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CORPORATE BRAND IMAGE OF ISLAMIC BANK IN MALAYSIA: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCE

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Abstract

The role of corporate brand image in influencing the survival of companies has never been underestimated. Because of this, this study intends to examine the antecedents and the consequence of corporate brand image towards customer behaviour. A model proposing firms and non-firms communication as the antecedents and loyalty as the consequence was proposed. One hundred and sixty-eight (168) questionnaires were collected and data was analysed based on the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The result of the study revealed that both firm and non-firm communication play a significant role in shaping the corporate brand image of an Islamic bank, especially in Malaysia. Corporate brand image on the other hand was also found to influence customers' loyalty. These findings have broadened the understanding of the corporate brand image's antecedents and the consequence also shows the importance of managing the Islamic bank corporate communication.

Keywords: *Corporate brand image, corporate communication, Islamic bank, loyalty.*

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Introduction

The Islamic financial sector has shown encouraging growth over the past few decades. Started from a small bank in a remote area of Egypt, the Islamic banking concept has spread throughout the world, reaching a value of USD2.19 trillion globally as in the second quarter of the year 2018 (IFSB, 2019) . However, despite this encouraging success, Islamic bank has been viewed as less popular and less experienced as compared to the conventional banks (Suhartanto, 2019). Not only that, studies also have shown that there are still consumers who are unaware of the differences between the concept of an Islamic bank as compared to its conventional counterparts (Al-Tamimi, Lafi, & Uddin, 2009; Belwal & Al Maqbali, 2019; Kaakeh, Hassan, & van Hemmen Almazor, 2018; Souiden & Rani, 2015). This is applicable not only among Muslim customers, but also among non-Muslim target markets, as Mohamad and Majid (2016) claimed that non-Muslim customers are aware of the Islamic bank but have low knowledge and understanding on the concept. In addition, the Islamic banking institutions also have been accused to only be a mere depiction of the conventional bank, with the only exception on the Arabic terms used (Khan, 2010). The *shari'ah* compliance aspect has been questioned (Belwal & Al Maqbali, 2019; Chong & Liu, 2009; Khan, 2010), indicating the bank weakness in communicating its differences and building a desirable image. All of these including the aggressive competition in a dual banking market in which Islamic and conventional banks are operating side by side leads to a decline in customer loyalty (Saleh, Quazi, Keating, & Gaur, 2017), which may then affects the bank revenue.

Therefore, in facing these challenges, the Islamic banking institution is proposed to focus on branding effort by developing a strong corporate brand image (Ahmad, Rustam, & Dent, 2011; Chaouch, 2017) through effective communication (Chaouch, 2017; Haniffa & Hudaib, 2007). Previously, studies on the corporate brand image of Islamic bank have mainly focused on the emotional aspect of the brand only (Ahmed, Ali, Jan, & Hassan, 2019; Osman, Ali, Mokhtar, Setapa, & Abd Malek,

2016; Osman et al., 2015). While the image is said to be influenced by various factors, in general, corporate brand image is generated by what people say about the institutions and what the institutions say about themselves (Dowling, 1993). In view of these, communication is therefore believed to be crucial in influencing the image building process (Palazzo, Foroudi, Kitchen, & Siano, 2020). However, despite the importance of understanding this communication aspect, studies available so far have focused more on the sender sides compared to the receivers' perspective (Cornelissen, 2000). Not only that, existing literature so far has rarely tried to understand the role of communication in the formation of image (Tran, Nguyen, Melewar, & Bodoh, 2015). To make it worse, the few available studies on the communication and image relationship also have found contradicting result with some studies have indicated the existence of significant relationship between corporate communication and image (Bravo, Montaner, & Pina, 2012), while other studies unable to prove the same (Ab Hamid & Wan Jusoh, 2016). In addition, despite findings in the conventional banking context that image is an important driver of customer behaviour, few studies have investigated this factor in the Islamic banking context (Suhartanto, 2019).

