

## **Contributing Factors to Apple's Sustainability in Malaysia's Information and Communication Technology Industry**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Apple has a large customer base in Malaysia because they offer products of superior design and features. The main objective of this study is to determine the contributing factors to Apple's sustainability in Malaysia's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Industry. This study is conducted based on quantitative research with 100 targeted respondents from Malaysia. The findings indicate that the marketing strategies, brand awareness, and customer experience are the major factors of the successful pathway of Apple's sustainability. The research concludes that Apple Industry should adapt a frequent reengineering approach where the existing and upcoming Apple products will satisfy customer needs.

**Keywords:** Apple Industry, Customer Experience, Malaysian Information and Communication Technology Industry, Marketing Strategies, Sustainability

### **INTRODUCTION**

Organizations must be vigilant and operate within the sustainable business framework (Hu & Kee, 2021). Apple industry is a successful technological-based industry that has emerged and sustained globally for over 45 years. This paper intends to examine the contributing factors that lead to Apple's sustainable business growth in Malaysia.

Apple Inc. is a global firm based in the United States that designs and manufactures consumer electronics gadgets such as personal computers, software, and portable digital music players. Apple has become the world's most valuable and largest technology company by sales since January 2021 (Counterpoint, 2021).

Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs established Apple Inc on April 1, 1976, under the name of Apple Computer, Inc. When Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs founded Apple, they were both college dropouts. Apple was known as "Apple Computer, Inc" for 30 years. The company then eliminated the word "Computer" due to the expansion of technology ("Apple Inc.," 2019). Apple regained profitability because of the reinvigorating "Think Different" program, which helped to restore Apple's reputation after a period of decline in the 1990s.

As Apple has expanded, its mission and vision statements have changed over time. The company's latest mission statement is "to bring the best user experience to its customers through its innovative computer hardware, computer software, and services" (Gaille, 2020). Besides, Apple's vision statement is "we believe that we are on the face of the earth to make great products and that is not changing. We are here to make the best products on earth, and to leave the world better than we found it" (Gaille, 2020). These

imply that Apple aims to deliver an exceptional user experience by offering user-friendly products to its customer to get good performance (Keenyn, 2020).

The widely known Apple's products include Macintosh computers, iPod digital music player, Mac OS X operating system, and iTunes Music Store. Apple's first product was a box that allowed free long-distance calls, followed by computer innovations. In addition to selling its products through its retail stores, the company also sells its products online, or through third-party wholesalers. As Apple's products have met consumers' expectations, this allows it to become one of the world's top five companies today (Davies, 2018).

The ICT sector in Malaysia is one of the fastest-growing industries, as it is worth 18.5 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018 and is predicted to reach 20 percent by 2020 (International Trade Administration, 2020). This typically attracts foreign companies to invest in Malaysia's ICT market. There are two possible market entry strategies for the United States corporations, such as Apple, to enter, partnership, distributorship, and joint venture with a local partner or establishing an in-market presence (International Trade Administration, 2020). Apple has entered Malaysia's ICT market through the first way. To sell its products in Malaysia, Apple has authorized some resellers in Malaysia which are typically labeled with Apple Authorised Reseller (iStudy and Challenger), Apple Premium Reseller (Machines), and Apple Shop such as Harvey Norman at Queensbay Mall (Expatgo, 2013).

To sustain in a rivalry market, Apple needs to gain competitive advantages and market share. Market share is the most critical metric for measuring a company's marketing efforts (Gemici, 2017). Domestic market share gives the company an overview of its revenue compared to the overall domestic industry and competitors (Jake, 2020). Hence, a company can increase its market share by conducting continuous innovation, lowering prices, strengthening customer relationships, advertising, increasing quality, and acquiring (Corporate Finance Institute, 2021).

However, Apple's product's mobile vendor market share was placed in the second-highest rank (20.39%) compared to other leading mobile vendors in Malaysia (Muller, 2021). Huawei led the mobile vendor market in Malaysia with a 21.15 percent share in June 2020 (Muller, 2021). The Android market has grown more open, and people's trust in well-known brands has dwindled (Muller, 2021). Apple is up against an intense competitive rivalry force, which means that Apple's competitors have a significant influence on one another (Aljafari, 2016). As a result, Apple's greatest challenge is to compete with Android where its market share is hovering around 80% (Tan, 2020). Furthermore, due to Apple's increasing price in recent years, its threat of substitutes is even higher (Gazerani & Joanneum, 2020).

