

## **MALAYSIAN FAST FOOD BRAND EQUITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Most Malaysian research defines the brand equity dimensions. This paper addresses this gap by developing an empirical research model with better understanding of sequential relationships between the dimensions of brand equity within the Malaysian fast food context. The results indicate perceived quality (PQ) and brand awareness (BA) are the initial stage of brand building. Brand familiarity, brand image, and brand trust serve as important role in enlightening the relationships between PQ, BA, and attitudinal brand loyalty (ABL). ABL plays as a key variable for explicating the relationships between other dimensions and overall brand equity. Future research could explore the possibility of a longitudinal study through repeated observations, and invariance test across different samples to make certain the components of measurement model and structural model are remained equivalent.

**JEL Classifications:** JEL M13, M31

**Keywords:** Brand equity, Fast food, Sequential order

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2009, global fast food had reached a market value of \$201.1 billion, with growth rate of 3.1%, the volume reached \$208.1 billion of transactions, counted as 3.9% growth rate (Datamonitor, 2010), and it was considered as an important industry due to its global trend (Van Zyl et al., 2010). However, the fast food market share in Malaysia was subjugated by foreign brands (Aseambankers, 2007), reason being lack of expertise in branding and marketing among local brands (Marshall Cavendish, 2009). Up-to-date, the existing literature on brand equity model within the fast food industry was still sparse (Tan et al., 2011). Besides, the identification of relationship among brand equity dimensions was not clearly extended by the implication of marketing theory (Gil et al., 2007). Such limitations have caused ambiguity in managing and predicting the tangible and intangible characteristics of fast food brand. For instance: "Are there any pre-determinate constructs among the fast food brand equity dimensions?" "Are there any direct contribution of a) each dimensions b) certain dimensions to fast food brand equity?"

The main objective of this research is to develop a theoretical model which identified the relationships among brand equity dimensions within Malaysian fast food context. The present study had applied Gil et al.'s (2007) brand equity model into fast food context and proposed a modified model that was meaningful, both conceptually and statistically. This research extended the understanding of fast food brand equity

phenomena and its measurement, by exploring the sequential relationships between the brand equity dimensions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

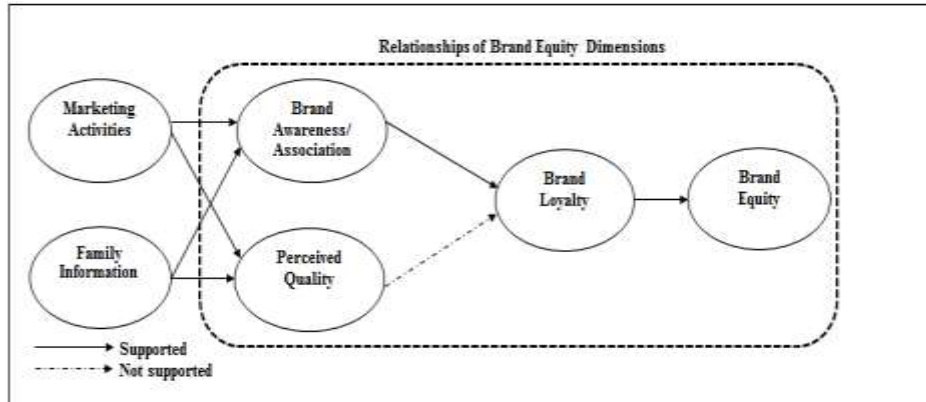
### **Gil, Andrés and Salinas's Theory of Brand Equity (2007)**