Hence, triggered by the above issues, in general, this study intends to investigate the relationship between corporate communication as a factor that influences the corporate brand image of Islamic bank and its consequence, which is loyalty. The findings of this study would provide marketers with the knowledge to prioritise its communication efforts in designing the desirable corporate brand image, thus influencing customer loyalty.

The following sections of this paper are structured as follows: First, the literature related to the corporate brand image is presented; second, the hypotheses undermining the study are explained; third, the research methodology and data analysis are elaborated, and finally, the paper is concluded with discussions of the findings and their implications, including suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Image is a complex concept that has been described by different authors in different ways (de Chernatony & Riley, 1998). In the simplest term, an image can be explained as a 'total impression an entity makes on the mind of others' (Dichter, 1985; Dowling, 1993).

Elaborately, image is defined by Aaker, Batra, and Myers (1982) 'as the set of meanings by which an object is known and through which people describe, remember and relate to it. That is, it is the net result of the interaction of a person's beliefs, ideas, feelings and impressions about an object' in which the object according to Dowling (1986) could be replaced with a brand, company, product, etc. Corporate image on the other hand is defined by Johnson and Zinkhan (1990) as an overall impression towards a company or an institution held by its various stakeholders. Corporate brand image, which is similar to corporate image (Blombäck & Axelsson, 2007), therefore could simply be understood as the interaction of stakeholders' beliefs, feelings, impressions, and ideas that resulted in a mental picture of an institution or organisation.

Scholars argued that image is an important aspect of a powerful brand (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006) and plays a crucial role in the development of brand equity (Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2018; Shabbir, Khan, & Khan, 2017). In a competitive market, creating an image is said to be part of a positioning strategy (Kuuru & Tuominen, 2016) to differentiate an offering or a company from competitors (Bălășescu, 2019). In the case of intangible service, or a parity product, image is used to define a product in consumers' minds, and able to influence selection and intention to purchase (Michaelidou, Micevski, & Cadogan, 2015). Evidence showed that image is a strong purchase influencer (Widyastutir & Said, 2017) and the first determinant used in selecting a service (Hee Youn & Ji-Hwan, 2013; Hung, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2016).

In addition, image also has been found to have an impact on perceived quality (Konuk, 2018), satisfaction (Lahap, Ramli, Radzi, Said, & Zain, 2016; Sallam, 2016) and loyalty (Chung, Yu, Kim, & Shin, 2016; Farida & Ardyan, 2018). In general, this is valid especially in the case of Islamic bank in which the services delivered are difficult to be evaluated, and customers are said to be having limited understanding and knowledge on the products offered, which resulted in an image being the most important driver of customer's future behaviour (Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, & Del Chiappa, 2017).

As such, building a strong image should be a top priority of many businesses (O'Cass & Grace, 2003), as it is one of the intangible assets that cannot be copied by competitors (Yeo & Youssef, 2010). Not only that, in the service's context, the creation of a proper corporate image is more important than the product, especially because of its intangible

nature (Berndt & Hollebeek, 2019). Therefore, in order to develop a favourable image, it is essential for companies to understand its current image, as it could be used as a basis to improve its existing position in the mind of customers (Dowling, 1986; Klein, Völckner, Bruno, Sattler, & Bruno, 2019). Identifying the most important factors that influence image is thus important so that corrective action could be taken and future strategies could be developed (Barich & Kotler, 1991).

Corporate Communication

Corporate communication is a strategic concept that could be applied in the management of image and reputation (Palazzo et al., 2020). Basically, Balmer and Gray (2000) defined corporate communication as the accumulation of messages from formal and informal sources, delivered through various media, for the purpose of conveying a company's identity to the stakeholders and multiple audiences. In general, corporate communication definition could be categorised into three areas in which first, its main purpose is to communicate the overall plan of a company; second, to incorporate internal and external communication to develop, maintain or restore an image or reputation of a company; and third, corporate communication concerns on maintaining the relationship with the internal as well as external stakeholders (Mazzei, 2014). Taking these into account, therefore, corporate communication in this study is defined as a process of conveying the company's identity and creating images through an integration of various messages delivered formally and informally via various media targeted not only to the stakeholders but also to multiple audiences.