Besides, the current market share of Apple (iOS) is stated as 22.21 percent, which is lower than Android's market share of 76.45% (StatCounter, 2021). Comparing the market share from March 2021 and April 2021, Apple showed a decrease of 1.48%, while Android turned up to show an increase of 1.48% (StatCounter, 2021). Table 1 shows the current market share of Apple and Android for the year 2021 derived from the current statistical graph. Meanwhile, large organizations are relatively easy to comply with sustainable practices (Gandhan, Kee, Senan, & Senan 2021). Hence, Apple also aims to achieve sustainable business growth in Malaysia's ICT industry, although it faces fierce competition in its market share and strong competitors such as Huawei. Therefore, the primary motivation for choosing this research topic is to determine the factors contributing to Apple's product's long-term sustainability in Malaysia's ICT industry. This study aims to determine the Malaysians' opinions on various marketing strategies, their perceptions of brand loyalty, and their satisfaction with Apple Inc.'s customer service provided by its retail stores in Malaysia.

**Table 1. Market Shares**

Month	Mobile Vendor Market Share in Malaysia (%)		Increase/ Decrease in Market Shares	
	Apple (iOS)	Android	Apple (iOS)	Android
January	22.12	76.63	-	-
February	22.06	76.55	(0.06)	(0.08)
March	23.69	74.97	1.63	(1.58)
April	22.21	76.45	(1.48)	1.48

Source: StatCounter (2021)

According to Keller (2009), brand awareness is the implementation of a brand in a consumer’s memory. It is the degree of customer recognition of a product (Kopp, 2021). It fosters the ability of a consumer to recognize or recall a brand in the categories when they make purchases (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Brand awareness is also understood as how customers associate with the brand through the products they desire to own (Shabbir, Khan & Khan, 2017). It increases market shares and sales as the first step to achieve performance-marketing goals (Walgrove, 2020). The technology industry needs to raise brand awareness (Appelt, 2019) by any means available, such as social media and the internet (Pandey et al., 2021).

Companies need to understand their competitor in the market and how strong each competitor in achieving brand awareness among their potential customers (Grams, 2018). Building and sustaining a strong business reputation, introducing new products or services successfully, finding and retaining loyal customers, and promoting the business through various platforms are all possible outcomes of creating brands and strengthening them in the minds of the consumer (Marrs, 2021). In addition, word-of-mouth (WOM) is marketing advertising that can be implemented through public activities. This will ensure companies spread and promote their product vigorously (Kenton, 2019). Thus, this will enhance the sustainability of Apple in the Malaysian industry.

Marketing strategy is an overall business’s game plan which solely focuses on reaching prospective consumers and building customer loyalty toward the product and services offered (Barone, 2021). The organization can promote its business, court suitable client types, and allocate its resources correctly (Financier Worldwide, 2014). Moreover, a marketing strategy can also be a source of important information for potential investors analyzing their businesses (Gregory, 2020).

A good marketing strategy can help the organization to understand consumer’s needs and identify their best customers. One of the business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing strategies is that organizations can use social media such as Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube for advertising their product or services to attract potential customers. Hence, a marketing strategy helps a company to promote the business to the targeted audience, assist the companies which keen to understand their customer, and help to brand their businesses (Quain, 2019).

