

Thai Consumers' Behavior on Online Marketing Communications of Mazda Brand

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to study Thai consumers' behavior on online marketing communications of Mazda brand. Two hundred and thirty-seven Mazda's current and potential customers aged between 25 to 45 years old residing in Thailand, who had been exposed to Mazda's online marketing communications in the past six months, were asked to complete the survey. The research findings in the cognitive part reveal that Mazda's online platforms, especially Facebook, is becoming increasingly important among its customers. The majority of the samples use Mazda's online media as the source of information on the brand and feel that these online platforms help increase their purchase intention and enhance Mazda's brand image. The results in the affective part show that most of the samples agreed that they had strong associations with the Mazda brand, as a significant portion of the respondents were able remember Mazda's logo and felt that Mazda has a favorable image and a strong personality. Furthermore, overall, the samples felt positively about Mazda's online communications; hence, they felt positively with the Mazda brand itself. For the conative part, the outcomes show that the samples' purchase intention to buy a Mazda car is not very high. However, the results further reveal that Mazda's potential customers are more likely to purchase a Mazda car than the brand's current customer. In conclusion, all cognitive, affective, and conative parts are significantly related to each other.

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Introduction

Many research studies have shown that the global use of the Internet over the past decades have grown at a fast pace (Schibrowsky, Peltier, & Nill, 2007, 2013). According to We Are Social's and Hootsuite's new 2018 Global Digital Suite, there are currently up to four billion people, accounting for 53% of the world population, who are using the Internet (Kemp, 2018). Especially in Thailand, the report further reveals that 57 million Thais, or 82% of the population are now online, which is a 24% increase from the previous year. This incrementing number of Internet users provide huge opportunities for businesses to market their offerings in this expanding online market (Kemp, 2018).

The advent of the Internet has greatly influenced the communication habits of the consumers. Today, consumers now spend more and more time surfing the Internet or browsing through social media platforms, causing an increasing share of communication to occur within this online realm (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Fuller, 2013). Ultimately, the Internet has also impacted modern consumer behavior, as consumers now rely heavily on online communications and interactions that happen in the online environment to make their purchase decisions (Hinz, Skiera, Barrot, & Becker, 2011, as cited in Hutter et al., 2013). Consequently, a growing number of businesses, regardless of industry, have embraced and leveraged on this new technology by adapting their marketing strategies to better respond to the target markets in the online environment (Paul, 1996).

Today, the majority of automobile brands in Thailand, including Mazda, Toyota, Chevrolet, and BMW, have reportedly invested more in online marketing and digital strategies in order to compete in this highly competitive market (Saleiyakanont, 2018). Earlier this year, Mazda Thailand has announced that the sales of its car had grown by 65% percent in February 2018, when compared to the same period of the previous year (Mazda Thailand, 2018). This is the highest growth rate the brand has achieved historically. The brand's senior marketing director revealed that one of the major driving forces that led to this huge increase in sales was the company's strong online marketing strategies. Mazda has invested in developing and improving the brand's digital platforms which include an official Website, Facebook page, YouTube channel, Instagram account, and Line official account. Mazda's executive also stated that these platforms are designed to better enhance customer experience by providing information of its products so that it is easily available and accessible to Thai consumers (Mazda Thailand, 2018). Furthermore, according to Mazda's senior executive, the brand recognizes that traditional messaging and content is no longer effective on online media. Therefore, the brand has been using content-based marketing strategies to better invoke interests and responses from the Thai consumers through its online channels. Moreover, according to Mazda Thailand's press releases, the brand also uses social media platforms as an informal mean of communication, in order to strengthen the

company's relationship with its customers. As a result of all these efforts, Mazda has become one of the top five car brands used by Thai consumers.

Hence, this research is using the Mazda brand as a case study to study its consumers' behavior on Mazda's online marketing communications, which can provide guidelines for other automobile brands that could be beneficial to their future online marketing communication strategies.

Marketing and Branding

Marketing is a business philosophy that is considered to be as old as human civilization (Minowa & Witkowski, 2009; Moore & Reid, 2008), and is constantly evolving. There is a shift from a traditional concept of transactional marketing approach, focusing merely on the exchange of values, to a more modern relationship marketing approach (Ambler, 2004). Today, the goal of marketing is not just to attract new customers to the business by promising superior value, but to also to maintain the current customers by delivering satisfaction (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011). Companies that are able to create, deliver and communicate superior customer value to their target markets, will win the market (Kotler & Keller, 2011).

The marketing process can be described in five simple steps (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011). The first and foremost step is that the company must work to understand the marketplace and their target customer wants and needs. Businesses will then create customer value by designing a customer-driven marketing strategy and

constructing an integrated marketing program that can deliver value superior to the competitors. The fourth step is to then build strong and profitable relationships with the customers, while trying to create customer delight. In the final step, companies are rewarded from creating superior customer values in forms of sales, profits, and long-term customer equity.