Several scholars have tried to describe the concept of corporate communication. Initially, Van Riel (1995) proposed that corporate communication could be categorised into three forms named as management communication, organisational communication and marketing communication (Balmer & Greyser, 2003). While management communication focuses on the internal audiences within the organisation, and organisational communication concerns on the multiple stakeholders such as suppliers, government and the media, marketing communication on the other side aim towards the end-users, intending to create interest and awareness on the organisation products or services through several tools including advertising, sales promotion, public relation and direct mail. On a different side, Balmer and Gray (2000) proposed a Total Corporate Communication

concept which categorised the company's communication effort into three parts which are primary, secondary and tertiary communication. The primary communication concerns the effects of communication towards the company policy, product or service performance, and behaviour of the employees. On the other hand, secondary communication refers to the planned communication efforts of the company using various communication channels including advertising, public relations and visual identification system. Secondary communication is said to be the reflection of Van Riel's marketing communication with the purpose to reinforce and support the primary communication. Finally, the tertiary communication involves the effects of communication on third-party messages which may include word-of-mouth and other forms of communication transmitted by competitors, media interpretation and opinion leaders' commentary. In summary, the three forms of communication proposed by Van Riel and the Balmer and Gray (2000) primary and secondary communication could be categorised as firm's communication while the tertiary communication could be considered as non-firm communication. However, as the setting of this study is focusing specifically on the consumers' perspective only, management communication and organisational communication proposed by Van Riel is therefore irrelevant.

Firm Communication

A firm communication could be defined as a company's planned and controlled communication strategies directed towards its internal and external stakeholders using various mediums of communication (Bravo et al., 2012). However, as the context of this study is on the consumers, it will focus on the effectiveness of various medium communicating corporate identity only, which in the banking sector is said to include corporate advertising (Bravo et al., 2012; Sadek, Redding, & Tantawi, 2015), public relation (Gaither & Al-Kandari, 2014; Sadek et al., 2015), and several marketing promotional tools including personal selling and direct marketing (Sadek et al., 2015). The findings of previous study revealed that these communication aspects directly influence the corporate brand image of banking institutions (Yeo & Youssef, 2010).

Non-firm Communication

Non-firm communication refers to the messages about a company or its products and services from other sources that are unable

to be controlled by the company (Berry, 2000). It usually reaches fewer people than firm communication but is still able to influence consumers' impressions and awareness about a company's brand through a dotted line relationship. However, in extreme cases in which the messages become widely-spread, this dotted line could change to be bold (Berry, 2000). Balmer and Gray (2000) classify non-firm communications under three categories: word-of-mouth, interpretation and spin by the media, also communication from the competitor. Cornelissen (2000) on the other hand divided this type of communication into other communication which refers to the media and competitors communication, interpersonal communication or word-of-mouth also interpersonal communication which refers to the receivers' prior experience and existing knowledge regarding the subject. In general, non-firm communication comes in the form of word-of-mouth and publicity (Berry, 2000).

Loyalty

The objective of most marketing activities conducted by a company is usually directed towards the establishment, maintenance and improvement of customers' loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994). Customer loyalty which resulted in repeat patronage or repeat purchase is said to be among the most important target of service marketing (Juhari, Bhatti, & Piaralal, 2016). Customers who are loyal would spend more at the company and tend to be less price-sensitive as compared to the other customers (De Leaniz & Del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016). Loyalty has been defined in various ways by different authors according to the means it is measured. In some study, loyalty is referred to as the attitudinal and behavioural preference to favour one corporation compared to others (Giovanis & Tsoukatos, 2017), while in another study, loyalty is defined as the psychological process that results in a certain purchase behavioural inclination excluding the repetition of purchase done randomly (Esmailpour, 2015). Previous studies suggested that the establishment of customer loyalty could be influenced by corporate image and reputation. However, not many empirical studies available supporting this proposition (De Leaniz & Del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016).

Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

The relationship between corporate communication, corporate brand image and loyalty could be explained among others by the corporate

image formation process developed by Tran et al. (2015). The formation process started with variables that build corporate communication and corporate personality which then influence the formation of corporate image. A favourable corporate image then will be linked to awareness, familiarity, favourability, trust and advocacy, which signify loyalty. In empirical studies, the link between the two forms of corporate communication which are firm and non-firm communication with corporate brand image has been investigated before. For example, Bravo et al. (2012) specifically prove that firm communication has a significant impact towards the image of conventional financial institutions. In a comparative study, Awan, Hayat, and Faiz (2018) found that firm communication indeed positively related to the image of a conventional bank, but in the context of Islamic banks, the same hypothesis is not supported.

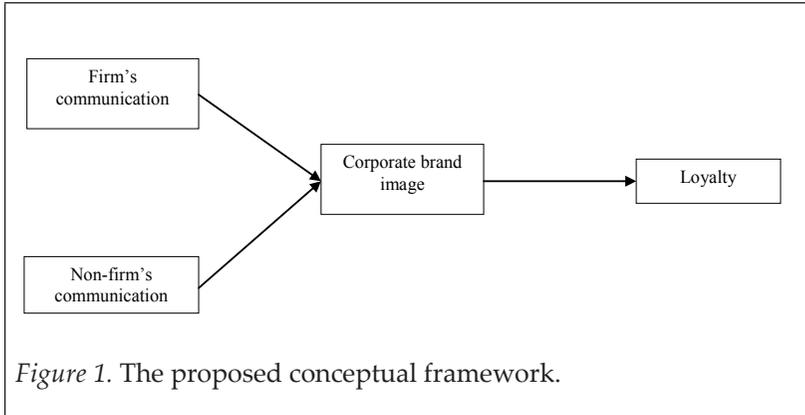
On the other hand, Cornelissen (2000) in its new corporate communication model proposed the existence of non-firm communication influence towards the corporate brand image. This is supported by Bravo et al. (2012) that found a significant relationship between non-firm's communication and the corporate brand image of conventional financial institutions. Awan et al., (2018) on the other hand found a mixed result in which non-firm communication is significantly related to the corporate brand image of Islamic banks, but has no influence on the image of a conventional bank.

In the aspect of loyalty, many studies have tried to examine the relationship that exists between corporate image and loyalty. In the context of online retailing, Da Silva and Syed Alwi (2008) found that online corporate brand image influence loyalty significantly. This is also supported in the offline setting in which corporate brand image is concluded to have a significant relationship with loyalty (Da Silva & Syed Alwi, 2006). In the field of colour cosmetics, brand image has also been found to have a significant effect on loyalty (Sondoh Jr, Wan Omar, Abdul Wahid, Ismail & Harun, 2007). From a banking perspective, image has also been found to influence loyalty (Ayuni, Hussein & Handrito, 2015). In the context of the hotel industry, study also has found that a favourable perceived image will be able to improve customer's loyalty (De Leaniz & Del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016). Therefore, based on the results of these previous studies, this study proposed three hypotheses:

H₁: There is a positive and significant relationship between firm's communication and the corporate brand image of Islamic banking institutions.

- H₂: There is a positive and significant relationship between non-firm's communication and the corporate brand image of Islamic banking institutions.
- H₃: There is a significant relationship between the corporate brand image of Islamic bank and loyalty.

The model in Figure 1 shows the link between the proposed construct:



Methodology

The study utilised a purposive sampling technique to collect the data. In selecting the right respondents, two qualifying criteria were determined: (1) Must be an adult at the age of 18 and above, and (2) must own an Islamic banking account for at least six months. The duration of at least six months is required as it is considered an adequate length for customers to evaluate their experience with the bank (Dagger, Danaher, & Gibbs, 2009) while adult customers are chosen with the assumption that they have the ability to make the decision on banking matters (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). In the process of collecting data, a self-administered questionnaire was used. The questionnaires were distributed to the Human Resource Department of public and private companies and institutions to be passed on to the employees. Overall, the data collection process took one month to be completed.