Gil et al.'s (2007) theory was adopted to generate a meaningful research in examining the attitudes of Malaysian fast food consumers. Gil et al. (2007) clearly identified the relationships among the dimension of consumer-based brand equity based on the explanation of cognitive-affective-conative, which served as a justification for the establishment of structural parameter estimate that provided better explanation than some of the recent studies (e.g. Hess et al., 2011; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011; Sanyal and Datta, 2011). Secondly, they categorized the dimensions of brand equity with theoretical justification. For instance, perceived quality and brand awareness/association were considered as cognitive constructs, while brand loyalty was considered conative construct. The main advantage of this approach was this could lead to the better development of measurement items, which to ensure there were clear operational definition of the constructs and no overlapping of measurement items (Gil et al., 2007). Thirdly, the selection of products/brands was based on the level of involvement that derived from the perception of consumer rather than the inherent characteristic of the product itself (Malär et al., 2011). Instead, Gil et al.'s (2007) model suffered a few shortcomings. Their results indicated that both brand awareness and brand association were considered as a joint construct; causing limitation in unraveling the effect of brand awareness from brand association (Huang and Sarigollu, 2012). Besides, their findings did not support Aaker's (1991) brand equity model, proposing perceived quality, brand awareness and brand association do not necessarily contribute to brand equity (Buil et al., 2013). Contradict with Das (2014) in a food retailing study, awareness, association, and perceived quality were proven to have significant impact on brand loyalty and purchase intention.

### **Different Dimensions of Brand Equity across Industries**

Norjaya et al. (2007) classified the brand equity dimensions of household electrical appliances as brand loyalty, brand distinctiveness and brand association/awareness. Wang et al. (2008) suggested that global brand equity consisted of quality perception, brand awareness, brand resonance, and corporation ability association. Xu and Andrew (2009) defined the conceptual framework of hotel brand equity as brand loyalty, brand association, brand awareness and quality of experience. Thus, researchers have to monitor the dimensions of brand equity within the specific industry (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010). As for fast food industry, brand familiarity (Schlosser, 2002) and brand trust (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005) were proposed as additional dimensions as they indicated as important dimensions in the context of fast food (Tan et al., 2011).

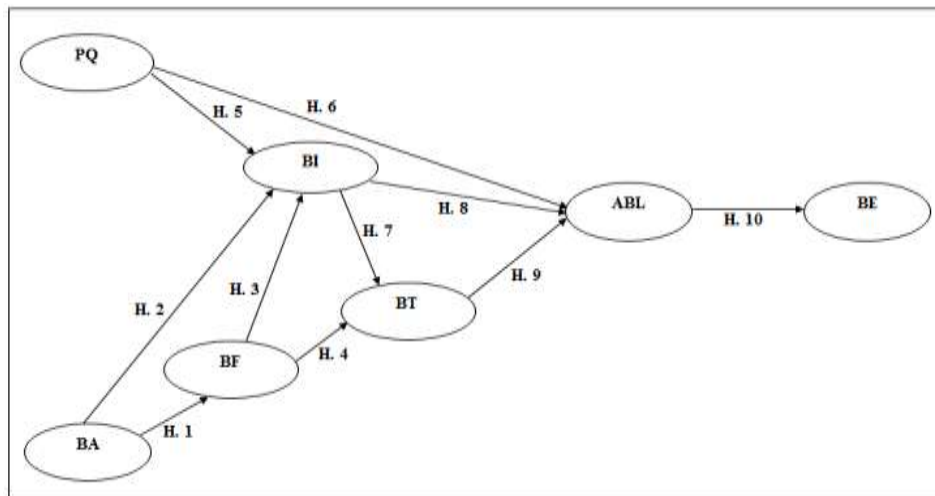
**FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF BRAND EQUITY**



Source: Gil et al. (2007)

**Hypotheses Development**

**FIGURE 2. PROPOSED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**



Note: BA=Brand awareness, PQ=Perceived quality, BF=Brand familiarity, BI=Brand image, BT=Brand trust, ABL=Attitudinal brand loyalty, BE=Brand equity.

Gursoy and McCleary (2004) argued brand familiarity was formed by the acquired information through external sources, for instance word-of-mouth, advertising, and the use of product. Researchers stressed out that the higher the brand awareness, the greater the brand familiarity and reputation (D’Souza and Rao, 1995). Brand awareness insisted

that consumers had to have greater association with its brand image; it served as a vital element in formatting and presenting a strong brand in consumers' memory (Keller, 1993).