Marketing mix is a combination of tools for marketing that can be used to satisfy the needs of the customer and to build relationships with them (Kotler and Armstrong, 2011). The term marketing mix was first coined in 1964 by Neil Borden, who claimed that there are 12 components included in the mix. However, Borden's concept of marketing mix was considered elaborated and complicated. Therefore McCarthy (1964) redefined the concept into one of the most well-known marketing mix models, the Four P's (4Ps) which includes product, price, place, and promotion (Cengiz & Yayla, 2007).

Meanwhile, brands are considered as one of the organization's most valuable assets and today, branding has become the key marketing priority for many businesses (Keller, 2009). According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a combination of elements, such as name, term, sign, symbol, or design to identify the goods and services a business and to distinguish them from the competitors (Keller, 2013). A brand is also a company's promise to their customer to deliver what a brand stands for in terms of functional, emotional, self-expressive, and social benefits (Aaker, 2014), all of which will guide the

consumers' decision-making process, and create relations among consumers (Kavak et al., 2015).

Keller (2013) explained that today, modern marketers rely on six criteria when choosing brand elements, with the first three criteria acting as an offensive strategy, while the last three play a defensive role. First of all, the brand will be judged whether it can be recognized and recalled easily or not. Secondly, brand elements should be meaningful and persuasive to consumers. Good brand elements must also be likable, meaning that they are interesting, aesthetically pleasing or possessing rich imagery. Brand elements will also be judged on whether they are transferable across product categories, geographic boundaries or cultures or not. The fifth criterion is adaptability. Most of the time, good brand elements must be flexible, updatable, and adaptable to different context and time period. Finally, brand elements must also be protectable, both legally and competitively. This means that it cannot be copied easily.

According to Keller (2013), there are four main steps in strategic brand management process. The first and foremost step is to identify and develop plans for the brand, by identifying points-of-parity and points-of-difference, describing its brand mantra, as well as listing out all the elements that identify what the brand represents and its position. The second step is to design and implement the brand marketing programs, which involves activities, such as choosing the brand elements, developing and integrating marketing activities or programs, and leveraging any associations or linkages

the brand may have in order to maximize the impact. The third step is to measure and interpret brand performance. This step will help the company keep track of how the brand is performing and identify areas of improvements for the brand. The final, and most challenging, step is to maintain, nurture, and sustain the brand equity (Keller, 2013). In order to do so, marketers must be aware of any differences among each group of consumers from different geographic locations, cultures, and market segments, and manage them accordingly, rather than applying the one-size-fits-all strategy.

Online Marketing

In the past decades, the discipline of marketing has been exposed to tremendous changes and challenges following the advent of the Internet (Hamill, Tagg, Stevenson, & Vescovi, 2010). Some of the changes brought upon the marketing field by the Internet includes a decline in the use of mass and other forms of media in traditional marketing and advertising (Keller, 2009), as well as the increase in interactive communication and marketing strategies conducted through the Internet (Mohammed, 2010).

It is undeniable that today, the Internet has become one of the most significant and vital business tools that contributes to the success of businesses and was even described as being the backbone of commerce (Fuciu & Deumitrescu, n.d.). The terms Internet marketing and online marketing have been used interchangeably in past literature. Kotler and Keller (2011) defined online marketing as the company's efforts to inform the market about its

products or services, as well as to communicate, to promote, and to sell them online. To be more specific, it can also be defined as a marketing process that applies digital technologies to form online channels to contribute to marketing activities in order to achieve profitability and customer retention by improving customer knowledge and delivering communications and services to meet consumer needs (Bhayani & Vachhani, 2014).

Despite the fact that online marketing is rooted in the traditional concepts marketing (Morozan & Ciacu, 2012), it is considered to be offering much more advantages than traditional marketing. First of all, online marketing helps businesses in reducing or eliminating the distance between buyers and sellers and provides a new medium of direct contact instead (Kimiloglu, 2004; Talpau, 2014). Moreover, online marketing is also interactive in nature. Thus, allowing firms to get in touch with and better enhance the relationships with their customers directly through online channels without the usage of intermediaries. Another benefit of online marketing is its relatively low cost, which allows companies to save their costs greatly (Pawar, 2014). Finally, one of the greatest benefits of online marketing is that it provides businesses with infinite possibilities to reach their potential customers that go beyond geographical boundaries. As the Internet can be accessed worldwide, firms can expand their markets to not only cover the local markets, but also international, or even global markets. In addition, online marketing is not constrained by time. Companies can be available for customers at

all times; hence, creating more opportunities for firms to generate sales, which will then in turn increase companies' profitability.