From 250 questionnaires distributed, 202 questionnaires were received. However, 34 questionnaires were rejected because some of

the respondents did not own the Islamic banking accounts while the rest of the other questionnaires were incomplete. Finally, only 168 questionnaires were considered valid which represent a response rate of 67.2 percent. Of the 168 respondents, 60.1 percent were female and 99.4 percent were Muslim. The majority of the respondents were between the aged of 31 to 40 and possess either a diploma or a bachelor's degree; 84.5 percent of them worked in the public sector and the majority of them received between RM2001 to RM5000.

There are four constructs under the study; they are firm's communication, non-firm's communication, corporate brand image and loyalty. The questionnaire used in this study was created based on the instrument developed and tested by Bravo et al. (2012), Lee (2004), and also Nguyen and Leblanc (2001). It was prepared in two languages, Malay and English, and assessed using a six-point Likert scale.

Analysis and Result

The Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis was carried out using smart PLS3.0 software. At the first stage, the measurement model was tested to examine the validity and reliability of the measures. Then, the structural model was computed to test the hypothesised relationship. This was done through the bootstrapping method so that the loading and the path coefficients significant could be determined.

Assessment of the Measurement Model

Four reflective constructs were involved in this study which are firm communication, non-firm communication, corporate brand image and loyalty. Following the guideline by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2017), the analysis was conducted on the convergent validity which indicated the degree to which the items were measuring the same construct. The assessment was done on the factor loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014). As presented (Table 1 and Figure 2), the result shows that the loadings for all items range between 0.820 and 0.924 which are more than the cut-off value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014). The Composite Reliability on the other hand ranges between 0.925 and 0.945, which is above the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014). This indicate that the measurement model possesses acceptable

reliability. Lastly, the AVE which indicates the amount of variance represented by a single construct ranges between 0.755 and 0.817, is also exceeding the value recommended by Hair et al. (2014) which is 0.5. Thus, it can be concluded that the measurement model has convergent validity.

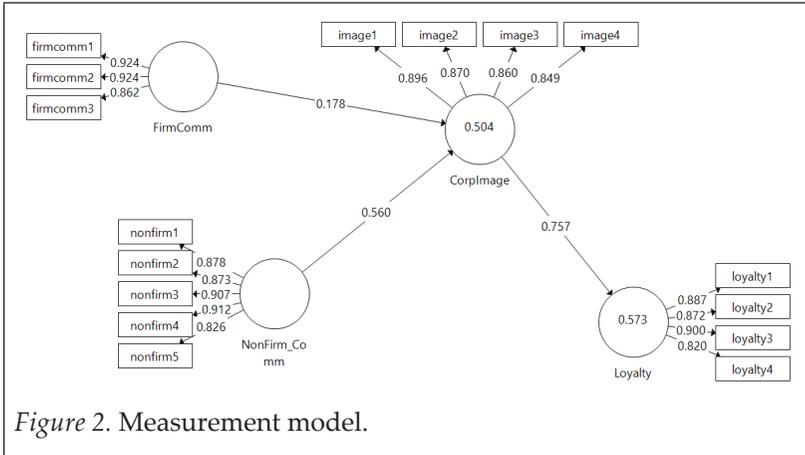


Table 1

Result of the Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Loadings	AVE	CR
Firm communication	firmcomm1	0.924	0.817	0.930
	firmcomm2	0.924		
	firmcomm3	0.862		
Non-firm communication	nonfirm1	0.878	0.774	0.945
	nonfirm2	0.873		
	nonfirm3	0.907		
	nonfirm4	0.912		
	nonfirm5	0.826		
Corporate image	image1	0.896	0.755	0.925
	image2	0.870		
	image3	0.860		
	image4	0.849		
Loyalty	loyalty1	0.887	0.757	0.926
	loyalty2	0.872		
	loyalty3	0.900		
	loyalty4	0.820		