***H1: The higher the awareness of a brand, the greater the brand familiarity***

***H2: The higher the awareness of a brand, the greater the brand image***

When a consumer was confronted with a familiar brand, he or she had felt emotional closeness and confidence and increased the level of consumer experience, thus drove to greater formation process of brand image (Zajonc and Markus, 1982). Campbell and Keller (2003) advocated that increasing brand familiarity through accumulated customer experiences not only created a knowledge structure for the consumer, but also built up consumer confidence about the brand, which led to brand trust (Fullerton, 2005).

***H3: The higher the familiarity of a brand, the greater the brand image***

***H4: The higher the familiarity of a brand, the greater the brand trust***

According to brand knowledge (Keller, 1993), good evaluation of perceived quality had increased brand association. This was because when there is good perception of quality, positive brand image had been created due to greater brand attributes, benefits, and attitudes as perceived by consumers. Roberts et al. (2004) had applied the concept of purchase decision stages to rationalize the relationships between perceived quality and loyalty. They had identified perceived quality as information evaluation stage, which had contributed significantly to loyalty.

***H5: The higher the perceived quality of a brand, the greater the brand image***

***H6: The higher the perceived quality of a brand, the greater the attitudinal brand loyalty***

A positive corporate image such as high competence and reliability would lead to higher level of consumer trust (Sichtmann, 2007). Esch et al. (2006) confirmed that there was a direct impact of brand image on a brand trust, and both direct and indirect influences of brand image on current and future purchases. Flavián et al. (2006) had stressed that brand image was one of the fundamental in building a sincere relationship of trust between customer satisfaction and loyalty. When customers had favorable images towards a certain brand, this process would exercise a positive influence on the customer's trust (Flavián et al., 2006) and eventually reinforced their loyalty (Kandampully and Hu, 2007).

***H7: The higher the image of a brand, the greater the brand trust***

***H8: The higher the image of a brand, the greater the attitudinal brand loyalty***

Rauyruen and Miller (2007) argued that in order to gain loyalty of customers, one must first gain their trust. Brand trust had been recognized as a prominent variable leading to long-term relationship with customers, which in turn affected brand loyalty in a positive way (Matzler et al., 2008). This could be further supported by Harris and Goode (2004),

proved that there was positive consumers trust on customer loyalty.

***H9: The higher the trust of a brand, the greater the attitudinal brand loyalty***

Previous studies indicated attitudinal brand loyalty had significant effect on brand equity (Gil et al., 2007; Norjaya et al., 2007; O'loughlin, 2006; Tong and Hawley, 2009). This showed the essential role of attitudinal brand loyalty in brand equity creation. Thus, this study proposed the importance of managing loyalty as part of the brand equity management.

***H10: The higher the attitudinal loyalty of a brand, the greater the brand equity***

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A preliminary study was conducted to select fast-food restaurant chains and to develop the measurement items of brand image. According to Low and Lamb Jr. (2000), the development of brand image scale was designed to be product-specific. Chowdhury, Reardon and Srivastava (1998) also stated that a free response technique needed to be applied in brand image studies. Therefore, two open-ended questions were addressed to 50 fast food consumers because it allowed for gathering consumers' point of view, feelings and any perspective that related to the brand image (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). The first question was "*Please list three fast food restaurant chains in which you had most frequently dined*"; while the second question adopted Keller's (2003) "*You can freely describe any characteristics that come to mind when you think about ... (above brand(s) name) ... using any words/phrases your choice*". The result showed that the most popular Malaysian fast food brands were McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut, Marraybrown, and 1901 Hot Dogs.