However, even though online marketing is considered to be highly advantageous, there are still certain disadvantages to it. One of the greatest disadvantages of online marketing is the limited face-to-face contact (Saulnier, n.d.). Using online channels alone is not sufficient for businesses to create strong relationships or build brand loyalty with its customers, as certain information can only be obtained from face-to-face encounter. Furthermore, the great amount of choices and information available online may cause consumers to become stressed and overwhelmed from information overload (Kimiloglu, 2004; Li & Grey, 2000). When experiencing information overload, consumers are at high risk of making incorrect and unprofitable decisions. Another major drawback of online marketing is the firms' lack or limited of control over its online marketing communications (Talpau, 2014). In the online world, unlike traditional marketing, customers are able to choose what kind of content they would like to view, through which channel they like, or they can skip any information entirely (Keller, 2009; Mohammed, 2010); hence, making it difficult for businesses to grab the attention of their target customers.

Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior can be described as the study of the series of steps taken by individuals or groups when they select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences in order to

satisfy their own needs and desires (Solomon, 2018). It does not specifically refer to the moment when a consumer makes purchases, but it is rather described as an ongoing process involving involves the social and psychological factors, that covers three stages, which are before, during, and after purchases.

In order to further examine the study of consumer behavior, three of the following basic elements must be considered: cognition, affection, and conation (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Cognition refers to the thoughts and beliefs, also known as the thinking, of the consumer about a brand. At this stage, consumers become aware of and gathers information about the brand and its products. Affection or emotion represents the feelings an individual can develop towards a brand. Finally, the conation aspect is the intention of individuals to purchase or not to purchase from a brand (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

Consumer Perception Consumer perception refers to the process by which individuals select, organize, and interpret information in the surroundings to create a meaningful picture of the world (G. Belch & M. Belch, 2004). Understanding consumer perception is very important for businesses in order to develop successful marketing strategies.

There are four stages to consumer perception. The first stage is consumers' sensation, which is the foremost responses of our sensory receptors, such as eyes, ears, nose to basic external stimuli or sensory input, including light, sound, and odor (Solomon, 2018). Selection is the second stage, which is comprised of selective

exposure and selective attention. Selective exposure refers to when an individual decides if they want to be exposed to a stimulus or not (G. Belch & M. Belch, 2004), whereas selective attention can be described as the process when an individual chooses to pay attention to a certain stimulus. The third stage of consumer perceptual process is organization, which can be explained by the Gestalt Psychology, a theory that posits that individuals organize what they perceive in several ways (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). The final step is interpretation, or the process when individuals assign meanings to the sensory stimuli they have received (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh, & Mookerjee, 2010). However, interpretation of a sensory stimuli from different individuals may vary, even though they received the same stimuli in the same environment, as the perceptual process is subjective for each person (Sharma & Singh, 2004).

Consumer Attitude Consumer attitude is "a learnt predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to an object or action" (Anilkumar & Joseph, 2012, p. 1). Consumers can develop either positive or negative attitudes, which can also vary in strength (Hoyer, Pieters, & MacInnis, 2013). Each individual's attitude is unique to those of the others, as attitudes are formed and shaped by the perception, personality, experience and, emotion of the individuals. Attitude plays a major role in consumer decision making, as it can guide one's thoughts, influence feelings, and impact behavior (Anilkumar & Joseph, 2012).

Lutz (1991) presented a theoretical orientation for the study of consumer attitude called the unidimensionalist view of attitude. According to this orientation, an attitude consists of the affective construct only. Cognition, therefore, becomes the cause of attitudes, representing beliefs about brands or products. Once consumers acquire these beliefs, they will then form an attitude by evaluating the brands. Conative or behavioral aspect refers to the intentions to perform a certain behavior as a result of individual's attitude.

Furthermore, the concept of consumer attitude can be explained by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The theory posits that an individual's behavior can be planned and predicted from the person's intention, which is in turn determined by their own attitude towards a behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). In short, an individual is likely to perform a certain behavior when he or she and the significant others in the society possess a favorable attitude towards the action, when the person believes that it is easy for the behavior to be carried out, and vice versa.

Consumer Involvement Consumer involvement is the degree of relevance a person perceived from an object and their interest needs (Solomon, 2018). Assael (2004) explained that consumer's level of involvement varies and depends on a number of factors, such as importance of the object to the consumer, individual's personal interest of the object, perceived risks, and emotional appeal. Furthermore, involvement is an important element that leads to

information search and decision process in consumer behavior (Lee & Bai, 2014; Zaichkowsky, 1985).

There are three types of consumer involvement, including enduring, situational, and response-based involvements (Khare & Rakesh, 2010). Enduring involvement occurs when a consumer searches for information on the products continuously for a long period of time, without having a clear intention to purchase (Richins & Bloch, 1986). Situational involvement, on the contrary, happens when a consumer search for products when they have an intention to purchase. Finally, response-based involvement is regarded as the extension of cognitive and behavioral process that illustrates the whole consumer decision process (Houston & Rothschild, 1978). Thus, this type of involvement includes both pre-purchase and post-purchase involvement (Richins & Bloch, 1986).