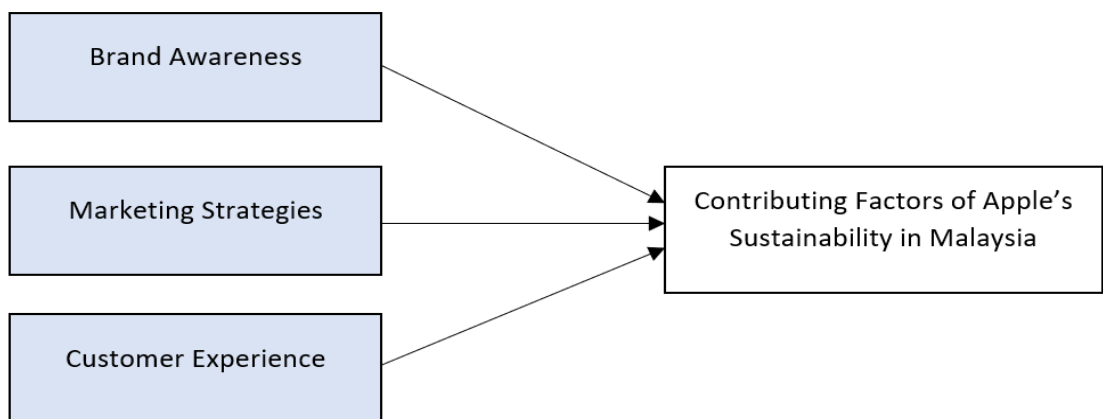
Through a successful marketing strategy, an organization can achieve five core elements: transparency, discipline and emphasis, data-driven, long-term capital and sales, as well as marketing alignment (Smith, 2020). Marketing capability has a big impact on competitive advantage, leading to a good impact on the financial performance of the company (Kamboj, Goyal & Rahman, 2015). Uncoordinated promotion campaigns, inadequate monitoring, and budget problems are all consequences of poor marketing strategies (McQuerrey, 2017). Thus, the requirements for an effective marketing strategy may include a focus on quality and speed, orientation to market and

customer, consideration of competitors, high creativity, and innovation (Porter; Feurer & Chaharbaghi; Sirvastava et al.; Sharkie, in Aghazadeh, 2015).

Customer experience is a strategic strategy in generating holistic customer value, differentiating oneself, and establishing a long-term competitive advantage (Jain, Aagja, & Bagdare, 2017). It is "a particular incident, feeling, or other thing that a person has gone through." (Experience, 2021) Customer experience or more known as CX, is the customers' holistic perception of a company's business or brand (Hotjar, 2021). Customer experience deals with how a customer reacts to all stages of customers (Hueffner, 2020). Meanwhile, a customer may relate an experience to some specific aspects of the offering, such as a brand (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009) or technology (McCarthy & Wright, 2004).

Based on the International Data Corporation survey, it was proven that over 72 percent of the respondents agreed that high customer experiences strategies are led by higher executives. A positive customer experience is critical for business because it can boost revenue and build customer loyalty to the company or brand (Bordeaux, 2018). In addition, a positive customer will also promote loyalty, retain customers, and encourage brand advocacy, which are crucial to the sustained growth of any business (Bordeaux, 2018). Having satisfied customers remand an organization and bring it prosperity (Cater in Aghazadeh, 2015). Businesses should also concentrate on creating great experiences for customers as it will result in high revenue, increase customer loyalty, and reduce the cost for marketing purposes (Spectrio, 2021). According to Hueffner (2021), half of the customers would switch to a competitor due to bad experiences, and this concludes that even one bad experience could impact negatively brand reputability.

Hence, our research framework in the present study is formed in Figure 1 after reviewing the related literature.



**Figure 1:** Research Framework

## RESEARCH METHOD

The target population for this research was 100 respondents from Malaysia. Most of the respondents are aged between 21 to 23 years old, 61 of 100 respondents are females while 60 of the respondents were students. To investigate the contributing factors to Apple's sustainability in Malaysia's ICT Industry, a survey was distributed among people who live in Malaysia, and own any types of gadgets.

Quantitative research is focused on numerical data (Research World, 2019). Quantitative data comprises closed-ended information such as that the information found on attitude

or behavior (Mondal & Mondal, 2018). We used the online survey technique by Google Form since a questionnaire is the most appropriate method to collect information or data effectively and accurately (Love, 2014). However, the main purpose of using a questionnaire is to get respondents' varied and comparable points of view to analyze as it is effective in measuring respondent's thoughts and perceptions on a large number of subjects (McLeod, 2018). Also, a questionnaire is an effective data collection method since it uses both open and closed questions to collect data.

The segregated sections in the questionnaire (Google form) are 1) respondents' demographics gathering the demographic information of gender, age, education, employment, and annual income; 2) brand awareness collecting the general questions of respondents' awareness on Apple's product; 3) marketing strategies consisting of general questions regarding the strategies implemented by Apple to grab customers' attention; and 4) customer experience gathering information of customers' experience and satisfaction towards Apple products.