The selected brands controlled approximately 80% fast food market share in Malaysia (Euromonitor, 2013), represented relevant and reliable brands which finalized in this study. 8 measurement items of brand image were developed from preliminary study. The validity of the questionnaire was determined by academicians, who are experts in the area of branding research studies. The reliability of the measurement items was tested by 50 pilot surveys of fast food consumers. The range for Cronbach's Alpha was from 0.75 to 0.91, which satisfied the cut-off value as suggested, indicated internal consistency for the constructs (Nunnally, 1978). The final version of measurement items were presented in Table 1. A total number of 600 self-administrated questionnaires were distributed because this study was in line with nonprobability sampling of previous studies (Perez et al., 2011; Yoo et al., 2000). Klang Valley was considered as the most populated region in Malaysia, which populated with economically and socially most advances people from diverse ethnic compositions and demographic groups (Norzalita and Norjaya, 2010). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a confirmatory approach was selected to analyze multivariate data. This was because SEM was frequently and widely used technique in psychology and social sciences research (Hair et al., 2010).

**TABLE 1. MEASUREMENT ITEMS**

<b>Instrument Items</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<u>Perceived quality</u> The staffs of X give customers individual attention. The staffs of X provide its prompt services at promised times. The staffs of X handle complaints of customers effectively. The staffs of X are always willing to help customers. The staffs of X are knowledgeable.	Kim and Kim (2005, p.559)
<u>Brand Awareness</u> I am aware of X. X is highly recognized. I have heard a lot about X.	Park (2009, p. 56)
<u>Brand Familiarity</u> I am familiar with X. I am knowledgeable of X. I can easily recognize X.	Park (2009, p. 57)
<u>Brand Image</u> Easy Prompt service Good dining environment Pleasant A place for social gathering Variety of choices Good value for money Convenient	Preliminary study
<u>Brand Trust</u> X is safe to me. I trust X. X is reliable to me.	Matzler et al. (2008, p.156) Park (2009, p. 57)
<u>Attitudinal Brand Loyalty</u> I try to visit X because it is the best choice for me. I consider myself to be a loyal customer of X. X is special to me. I would love to recommend X to my friends.	Chiou and Droge (2006, p.625)
<u>Brand Equity</u> Even if there is another [fast food category] brand as delicious as X, I still prefer X. X is definitely my choice in [fast food category]. Even if another [fast food category] brand has the same price as X, I would still buy X.	Gil et al. (2007, p.193)

## RESULTS

The study was collected from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2011 to 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2011 across fast food restaurants that located in Klang Valley, a sampling design was planned to reduce the potential bias and increase the precision of estimates for non-probability sampling (Chang and Chieng, 2006). Subsequent to the data screening process, 15 surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses. Thus, 585 or 97.50% of respondents were proceeding for further analysis. Out of the pool of completed survey forms, 50.43% were male and 49.57% were female. With respect to ethnic groups, 63.09% were Malays, followed by Chinese 26.15%, Indian 4.96%, and others 5.80%. One item of perceived quality “*The staffs of X are knowledgeable.*” and three items of brand image “*Easy*”, “*A place for social gathering*”, “*Convenient*” were deleted because the standardized residuals values for pair of items were above 4.0, which deserved for deletion (Hair et al., 2010). After the purification process, the final measurement models satisfied all the fix statistic values as recommended by Hair et al. (2010); demonstrated perfect results for the degree of unidimensionality ( $\chi^2 = 859.593$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.384$ , RMSEA = .064, SRMR = .037, CFI = .950, PCLOSE = .06), and the p-value associated with chi-square was .0001. In term of convergent validity, the values of construct reliability ranged from 0.86 to 0.94, enormously above the cutoff value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted were above the cutoff value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 presented the average variance estimated of each constructs was above the squared correlation with other constructs. The results provided evidence that the seven constructs were unique and had captured some phenomena that other measures had not. It was evident that these results had contributed adequate evidence for discriminant validity of the final measurement model (Hair et al., 2010). The goodness-of-fit statistics, indicating the overall acceptability of the structural model analyzed, were satisfied ( $\chi^2 = 917.953$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.490$ , RMSEA = .065, SRMR = .050, CFI = .946). Out of ten hypotheses, eight were supported and two were rejected (see Table 3). The squared multiple correlation ( $R^2$ ) for brand equity was 0.74, attitudinal brand loyalty (0.62), brand trust (0.67), brand image (0.55), and brand familiarity (0.54). However,  $R^2$  was not applicable for exogenous constructs. It was estimated that the predictors of brand equity explained 74 percent of its variance.