Consumer Decision Making Past studies indicate that there are five stages to a consumer's decision-making process (Solomon, 2018); however, consumers do not necessarily go through all five steps in the same manner (Kotler & Keller, 2011).

Problem or Need Recognition is the first step in consumer decision-making process. At this stage, consumers recognize a problem, which is typically a result from the imbalance between the actual state and the desired state of the consumers (Bruner, 1983). Stock depletion, dissatisfaction with current products, and increase or decrease in financial status are all examples of a problem that would cause consumers to think about making a purchase (Solomon,

2018). Information search is the next step and can be conducted both internally and externally. Internal information search refers to when consumers try to remember from their memory, but external information search refers to the search for information through external sources (Rose & Samouel, 2009). The third stage in consumer decision-making is evaluation of alternatives. Once consumers have enough information, they will then list out all the available options, evaluate them, and select the one that best satisfies their needs. The fourth stage in consumer decision-making is the actual purchase of products or services. Finally, the last step is post-purchase evaluation, when consumers decide if they are satisfied or dissatisfied with the purchases. The experiences they have acquired will impact their future decision-making process for similar purchases during the information search stage.

Solomon (2018) further explained that consumer decision-making process can be categorized into three major types. The first type is Extended Problem Solving (EPS) which is commonly used with high involvement products. In EPS, consumers not only search for information internally, but they also conduct active and extensive external search to maximize the amount of information gathered. Another type of decision-making is Limited Problem Solving (LPS). This method is most commonly used with low involvement products. With this method consumers still perform both internal and external searches, but external searches will be more passive or having much lower intensity than EPS. The last

type of decision-making is Habitual Decision Making. As its name suggests, this method is often used with purchases that are routine or habits of the consumers. Decisions are usually made automatically with minimum effort to search for information.

Methodology

A quantitative research approach using survey questionnaire was utilized in this exploratory study of the consumer behavior on the online marketing communications of Mazda brand. The questionnaire consists of five parts focusing on the studies of the process of cognition, affection, and conation of Thai consumers.

Sampling Method As this research aimed to explore the behavior of Thai consumers on Mazda's online marketing communications, the questionnaire was, therefore, distributed at seven Mazda showrooms nationwide with three from the north (Chiang Mai, Lampang, and Phitsanulok provinces), one from central (Bangkok Metropolitan), and three from the south (Suratthani and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces). Moreover, the questionnaire was also distributed through Mazda's online community groups on Facebook in order to reach the unreachable consumers in Thailand, as well as to provide privacy to those who may feel more comfortable participating through the online means. The 200 respondents were either a current owner of a Mazda car or a potential customer, who plans to buy a Mazda car in the next twelve months. Furthermore, the respondents must possess a prerequisite exposure to the

brand's online marketing communications in the past six months in order to be able to state their attitudes toward the brand and its online communications.

Questionnaire Format The questionnaire was formulated in both English and Thai versions and consists of five sections. The questions of the questionnaire are comprised of close-ended questions, with some are in the form of multiple choice. Overall, the questionnaire has details as follows:

Part one is comprised of five screening questions that are used to screen out the respondents who are not qualified for this research. The respondents, who did not meet the requirements at this screening stage, were directed to end the survey. Part two contains three questions on respondents' cognitive stage using an interval scale, including the intensity of Mazda's online media usage, Mazda's online media usage experience, and Mazda brand awareness. Part three contains three questions on the respondents' affective step, which are Mazda brand associations, attitudes towards Mazda's online communications, and Mazda brand attitudes, using an interval scale. Part four consists of one question using an interval scale on the conative stage, focusing on the respondents' purchase intention to buy a Mazda car. Part five is comprised of four questions on the respondents' demographic information about gender, occupation, monthly income, and region of residence using a nominal scale.

Measurement of the Variables In the studies of consumer behavior, the researcher studied the three major key variables of consumer behavior which are cognition,

affection, and conation. According to Romana (2011), cognition refers to a consumer's thought process. In addition, affection is described as the emotional process, whereas conation is the action of the consumers.

Past research studies identified cognition as a thought process that is a part of the consumer behavior, where consumers' knowledge about a brand, product, or service exists (Matthews, Son, & Watchravesringkan, 2014). As a part of this cognition step, the intensity of online media usage, which measures the respondents' time spent on following Mazda's online media platforms, including Website, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Line, was adapted from Duffet (2015) using a five-point, Likert scale, where 5 = Strongly agree and 1 = Strongly disagree.

Moreover, the scale measuring online media usage experience was adopted from Wang and Abdullayeva (2011) with the reliability of .68. Seven statements that best suit this research were chosen from the original's twelve statements. Lastly, the scale of brand awareness, which consists of six statements, was adapted from Sadek, Elwy, and Eldallal (2018). The scale has the reliability of .86. To measure the respondents' level of agreement on online media usage experience and brand awareness, a five-point, Likert scale was utilized, where 5 = Strongly agree and 1 = Strongly disagree.