Then, the assessment of discriminant validity was conducted using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion as well as the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation (HTMT) (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE is higher than the correlation of the construct, which provides evidence to establish the discriminant validity. This result is also supported by the finding of HTMT assessment in table 3 which shows that the discriminant validity is established with $HTMT_{0.90}$. In summary, the measurement model demonstrates enough convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 2

Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	1	2	3	4
1. Firm communication	0.904			
2. Corporate image	0.625	0.869		
3. Loyalty	0.563	0.757	0.87	
4. Non-firm Communication	0.799	0.702	0.692	0.88

Source: Fornell and Lacker (1981)

Table 3

Discriminant Validity of Constructs (HTMT)

	1	2	3	4
1. Firm communication				
2. Corporate image	0.699			
3. Loyalty	0.63	0.837		
4. Non-firm Communication	0.88	0.771	0.758	na

Assessment of the Structural Model

Tables 4 and 5 present the variance inflated factor (VIF), the coefficient of determination (R square), the predictive relevance (Q square) and the effect size (f^2). The VIF values show that the collinearity issue does not exist as both VIF for the firm and non-firm communication constructs are less than the threshold value, which is 5 (Hair et al. 2017). This indicates that the constructs are significantly different from one another. In a similar vein, firm and non-firm communication explain 50.4 percent of the variance in corporate brand image while the image

explains 57.3 percent of the variance in loyalty. In addition to that, the result also shows that non-firm communication has a large effect size on the corporate brand image ($f^2=0.229$) while firm communication has a small effect on image ($f^2=0.023$). Lastly, the image is found to have a substantial effect on loyalty ($f^2=1.340$). Then, the predictive relevance of the exogenous variables on endogenous variables was assessed using blindfolding. The blindfolding assessment result shows that the exogenous variables have a predictive relevance over the endogenous variable as the values of Q^2 for all predictors are more than 0 (Hair et al., 2014; Stone, 1974).

Table 4

Lateral Collinearity Assessment

Construct	Image (VIF)	Loyalty (VIF)
Firm Communication	2.765	
Non-firm Communication	2.765	
Image		1.000
Loyalty		

Next, using a bootstrapping technique of a 5000 resample, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypotheses. The variance explained for the model is shown in table 5. The t-value shows that all three hypotheses were supported. Firm communication was significantly related to the corporate brand image ($\beta=0.178$, $p<0.05$) and non-firm communication was positively related to the corporate brand image ($\beta=0.560$, $p<0.05$). On the other hand, the corporate brand image was also significantly related to loyalty ($\beta=0.757$, $p<0.05$).

Table 5

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std Beta	Std Error	t-value	Decision	R ²	f ²	Q ²
H ₁	Firm Comm -> Image	0.178	0.097	1.825	<i>Supported</i>	0.504	0.023	0.335
H ₂	Non-firm -> Image	0.560	0.085	6.601	<i>Supported</i>		0.229	
H ₃	Image -> Loyalty	0.757	0.036	20.915	<i>Supported</i>	0.573	1.340	0.381

Discussion and Conclusion

Building and maintaining favourable corporate image is crucial as it is said to be among the main reasons that influence sales and selection (Hee Youn & Ji-Hwan, 2013; Hemsley-brown, Melewar, Nguyen, & Wilson, 2016). Not only that, the image is also able to drive the brand equity (Van Rekom, Jacobs, & Verlegh, 2006), to influence company's position in the mind of consumers (Aaker, 1991; Biel, 1993), and is difficult to be copied by competitors (Sondoh Jr et al., 2007). In view of this importance, this study has investigated the role of corporate communication in building images and the effects of the image on the customer's loyalty. With this in mind, a model has been proposed and validated. Findings of the statistical analysis indicate that both firm and non-firm communication plays a role in influencing the corporate brand image of Islamic bank, especially in Malaysia. Among the two, the beta value, however, shows that non-firm communication plays a bigger role in influencing image compared to the firm communication. This is similar with the findings of several previous studies in the conventional financial institutions which reveal that both corporate communication tools have an effect towards image (Bravo, Montaner, & Pina, 2010), and in the case of severe instances where the word-of-mouth spreads widely or becomes viral, the non-firm communication thus will be more impactful than the earlier (Berry, 2000). In addition, the corporate brand image also was proven to significantly affect customer's loyalty towards Islamic bank, indicating that the higher the customers perceive the image of a bank, the higher the probability of the customers to retain their loyalty to the bank. This is supported by other studies in various fields that show the existence of a significant relationship between image and loyalty (Ayuni et al., 2015; Da Silva & Syed Alwi, 2006; Sondoh Jr et al., 2007).