Descriptive and reliability analysis were used in the present research and the questionnaire was designed to test the three factors that affect Apple's sustainability in Malaysia's ICT, namely brand awareness, marketing strategy, and customer experience. The items in the questionnaire were designed in English and 5-point Likert scale was used in all the sections except section 1 and section 2. Brand awareness (Section 2) was mostly calculated with the descriptive analysis because there are only three items that are related to the Likert scale.

Data was analysed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 25 in this study. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed. The present study received 100% responses from the respondents. Descriptive statistics were estimated for the various constructs and frequency tables were made for all the variables in Section 1 and Section 2. Besides that, data consistency was also checked using the Cronbach's alpha index which is through the regression analysis for Section 3 and 4. Furthermore, correlation is used in this study to establish the direction of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

Moreover, the present study referred to Apple's websites to get some useful information about the contributing factors. The present researchers did collect the source of materials from journals or articles to strengthen the knowledge about Apple. Hence, information gathered online helped the present researchers in having related extensive knowledge.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A quantitative survey was used to perform the research. This survey included a total of 100 Malaysian respondents. The survey was distributed over social media for three weeks. The questionnaire was measured through descriptive analysis and reliability analysis. There were 41 items examined through the online survey and a 100% response rate is gained. The descriptive analysis was carried out with 5 variables with 22 items and 3 variables with 24 items. The items in the questionnaire were tested for consistency through the reliability analysis.

### **Demographic Analysis**

The demographic analysis was measured through the descriptive analysis. Based on the descriptive analysis, the majority of the respondents were female (61%), followed by male (39%). Most of the respondents are aged between 21 – 23 years old (54%). The detailed analysis of demographic information was presented in Table 2. The frequency analysis was conducted by IBM SPSS for Part 1 of the questionnaire (demographic information).

**Table 2. Demographic Analysis**

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>	16-17	7	7.0
	18-20	13	13.0
	21-29	54	54.0
	30-39	10	10.0
	40-49	4	4.0
	50-59	12	12.0
<b>Gender</b>	Male	39	39.0
	Female	61	61.0
<b>Education</b>	High School	14	14.0
	Foundation/ Diploma	22	22.0
	Bachelor's Degree	57	57.0
	Master's Degree	7	7.0
<b>Employment</b>	Student	60	60.0
	Employed	34	34.0
	Not Employed	3	3.0
	Retired	3	3.0
<b>Annual Income</b>	RM0 – RM10,000	70	70.0
	RM10,001 - RM30,000	10	10.0
	RM30,001 - RM50,000	6	6.0
	RM50,001 - RM70,000	5	5.0
	RM70,001 – RM100,000	5	5.0
	RM100,001 and above	4	4.0

**Reliability**

Cronbach's Alpha was used to find the reliability of the variables of Apple's success in Malaysia. The Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency which relates to how each item is related as a group (Akhtar, Azeem, Basiouni, Ban & Alvi, 2020). It is used to test the scales and the reliability of the scales created through research (Taber, 2017). Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 and above is good, 0.80 and above is better and 0.90 and above is the best (Cronbach's Alpha, 2018). Brand Awareness carries the lowest Cronbach's Alpha, which is lower than 0.7 because the number of items and the Likert scale were lesser than this variable. The range of the Cronbach's Alpha for other variables is between 0.90 and 0.99. Thus, it shows that the remaining variables in the present study have high reliability and consistency. As for the brand awareness variables, it is not suitable to find the reliability using the reliability analysis under SPSS because the items were small, and the items related to brand awareness were string variables unacceptable to run in the reliability analysis. However, from the questionnaire, the respondents' responses for brand awareness were analyzed using descriptive analysis.