Affection refers to the emotion and attitudinal aspects of consumer behavior. In order to measure the consumers' brand associations, a scale was adopted from Sadek, Elwy, and Eldallal (2018) with the

reliability of .85. The scale consists of eight statements. In addition, the scale of consumers' attitudes towards online communications, which is comprised of nine statements, was adapted from Luna- Nevarez and Torres (2015) with the reliability of .98. The five-point, Likert scale, where 5 = Strongly agree and 1 = Strongly disagree, was also applied to measure the respondents' level of agreement on brand associations and attitudes towards online communications.

Furthermore, the scale of brand attitudes with eleven pairs of opposing terms was adopted from the research of Rea, Wang, and Stoner (2014) with the reliability of .97. The five-point, semantic differential scale was used to measure the consumers' attitudes towards the brand.

Lastly, conation refers to the action and behavioral aspects of the consumer behavior. A four statements scale was adopted from Rizwan, Oayyum, Oadeer, and Jayed (2014) to measure the consumers' purchase intention. The scale adapted has the reliability of .80. The five-point, Likert scale, where 5 = Strongly agree and 1 = Strongly disagree, was applied to measure respondents' level of agreement on purchase intention.

Data Collection and Data Analysis
The data of this research was collected using online and offline survey distributed from mid-October to early November 2018. The analysis of the data was computed by the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) program and all statistical data was run at a 95% confidence level.

For the analysis of the data, the descriptive statistics was utilized to describe

the means and standard deviation of the data. Furthermore, inferential statistics, which are Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and independent samples t-test analysis, were also used to examine and make inferences about the data collected.

Findings

Among the 237 respondents in the study, the results show that 65.4% of the survey participants are female (155 people), whereas male contributes to only 34.6% (82 people). The results also show most respondents are aged between 30 to 34 years old. In terms of the occupation of the respondents, private company employees constitute the greatest portion of the responses (54.0%). The data findings on respondents' average monthly income reveal that most of the survey participants' income is in the range between 30,001 to 40,000 Baht (31.2%). As for the region of residence, the majority of the respondents are currently residing in Bangkok, accounting for 43.9%. Lastly, the research findings on Mazda cars ownership show that about half (51.5%) of the respondents currently own a Mazda car, while the other half (48.5%) does not yet own a Mazda car, but is likely to buy one in the near future.

Cognitive Part The cognitive part consists of the results on three variables, which are the intensity of online media usage, online media usage experience, and brand awareness. The data on the respondents' intensity of Mazda's online media usage shows that the majority of the respondents visit Mazda's online platforms once or less than once per week for website (32.9%),

Facebook (35.0%), YouTube (33.3%), and Line (31.6%). Moreover, it is reported that 29.1% of the respondents have never used or visited Mazda's Instagram account before. The results on the respondents' online media usage experience depicted that the majority of Mazda's customers neither agree nor disagree with the statements but came close to agreement given the total mean score is at 3.82. The respondents agree most on the statements on increase in purchase intention ($M = 4.18$), and least agree on statements on experience sharing through online media ($M = 3.41$). Finally, the data on the respondents' opinion on the Mazda brand awareness was collected. Overall, the participants of this research's survey agree to the statements with a total mean score of 4.12. Respondents agree most on brand recall ($M = 4.24$) and neither agree nor disagree on brand characteristics but came close to an agreement with a mean score of 3.99.

Affective Part The second part to the study of the consumer behavior is the affective part, which will exemplify three variables including the respondents' opinion on Mazda brand associations, attitudes towards online communications, and brand attitudes. The results show that, in general, the respondents have a positive opinion on Mazda brand associations with a total mean score of 4.00. The respondents mostly agree that they remember Mazda's logo ($M = 4.23$). The respondents least agree that Mazda has a strong brand image; however, the mean score still leans toward agreement ($M = 3.94$). The finding on the respondents' attitude towards Mazda's online communications show that generally, the

respondents agree to the statements with a total mean score of 4.10. The respondents agree most that they feel positive about Mazda's online communications ($M = 4.17$) and agree least that Mazda's online communications are fun to see ($M = 4.03$). Lastly, the results show that the majority of the respondents have positive attitudes toward the Mazda brand with a total mean score of 4.39. Overall, the respondents agree with all eleven positive terms. The terms with the highest mean score include appealing, useful, and exciting ($M_s = 4.45, 4.44,$ and 4.43 , respectively). The terms with the lowest mean score are attractive, beneficial, and enjoyable ($M_s = 4.33, 4.34,$ and 4.35 , respectively).

