enhancement. The new established businesses definitely need bigger fund not only for marketing activities but also on keeping existing stocks (ex-stocks) as many of them run retail outlets. Two out of eight respondents are fashion designers turn entrepreneurs has difficulties in keeping ex-stocks for their Ready-to-Wear (RTW) products due to lack of allocation for that purpose. As keeping the ex-stocks means they have to increase their production activities therefore more fund is needed. Besides, application for working capital is tough as they have yet to show good financial statements to banks of any government agency for financial aids. Things are getting complicated for them to run the business especially when they are unknown in the market plus no fund to develop further. Actually, it was found that BF SMEs were unaware of business assistance services provided by government (Khairudin, 2007; Foziah et al., 2006). In fact, the government has developed Bumiputera Entrepreneurs Start up Scheme (SUPERB) which provides grants of up to RM500, 000 to support innovative and creative business ideas. It is a fund to help start-ups companies with an allocation of RM100 million. The program is open to Bumiputera who aspires to be an entrepreneur or Bumiputera companies operating for less than 3 years to have funds for working capital (Unit Peneraju Agenda Bumiputera (Teraju), 2014).

BF SMEs were found quite inexperienced in business threats. It was found that BF SMEs complaint that their products being copied. This issue made them feel discouraged as patented designs is a subjective matter as well as incurred costs. In fact, in the fast moving fashion business, many rivals will copy the outstanding designs in the market thus, being fashion entrepreneurs they have always to be ahead of time and always on the fast lane. Therefore, a well-planned business strategy is important to provide the implementation of measures in the management of brand to secure the viability of the brand in the market, a management team that possesses the necessary skills and expertise to take care of the brand's weakness and strength business is significant (C. le Roux, C. du Plessis; 2014).

Needs Strategic Tool to Perform in Business

When talking about being resilient for enhancing in business performance, many business owners try to look for ways to business growth.

Based on the case study, only two respondents made effort to do market survey for identifying market niche for their business. It could be seen as less than 30% of BF SMEs were concerned about being in a specialized market segment. Niche market can be a strategic tool for them in the market however, not many are willing to take an effort to find out what is wanted or needed in the market. As a matter of fact, they only rely on the designs of products that they have on hands without thinking to be specifically different or unique from others in the market (Hammervoll, 2012). In today's challenging and ever-changing business environment, in order to thrive they can only achieve and perform in business through specialization, product differentiation and exploiting the new market opportunities in niche Market (Abrar et al., 2009).

On the other hand, all BF SMEs used social media as a tool to help them in business performance (Stephen & Toubia, 2010). It cannot be denied, currently internet networking is global activities (Burcher, 2010). It helps in a way for them to participate in the social media networking in order to make public appearance through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. as well as establish their brand names widely.

In the finding, it showed that BF SMEs need more than public appearance or establishing brand name. They need a complete establishment of brand in the market in order to be distinguished and specialized as an identity in the market (Keller, 2008; Abrar et al., 2009; Hammervoll, 2012). This is because popularity can be banish overnight but established identity will remain longer (Aaker, 2010). It shows that BF SMEs really need strategic tool to be resilient that enable them to enhance in business performance.

Finding II: Internal Elements of Brand Identity is more Significant in Creating Resilient BF SMEs in Enhancing Business Performance

Finding II shows that internal elements of Brand Identity is more significant for creating resilient BF SMEs in enhancing business performance. This finding is answering the research question on the issue of identifying which element is more significant between internal and external elements of Brand Identity in the conceptual framework of the study. The finding is supported by two organizing themes in the ground theory analytical approach.

Brand Identity as a Tool to Enhance Business Performance

In the conceptual framework of the study, researcher is focusing on internal and external elements of Brand Identity building that were identified as themes in the conceptual framework on ground theory approach of the study analysis. Since the study is explorative towards finding an answer on how to create resilient BF SMEs for enhancing business performance, most likely the finding will turn into positive contingent in the whole business development activities.

Basically, it was found that many BF SMEs do not have distinct product brand identity. The fact is less than 20% of them have distinct corporate branding for unification of brand management which covered all operational activities including sales and marketing as a strategic tool of the whole organization (F. Mosarrat, 2014). However, all BF SMEs agreed that they need to use brand identity to create a strong corporate branding in developing the distinct identity based on the internal and external strength (G. Price et al., 2010). BF SMEs believed that brand identity will play a significant role to strike their business performance to create a long lasting impression (F. Mosarrat, 2014). The values and beliefs are the key successful factors as strategy to formulate the integration links between internal and external stakeholders that include top management, employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders to the enhancement of business performance (Schultz et al., 2005).