**TABLE 2. RESULT OF THE DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY ANALYSIS**

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(AVE)	<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.84</b>
1. BA	1						
2. BF	0.55(0.74**)	1					
3. PQ	0.09(0.29**)	0.08(0.27**)	1				
4. BI	0.14(0.38**)	0.23(0.48**)	0.44(0.67**)	1			
5. BT	0.22(0.47**)	0.47(0.69**)	0.26(0.51**)	0.53(0.73**)	1		
6. ABL	0.23(0.48**)	0.40(0.63**)	0.29(0.54**)	0.52(0.72**)	0.55(0.74**)	1	
7. BL	0.17(0.42**)	0.32(0.57**)	0.21(0.46**)	0.35(0.59**)	0.36(0.60**)	0.75(0.87**)	1

a. \*\*. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

b. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are greater than the squared correlation estimates, showing discriminant validity.

Note: BA=Brand awareness, PQ=Perceived quality, BF=Brand familiarity, BI=Brand image,

*BT=Brand trust, ABL=Attitudinal brand loyalty, BE=Brand equity.*

**TABLE 3. RESULT OF THE DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY ANALYSIS**

			<i>b</i> (95% CI)	$\beta$	se	<i>t</i> value	$\alpha$	Conclusion	
<b>Structural parameter estimates</b>									
H1	BA	→	BF	0.83 (0.71-0.95)	0.73	0.06	14.08	**	Supported
H2	BA	→	BI	-0.07 (-0.17-0.03)	-0.09	0.05	-1.38	0.17	Not Supported
H3	BF	→	BI	0.31 (0.21-0.41)	0.40	0.05	6.37	**	Supported
H4	BF	→	BT	0.48 (0.40-0.55)	0.43	0.04	10.96	**	Supported
H5	PQ	→	BI	0.48 (0.41-0.56)	0.59	0.04	12.65	**	Supported
H6	PQ	→	ABL	0.09 (-0.01-0.19)	0.08	0.05	1.84	0.07	Not Supported
H7	BI	→	BT	0.67 (0.51-0.83)	0.46	0.08	8.49	**	Supported
H8	BI	→	ABL	0.44 (0.26-0.62)	0.31	0.09	5.00	**	Supported
H9	BT	→	ABL	0.46 (0.36-0.56)	0.48	0.05	9.43	**	Supported
H10	ABL	→	BE	0.98 (0.90-1.06)	0.86	0.04	24.95	**	Supported
<b>Squared multiple correlation</b>				<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>					
BA				-					
PQ				-					
BF				0.54					
BI				0.55					
BT				0.67					
ABL				0.62					
BE				0.74					

Notes: *b*=Unstandardized parameter estimates, CI=Confidence interval,  $\beta$ =Standardized parameter estimates, se=Standard error,  $\alpha$ =Statistical significance level, \*\* Path analysis is significant at the .001 level

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This model states that both perceived quality and brand awareness are the initial stage of brand building in consumer-based context. The awareness of fast food brand served as an important role in enlightening the relationships with brand familiarity (H1:  $\beta = 0.73$ , se = 0.06, *t* value = 14.08,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ), however, brand awareness alone was not sufficient in providing the brand image hold in the consumer's memory (H2:  $\beta = -0.09$ , se = 0.05, *t* value = -1.38,  $\alpha = 0.17$ ), consistent with Tan et al.'s (2012) study. This was because fast food brand image involved greater association of consumers' memory than just recalling or recognizing (Keller, 2003). Consumers had felt comfortable on trusted brand because the brand had long-term relationships with them (Sichtmann, 2007; Matzler et al., 2008). Therefore, the familiarity of fast food brand was essential (H4:  $\beta = 0.43$ , se = 0.04, *t* value = 10.96,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ), as it enhanced consumers' formation process of brand image (H3:  $\beta = 0.40$ , se = 0.05, *t* value = 6.37,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ) and feelings of greater trust between the restaurant brand and the consumers. These were because brand familiarity had driven to a sense of reduced anxiety, faith in the provider, reduced perceptions of risk, and consumers knew what to expect directly (Lee et al, 2005).