Conative Part The conative section focuses on the respondents' purchase intention of Mazda cars. Respondents neither agree nor disagree to all four statements with a total mean score of 3.83. Statement on the participants' intention to buy Mazda cars in the future came close to an agreement with a mean score of 3.93 and willingness to buy Mazda cars in the near future is high came closest to the level of neither agree nor disagree ($M = 3.75$).

Statistical Analysis The statistical test results from the correlation analysis between cognitive, affective, and conative parts are shown in Table 1 below. Five major key variables were selected from the three parts to test the relationships in order to describe the consumer behavior. The variables include brand awareness from the cognitive part; brand associations, attitudes towards online communications, and brand

attitudes from the affective part; and purchase intention from the conative part.

The correlation analysis revealed that brand awareness and brand associations have a moderate relationship with a score of .44 ($p < .05$). Attitude towards online

communications and brand attitudes have a stronger relationship with a score of .53 ($p < .05$). Lastly, brand attitudes and purchase intention have a weaker relationship with a score of .36 ($p < .05$).

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

Relationship between	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Brand Awareness <i>and</i> Brand Associations	.44	.00
Attitude towards Online Communications <i>and</i> Brand Attitudes	.53	.00
Brand Attitudes <i>and</i> Purchase Intention	.36	.00

The independent samples *t*-test analysis was conducted to test the differences between the different types of Mazda's customers. In this study, the researcher divided Mazda's customers into two categories based on their Mazda car ownership. The two categories are current customers, or those who already own a Mazda car (122 responses), and potential customers, or those who do not yet own a Mazda car and plan to buy one in the next twelve months (115 responses). The independent-samples *t*-test analysis was used

to test whether the type of Mazda customers has differences on their purchase intention to buy a Mazda car or not.

The results revealed that there is a statistical significance in the difference between the purchase intention of Mazda's current and potential customers ($t[235] = -4.16, p < .05$). The findings in Table 2 show that Mazda's potential customers have higher intention to purchase a Mazda car as the mean score is higher ($M = 4.05$) than that of Mazda's current customers ($M = 3.62$).

Table 2: Independent Samples *t*-test Analysis

Type of Mazda customers	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Current customers	3.62	0.96	- 4.16	235	.00
Potential customers	4.05	0.54			

Discussions

Each of the consumer behavior components will be discussed in the following paragraphs. They are cognitive, affective, and conative parts, and their relationships. In addition, limitations, directions for future research, and practical implications are also addressed.

Cognitive Part

The findings of this research study show that, in general, online media is becoming increasingly important among Thai consumers, as the majority of this research's respondents spend at least once or less than once a week visiting Mazda's online media platforms. The results are consistent with We are Social and Hootsuite's 2018 Global Digital Suite, which stated that the importance of the Internet and online media is growing exponentially, as the number of online users increase drastically every year (Kemp, 2018). The report also revealed that Facebook and YouTube are popular platforms in Thailand, which is also consistent with the research's outcomes. The reason why Facebook and YouTube are rated as Mazda's most used online platform by its customers is plausibly because the communications conducted through these two platforms allow brands to convey more information in detail when compared to other platforms, such as Line or Instagram, which is more suitable for short messages or imagery. As cars are considered high-involvement products, consumers are often looking more for information on the product; hence, making these two platforms widely used among Mazda's customers.

The outcomes on *online media usage experience* illustrate that, in general, consumers of Mazda's cars in Thailand use the brand's online media as a source of information to learn more about the brand and its products. This is consistent with the study of Klein and Ford (2003), which stated that modern consumers are replacing traditional media with online media in order to search for information about brands. Furthermore, the outcomes also revealed that Mazda's consumers are more likely to have higher intention to purchase after using the brand's online media, which is also supported by a past research study that stated that consumers often find online platforms sufficient in providing the information on the brand and that their purchase intention is likely to increase after visiting these platforms (Online Marketing, 2011). The results of the study also indicate that the majority of Mazda's customers feel that the brands' online media platforms have helped improve the brand's customer services; hence, ultimately improve the customers' feelings toward the brand. The findings are in line with the studies of Kimiloglu (2004) and Talpau (2014). According to them, the use of online marketing communications will facilitate the brand's customer services and enhance the brand's relationship with its customers.

Lastly, the outcomes of the research show that, generally, Mazda's customers agree to the statements on *brand awareness*. The research's survey respondents agree that they can quickly recall the Mazda brand, which is compatible with the study of Keller (2013), who explained that a good brand is

the brand that can be recognized and recalled easily by the consumers. Furthermore, the respondents also agree that they can recognize Mazda among other competing brands. The result can also be associated with the theory of Keller (2013), which stated that a brand is a combination of many different components that identify and differentiate it from its competitors. These components can include brand names, logos, symbols, package design, slogans, jingles, signage, spokespeople, URLs, or any other characteristics that do not only identify a product or service, but also distinguish the brand from its competitors. In the past recent years, Mazda had been actively and intensely conducting its marketing campaigns, through both online and traditional media. Therefore, it is possible to explain that the high recognition and recall of the Mazda brand among its customers could be as a result of its successful marketing campaigns. Finally, the results of this research show that the survey participants agree that the Mazda brand is very familiar to them. The result is consistent with Achenbaum (1993) and Keller (2003), who mentioned that in order for a brand to be distinguished from the others, it has to go beyond the tangibles or the product level, and differentiate itself on the intangible aspects, such as emotional values.