Implications

Based on the findings presented in this study, several recommendations and implications can be considered by an Islamic bank in order to enhance its corporate brand image and at the same time improve its customers' loyalty. First, the result of the analysis reveals that firm communication plays a positive and significant role in influencing the image of Islamic bank, although the effect is low. This low effect may be attributed to the Islamic bank's ineffective promotional efforts found by Loo (2010) previously. In general, banking customers are

said to pay less attention to the bank's publicity materials such as annual report, brochures and pamphlets (Yeo & Youssef, 2010). In view of this, it is therefore essential for the Islamic bank to ensure that effective communications are being delivered to customers and potential customers. Not only that, the messages communicated by the bank through various medium such as advertising, personal selling, public relation, and direct marketing should reflect the philosophy and personality of the company and coherent with the company's culture and belief to avoid contradicting experience during customers' encounter with the product or service (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Suhartanto, 2019). In addition, in today's era of technological advancement, Islamic banks should also consider the utilisation of lower cost online options such as blogs or weblogs that allow users to comment and social media sites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012) that permit a two-way communication. This is due to the findings of previous studies that proved the ability of these social networking channels in constructing the corporate brand image (Bruhn et al., 2012; Gilpin, 2010).

Second, the significant relationship that exists between non-firm communication and corporate brand image shows the importance of Islamic bank management in managing its non-firm communication such as word-of-mouth, publicity and word-of-mouse. Although non-firm communication is said to reach fewer people than the firm communication, the impact might have been bolder if it gets a wider attention and publicity (Berry, 2000), thus affecting not only the corporate brand image but also the brand equity. In the time of widespread usage of online media today, where word-of-mouse and negative online product review can become viral in a short time, its effect towards image therefore can be detrimental (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011). Hence, to monitor and manage the effect of non-firm communication, the Islamic banking managers are encouraged to examine the bank's brand health by monitoring the customers' feedback surveys, findings of commercial survey and also the customers' comments in the social media sites and forums (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2014). In addition, banks can engage and educate customers and potential customers to build their expertise on the Islamic banking products which in the long run can lead them to spread positive messages (Sweeney et al., 2014).

Finally, the significant relationship between corporate brand image and loyalty also stressed on the findings of previous studies on the

importance of developing favourable corporate image to encourage repeat patronage. Therefore, in the effort of increasing retention, it is highly critical for Islamic banking managers to ensure that not only the firm and non-firm communications are favourable, but also other factors affecting the corporate brand image such as the contact personnel, the service accessibility and the products and services offered are all properly managed.

Limitations

There are several constraints that should be considered in generalising this study. First, the study has been aimed towards Islamic banking customers in certain regions in Malaysia only, which may limit its ability to be interpreted towards other Islamic banking customers in the world. Second, despite the fact that Islamic banking customers comprise Muslims and non-Muslims, this study was only able to get responses from a very small percentage of non-Muslims which may not represent the views of other non-Muslim customers. Third, the data collection was conducted using non-probability purposive sampling technique which lack of randomness and representativeness and this may cause limited generalisability of the findings to the whole population.

Conclusion

The study reveals that firm and non-firm communications has a significant relationship with the image, while image also play a crucial role in influencing loyalty. As an improvement to this, future studies may consider to test the relationship between firm and non-firm communication to the specific dimension of image such as the functional and emotional brand images. In addition, future study may also consider to test the role of corporate brand image in mediating the relationship between corporate communication and loyalty.

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