**Table 3. The Descriptive Analysis for Brand Awareness**

Responses		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Heard of Apple brand before?</b>	Yes	99	99.0
	No	1	1.0
<b>How do you know about Apple?</b>	Social media	88	88.0
	Family and friend	75	75.0
	Newspaper and magazine	27	27.0
	Advertisement	60	60.0

<b>Bought Apple products before?</b>	Yes	86	86.0
	No	14	14.0
<b>Types of Apple products bought before?</b>	iPhone	77	77.0
	iPad	41	41.0
	Mac	22	22.0
	TV	7	7.0
	Music	7	7.0
	Air pods	24	24.0
	Never purchased	15	15.0
<b>How often you have used Apple's products?</b>	Never	13	13.0
	Rarely	20	20.0
	Sometimes	18	18.0
	Frequent	49	49.0
<b>Rate of Apple's brand</b>	Rate of 1	2	2.0
	Rate of 2	1	1.0
	Rate of 3	14	14.0
	Rate of 4	28	28.0
	Rate of 5	55	55.0

**Note:** \* Shows N > 100 because respondents can choose more than 1 options

### Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis calculated to determine the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient with a two-tailed significant test is shown in Table 4. The correlation analysis is used to find the strength of the relationship between two observed variables (Schober, Boer, & Schwarte, 2018). Before determining the correlation analysis, the computation was done on the dependant and independent variables. The correlation or reliability analysis measures were executed to impose more confidence on the reliability of the variables (Akbiyik & Senturk, 2019). As for this research, marketing strategies, brand awareness, and customer experience were made as the independent variables while Apple's sustainability was made as the dependent variable.

As shown in Table 4, all independent variables of marketing strategies, brand awareness, and customer experience are significantly related to the dependent variable of sustainability,

**Table 4. Correlation Analysis**

Construct	Sustainability	Marketing Strategies	Brand Awareness	Customer Experience
Sustainability	<b>1.000</b>			
Marketing Strategies	0.754**	<b>1.000</b>		
Brand Awareness	0.633**	0.800**	<b>1.000</b>	
Customer Experience	0.605**	0.785**	0.790**	<b>1.000</b>

Note: N=100, \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 5. Summary of Regression Analysis**

Variables	Standardized Coefficients Beta
Marketing Strategies	0.713***
Brand Awareness	0.691***
Customer Experience	0.639***

Note: Constant Variable: Sustainability  
 N=100; \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

Table 5 shows that all the independent variables are significant to the dependent variable. These findings show that the marketing strategies, brand awareness, and customer experience have a positive impact on Apple’s sustainability. However, the independent variable of marketing strategies has the strongest influence on Apple’s sustainability. Thus, it is proven that the hypothesis, H1, H2, and H3 are supported. Table 6 shows the hypotheses interpretation.

**Table 6. Hypothesis Interpretation**

	Hypothesis	Results
H1	Marketing strategies influence Apple’s sustainability	Supported
H2	Brand awareness influence Apple’s sustainability	Supported
H3	Customer experience influence Apple’s sustainability	Supported

## CONCLUSIONS

Apple Inc. is a successful company in the worldwide market today and in Malaysia, as it is attributed to its high brand awareness, effective marketing strategies, and impeccable customer experience. The present study concluded that Apple products, in general, are costlier than other Tech company products like Techno, Dell, and HP, which are major competitors in Malaysia’s ICT market. Though their product price is high, the responses in terms of buying Apple’s product are still 86% positive.

The study also concludes that the popularity of Apple products in Malaysia is subject to demand and may be affected if Malaysia’s economy begins to falter and the level of unemployment increases. This conclusion is made since the majority of the respondents are employed with average income earners.

Also, the study concludes that product differentiation and social media marketing strategy has proved to be more effective in marketing Apple’s products. Thus, more consideration should be given to these strategies since they yield effective results.

On the other hand, other factors which lead to Apple’s sustainability in Malaysia can be studied in future research. As indicated in past studies, employees’ well-being is one of the factors contributing the organizational success (Ahmad, Saffardin, & Teoh, 2020; Juliana, Saffardin, & Teoh, 2021). Hence, organizational factors, such as psychosocial safety climate, which are related to employees’ well-being, can be studied in future research (Teoh & Kee, 2020), with the mediating factors of job demands and work engagement (Teoh & Kee, 2018).

Finally, Apple does not only excel in marketing strategies and brand awareness while they also ensure customers have a memorable experience whenever they visit Apple retail stores in Malaysia. The shareholders of Apple in Malaysia need to focus and enhance the marketing strategies, brand awareness, and customer experience in the business to bring Apple’s sustainability to the next level of success.



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