Perceived quality had positive influence on brand image (H5:  $\beta = 0.59$ , se = 0.04, *t* value = 12.65,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ), because it involved consumers in developing, maintaining, and giving meaning to the influence of personal experience of the stimulated



brands (Dabholkar, 1995). The finding indicated that perceived quality did not statistically contribute to attitudinal brand loyalty in the context of fast food industry (H6:  $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $se = 0.05$ ,  $t$  value = 1.84,  $\alpha = 0.07$ ). Nevertheless, this result was in line with previous studies (Gil et al., 2007; Tong and Hawley, 2009). This could be further explained that attitudinal brand loyalty had been considered as a conative construct, while perceived quality was considered as a cognitive construct, based on arguments of cognitive-affective-conative hierarchical model (Chiou and Droge, 2006). Perceived quality could drive an effect on attitudinal brand loyalty through affective construct. Affective construct would serve as the mediating variable, such as “emotional” or “feeling” responses. Brand image exercised strong influence on brand trust (H7:  $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $se = 0.08$ ,  $t$  value = 8.49,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ) and attitudinal brand loyalty (H8:  $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $se = 0.09$ ,  $t$  value = 5.00,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ). Therefore, the image of fast food brand was considered important because it served as a driver for consumers’ readiness to believe on a particular brand, referred to its capability of promised functionality and attributes, and drove to greater loyalty of the brand.

Brand trust contributed significantly on attitudinal brand loyalty (H9:  $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $se = 0.05$ ,  $t$  value = 9.43,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ). It presented an emotion-driven aspect (affective character) of long-term relational exchanged between fast food brands and consumers, rather than the utilitarian value (cognitive character) of the brands. Attitudinal brand loyalty played as a key variable for explicating the relationships between other dimensions and brand equity (H10:  $\beta = 0.86$ ,  $se = 0.04$ ,  $t$  value = 24.95,  $\alpha < 0.001$ ). In other words, fast food brand equity would not exist when there was no attitudinal brand loyalty. Nevertheless, when there was absence of brands’ affective reactions, attractiveness, aesthetics, or signals of benevolence (affective sense of brand trust), consumers would less likely in repeat purchase intention, recommendation to others, or willingness to pay a price premium. Thus, the trustworthiness of fast food brand served as a vital antecedent for the development of attitudinal brand loyalty, which ultimately drove to overall brand loyalty.

In term of limitation, cross-sectional data might have had limited the detection of causal inferences (Hair et al, 2010). Therefore, a longitudinal study should be designed, which was often used in psychology, involved a series of observations made over long period of time. Future research could explore the possibility of a longitudinal study through repeated observations, and invariance test across different samples should be conducted to make certain the components of measurement model and structural model are remained equivalent. In addition, future study should investigate the impact of distribution intensity, price, store image, price deals, and advertising spending on fast food brand equity as the success of a branding strategy depends on the marketing mix (Yoo et al., 2000).

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Malaysian fast food managers have to establish the most relevant brand input in consumers’ mind. The focus on the identification of the brand position and sequential order served as a necessity and crucial marketing plan in creating fast food brand equity. Most of the Malaysian government assistance programs focused on providing advisory services, market access, infrastructure facilities, financial assistance, and business and

networking opportunities (Pemadu, 2012). This study provides an alternative approach for the growth of Malaysian fast food brand, which is based on the development of fundamental knowledge among local entrepreneurs to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The characteristic for each of the brand equity dimensions has to be communicated clearly. Consequently, local fast food entrepreneurs would have the ability to identify the antecedents and consequences of brand equity dimensions, thus will have better blueprint for their branding strategy. Besides, the study also contributes to the Entry Point Projects 5 of National Key Economic Areas, which increases the standard of professional management among the local food entrepreneurs by polishing their brand management skills (Pamandu, 2012).

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