Affective Part

Overall, Mazda's customers in Thailand agree on the statements on brand associations. The respondents agree that they are able to remember Mazda's logo, which is compatible with Keller (2013), who

explained that logo is one of the crucial parts of a brand and its image. As mentioned earlier, Mazda had actively and intensely promoted its brand through various campaigns in the past few years, both online and offline. The Mazda logo was placed prominently in almost all of their campaigns, which could have led to the high recognition and recall rate of its logo among Mazda's customers in Thailand. In addition, the respondents also agree that Mazda has a favorable image and strong personality. According to Aaker (2014) a brand is a company's promise to their customer to deliver what a brand stands for in terms of not only functional, but also self-expressive values. As a result, a strong brand refers to the brand that has carefully tailored their brand elements; hence, creating a favorable image and strong personality, which distinguish itself from other brands (Keller, 2013).

The outcomes on the survey participants' attitudes towards Mazda's online communications reveal that overall, the respondents agree on all nine statements. The results show that the respondents feel positively about Mazda's online communications and that they think that Mazda's online communications are good and pleasant. The results are consistent with the research of Talpau (2014), which explained that one of the purposes of a brand's online marketing communications is to create brand awareness, as well as inducing positive and favorable brand attitudes among consumers. According to Talpau (2014), all of the above mentioned could only be achieved when a

brand conducts its online communications well.

Finally, the results of this research study show that the respondents have positive attitudes toward the Mazda brand, as the participants agree on all of the positive terms used to describe the brand. According to the results, the respondents feel that the Mazda brand is appealing, useful and exciting. The outcomes of the research are compatible with the study of Solomon (2018), who described brand attitude as an evaluation that a consumer form continuously about a brand. According to Solomon (2018), brand attitudes can be either positive or negative and can vary in strength. Anilkumar and Joseph (2012) also mentioned that consumers' attitudes toward a brand plays a major role in their decision making as many consumers use their brand attitudes as a frame of reference to guide new information and objects. Furthermore, Rossiter and Percy (1987) also described that a successful brand must be able to achieve positive and favorable attitudes in the minds of the consumers.

Conative Part

The outcomes on the purchase intention of Mazda's current and potential customers in Thailand reveal that the respondents tend to have intention towards buying a Mazda car, although the intention is not very high. The respondents appear to take time in thinking through well before they make a decision to purchase, which is consistent with the research of Zaichkowsky (1985), who mentioned that consumers with high involvement are more likely to search for information, think and learn about the

product as much as possible before they actually decide to make a purchase. This is because cars are considered high-involvement product. As Assael (2004) explained the consumer's level of involvement depends on a number of factors, including the importance of the object to the consumer, the consumers' personal interest of the object, perceived risks, and emotional appeal. Furthermore, the outcomes on the purchase intention of Mazda's customers in Thailand are somewhat compatible to the research study conducted by Solomon (2018), who stated that consumer behavior is not only determined by the time of purchase, but other factors must also be taken into account as well.

Moreover, the findings of this research study also show that Mazda's potential customers tend to have higher intention to purchase a Mazda car, when compared to that of Mazda's current customers. The outcomes are, to a certain extent, consistent with the study of Richins and Bloch (1986). According to them, consumers may not have a clear intention to purchase, even though they constantly following and searching for information on a brand over a period of time, when they have an enduring involvement with the brand or product. On the contrary, Richins and Bloch (1986) also explained that consumers tend to have higher intention to purchase when they have situational involvement on a brand, meaning they are actively searching for information on the brand and product as they plan to purchase. In this research study, Mazda's current customers appear to have enduring involvement, while the potential

customers have situational involvement on Mazda brand and its products.

Relationship between Cognitive, Affective, and Conative Parts

The research findings show that *brand awareness* and *brand associations* have positive and significant relationship. The results suggest that the more brand awareness a consumer possess of a brand, the higher their brand associations of that certain brand will be. The research findings are consistent with Keller (2013), who explained that consumers will form brand associations once they have developed an awareness of a certain brand. In addition, the outcomes are also compatible with Lavidge and Steiner's (1961) Hierarchy of Effect model, which illustrates that consumers must pass on a journey from awareness to knowledge, then liking stage. In simpler words, consumers must first possess an awareness and knowledge of a brand, before they can develop associations with the brand.