Many of BF SMEs have yet to use the brand identity to strategize the whole organization functions and activities for better perceive. Joshi (2102) claimed that a company with strong brand identity has more advantages of sales promotion compared to competitors, the attention from buyers and creates interest in customers, tool to boost the sales revenue, making advertisement and publicity easier and quality standard and satisfaction of customers be guaranteed (de Chernatony & Harris 2000). Obviously, brand identity is the core to be resilient in the role of management on recognition and conscious building of internal and external stakeholders (de Chernatony 1999; Suomi et al 2013).

Internal elements of Brand Identity Create Resilient BF SMEs for Enhancing in Business Performance

Internal element which consists of Corporate Identity and Organizational Identity is important to get the core of the distinct identity. Through the explorative process it was found out that internal element is more significant to create resilient BF SMEs for enhancing in business performance. The whole concept will be explored further to interpret the basic themes that are supportive to the evidence of study.

In this research study, it was found that BF SMEs admitting they have faced difficulties in keeping their brand identity in the market however, they still believe that internal elements of brand identity are important to their success in business enhancement.

More than 80% of BF SMEs has company vision and mission, however, they do not apply it to the entire business entity. The lack of sensitivity towards using the basic Corporate Identity has led to the poor performance to the business since the whole organization does not know where the company is heading to. BF SMEs should use the company vision to initiate mission of business activities by using an internal branding strategy in establishing the values and goals of the business among employees and focusing on the role of internal communication practices in corporate brand image formation (Chandon 2003; Ind & Bjerke 2007; Aaker 2011). Thus, the findings also revealed the needs for more communication channels to structure and direct communication throughout the organization in order to accomplish better business performance (C. le Roux & C. du Plessis, 2014).

All BF SMEs even realized that the failures in keeping brand identity was due to the fact that their Organizational Identity is not being carried out properly. The situation occurred either the employees do not get the message clearly from the top management or they deny delivering good products and service to customers. As the consequences, BF SMEs do not perform in business due to losing of customers and reducing in sales (de Chernatony 2001; Jones 2010). In order to ensure that employees' behaviour reflects the brand identity, BF SMEs should encourage employees to act as brand ambassadors by being passionate about the brand and living the brand values of integrity and customer focus (de Chernatony, 2010; C. le Roux & C. du Plessis, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the role of brand identity can be considered as a strategic tool to create resilient BF SMEs for enhancing business performance in Malaysia. Data form the case study had showed that having difficulties in performing in business due to tough competitions, BF SMEs realise the needs of strategic tool to perform in business for further establishment thus, they agreed that without strategic tool, they will lose in the competition locally and globally in fashion industry (de Chernatony 1999; de Chernatony, Harris, 2000; Kapferer 2000; Suomi, 2015). Therefore, BF SMEs are considering the role of brand identity as a strategic tool for enhancing in business performance.

It can be concluded that BF SMEs want to have distinction in brand identity that cover all operational activities as a strategic tool of the whole organization (Forman & Argenti 2005; Bick et al., 2008). They realise

that by using brand identity, they can create a strong corporate branding in a long term basis as it involves the values and beliefs to formulate the integration among top management, employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders (Schultz et al., 2005; C. le Roux & C. du Plessis; 2014).

In this research study, it also can be concluded that internal elements of brand identity is more significant to create resilient BF SMEs for enhancing in business performance. Internal elements aim at aligning employees' behaviour to ensure that their actions reinforce the brand messages of stability, honesty, transparency and trustworthiness (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Chandon 2003; Ind & Bjerke 2007; Aaker 2011). The quality relationships maintained internally among groups of stakeholders will develop high synergy to establish a strong corporate brand that conceptualizes consumers' beliefs and values to establish trustworthiness (C. le Roux & C. du Plessis; 2014).

Directions for future study

This study provides a relationship between the role of brand identity to create resilient BF SMEs and enhancement in business performance. Although the focus has been on brand identity contributions to business performance, the argument will put forward could be justify on the role of other brand contributions like brand personality, brand positioning, brand knowledge, brand equity for the purpose of business effectiveness. Brand identity is the effective tool that can bring business success (Aaker 2008; Buckingham 2009; Bresciani & Eppler, 2010) therefore, future study should look into other economic contexts as well.

This small scale research study with a limitation of market segmentation based on larger scale of primary data, is a thought for further broad scale research work in other category of brand as well. Since consumers' perception about a brand together with marketing communication is motivated by their own culture (de Mooije, & Hofstede, 2010), inclusion of ethnographic qualitative research framework will strengthen any future research.

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