Moreover, the outcomes from this section are also compatible with the Multiattribute Attitude Model, which explains that a consumer's attitude towards an object (Ao) will be depending on their beliefs about that object's attributes (Fishbein, 1963, as cited in Solomon, 2018). In other words, when the consumers' beliefs are combined, it can be used to determine their overall attitude towards a certain object or brand.

Furthermore, the outcomes also reveal that *attitudes toward online communications* and *brand attitudes* have a positive and significant relationship. In other

words, the more favorable attitudes a consumer has toward online communications, the better their brand attitudes will be. The outcomes are supported by the research of Mohammed (2010), which stated that a brand's effective online communications could convey satisfaction and positive feelings toward the brand among the consumers. The results are also consistent with the notion of transformational effect, which states that when a consumer develops positive attitude towards an ad or communications of a brand, their positive feeling will be transformed and extended to the brand as well (Rossiter & Percy, 1987).

Lastly, *brand attitudes* and *purchase intention* also have a positive and significant relationship. This signifies that Mazda's customers' purchase intention is positively influenced by their brand attitudes. The results are consistent with the theory of Ajzen (1991), which explained that consumers are likely to have high intention to purchase a product when they have developed favorable attitudes toward the brand. Furthermore, the outcomes can also be explained by Lutz's (1991) unidimensionalist view of attitude that stated that consumers' purchase intention is developed as a result of each individual's attitude.

As a conclusion, the outcomes of this research study are supported by the Hierarchy of Effects Model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). According to this theory, an individual will have to journey through a fixed series of steps of consumer behavior. As the products of the Mazda brand are considered to be high-involvement, the consumer journey will follow the high-

involvement hierarchy or learn, feel, and do (Solomon, 2018). First of all, the respondents developed the Mazda brand awareness, which is considered as the learning or cognitive stage of the hierarchy. Once they are aware of the Mazda brand, the respondents then develop Mazda brand associations, which is consistent with the affective stage of the hierarchy. In addition, further to the affective part, the outcomes also show that respondents of this research must have developed an attitude towards Mazda's online communications first, before forming an attitude towards the Mazda brand. Finally, once the consumers have learned about the brand and developed feelings toward it, they will engage in a relevant behavior by choosing to buy or not to buy the brand, which is measured by their purchase intention in this study.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the researcher's attempt to minimize the limitations in this study, it still cannot be avoided. The first limitation acknowledged in this research is the limited sample size. This study gathered a sample size of only 237 responses, which only barely represents the whole population. In addition, samples collected did not cover all regions in Thailand due to geographical and logistical limitations. Secondly, the method of the research includes an online survey, where the respondents cannot be monitored. As a result, a lot of the data collected via an online method were unusable as the participants may have misunderstood the questions or did not read the instructions

carefully. Finally, the information gathered is specific to only one brand, which, although can be generalized to automobile brands to a certain extent, is not accurate enough to represent all automobile brands in Thailand.

To further expand and improve this research, future researchers are highly encouraged to increase the sample size, so that the data gathered would be more accurate in representing the whole population. Furthermore, the survey should be conducted in all regions in Thailand, by giving out the questionnaires in the major provinces within each region. Moreover, researchers should expand the methodology of the research to include other methods, such as in-depth interviews, which could provide further insights to the topic. In addition, for future research, other automobile brands should be studied in order to inspect the industry in more details and to compare the outcomes between the different brands.

Practical Implications

The first practical implication that marketers could adopt is that, according to the survey's results, the Mazda's brand associations that the respondents rated as strongest are the Mazda logo, followed by the brand's image and personality. Hence, Mazda's marketers should focus on developing online marketing strategies that aim to further enhance the brand's image, as well as putting the brand's logo out prominently as much as possible.

Furthermore, the results also indicated that the weakest Mazda brand association among the respondents is the

brand's characteristics, as the majority of the survey participants reported that it can be difficult for them to recall. Therefore, marketers for Mazda should improve this point of weakness and further enhance their brand's characteristics in order to stand out from the competitors, as well as making these characteristics prominent and memorable, so that the consumers will be able to recognize and recall.

In addition, the research findings also suggest that Facebook is rated as the most used online media platform among Mazda's customers in Thailand, followed by YouTube and Website. Consequently, marketers could further improve their online marketing communications strategies by placing more emphasis on these three platforms than the other online channels. Moreover, marketers could also further enhance their marketing strategies by

developing content in the format that is suitable for each of the brand's online platforms.

More importantly, the research findings also indicate that the information given on Mazda's online communications are among the major factors that lead to higher purchase intention among their customers in Thailand. As a result, marketers could also emphasize on keeping the information on their online platforms up-to-date and focusing on creating content that is information-centric.

In conclusion, marketers and business owners of automobile brands can take these points into consideration when creating their online marketing communications strategies or conduct future research in order to gain more significant insights, develop better understanding, and further enhance their marketing communications strategies.

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