

The influence of brand slogan-sponsored event congruity on brand trust: The mediating role of attitude towards sponsorship

Noraziah Mohd Amin^{1*}, Nursafwah Tugiman², Mohamad Noor Salehuddin Sharipudin³

¹*Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, 13500 Permatang Pauh, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

²*School of Multimedia Technology and Communication, College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06100 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia*

³*Faculty of Modern Languages and communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the prevalent practice of sponsorship globally, there is currently little academic research on the relationship between brand slogans and sponsored events, and how this association impacts consumers' brand trust indirectly through their attitude towards sponsorship. The present research investigates this issue by employing the theory of congruity in an experimental study involving 330 consumer participants. This study aims to achieve the following objectives: 1) To investigate if brand slogan-sponsored event perceived congruity (BSSEC) impacts consumers' attitude towards sponsorship (ATS); 2) To examine if BSSEC influences consumers' brand trust (BT); and 3) To explore to what extent consumers' ATS mediates BT. To obtain the answers, a one-way ANOVA was performed, and the results demonstrated that the higher the consumers' BSSEC, the more positive their ATS. Besides, the data was also analysed using Hayes's PROCESS Macro Model 4 and it was discovered that the total effect model for BT was statistically significant, with an F-value of 122.2529 and a p-value of .000, accounting for 27.15% of the variation in BT. The significant overall impact of BSSEC on BT, considering both direct and indirect paths, indicates that the effect of BSSEC on BT is partially mediated by consumers' ATS. The data apparently highlights the significance of aligning brand messages with sponsored events to improve perceived congruence and, therefore, produce more favourable sentiments from consumers, ultimately impacting brand trust. Thus, marketers should select a brand slogan that reflects the brand's core values and resonates with the target audience while ensuring the sponsored event aligns with the slogan's message, theme, and emotional appeal to create a seamless and authentic brand-event connection.

^{1*} Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* noraziahm@uitm.edu.my

1. INTRODUCTION

Kohli et al. (2007) contend that slogans may serve as a means of temporarily promoting a brand, such as by associating it with an event like the Olympics, in addition to establishing a long-term relationship with the company's identity. According to Brasel and Gips (2011), the energy drink company, Red Bull has created its brand identity by using the tagline, "Gives You Wings" in promotional activities such as sponsoring downhill street luge championships and aeroplane races. Undoubtedly, brand slogans have been used to promote brands through sponsorship (e.g., Conway, 2022; Purves et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024) and it is valuable to investigate this in order to have a better understanding of how brand slogans function in sponsorship. The study by Quintal et al. (2020) suggests that sponsorship may be a persuasive technique, and this can perhaps be realised through the use of brand slogans (Lamichhane, 2021) that adds financial value to a brand when they are consistent and well-articulated. The significance of sponsorship in contemporary times, particularly in terms of its ability to influence consumer behaviour and generate financial gains, underscores the need to understand this issue. This research contributes to broader societal impacts by promoting ethical sponsorship practices, encouraging brands to align their slogans with events in a way that fosters transparency and authenticity, ultimately enhancing consumer trust. By understanding how congruent brand-event associations influence perceptions, businesses can adopt responsible marketing strategies that not only drive financial success but also build meaningful and trustworthy relationships with their audiences.

1.1 Problem statement

Brand slogans are vital for brands, enhancing identity, aiding recall, and differentiating them in consumers' minds (Kohli et al., 2007; Doyle, 2014). Despite their importance, there is limited research specifically on brand slogans (Lee et al., 2020; Musté et al., 2015). They are often studied as part of broader concepts like brand identity (Qu et al., 2020) or brand image (Johan et al., 2022), rather than as standalone entities. However, brand slogans play significant roles, including building consumer trust (Govers, 2013). While brand slogans receive attention in advertising, marketing, and tourism, there remains a gap in understanding their role in sponsorship (Boshoff & Gerber, 2008). Little is known about the impact of brand slogan-sponsorship congruity on consumer trust (Carrillat et al., 2015). Hence, the present study examines this relationship, aiming to understand its effects on consumer attitudes and brand trust.

The study's focus on brand slogans in sponsorship stems from the lack of research attention in this area (Wakefield et al., 2020). While some studies touch on brand slogans in sponsorship, they often overlook their direct impact on consumer perceptions (Hendriks et al., 2020). Additionally, most existing studies use real brand slogans, whereas this study employs fictitious ones, thus bridging a gap in the literature. The study also investigates the role of brand slogan-sponsorship congruity in shaping consumer trust, thereby filling a gap in current sponsorship research (Roy & Graeff, 2003). It aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how brand slogans influence consumer perceptions in sponsorship contexts, potentially shedding light on overlooked aspects of sponsorship effects. The theoretical underpinnings for the study include congruity theory, which has been underutilised in understanding brand slogan-sponsorship relationships (Trendel & Warlop, 2007). Additionally, the study explores the potential of brand slogans as antecedents for brand trust, an area that has been relatively neglected in sponsorship literature (Shin et al., 2018). By focusing on these aspects, the study aims to advance knowledge in the field of sponsorship research, providing insights into the effects of brand slogans on consumer trust. Based on the arguments and the rationale for conducting the present study, the answers to the following research questions are sought:

1. Does consumers' brand slogan-sponsored event perceived congruity (BSSEC) influence their attitude towards sponsorship (ATS)?

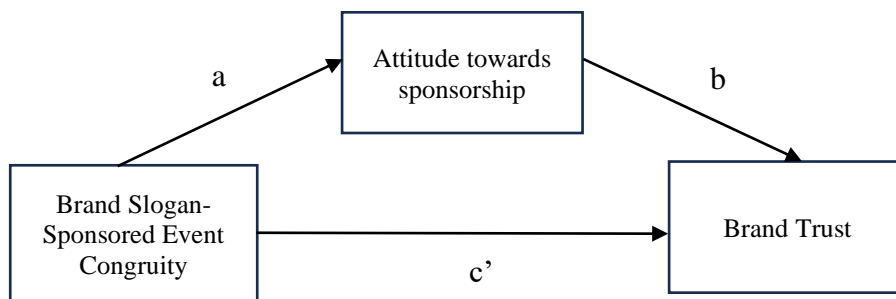
2. Does consumers' brand slogan-sponsored event perceived congruity (BSSEC) influence their brand trust (BT)?

3. To what extent does consumers' attitude towards sponsorship (ATS) mediate the relationship between BSSEC and brand trust (BT)?

1.2 Research framework

Olson (2010) highlights that the majority of research on sponsorship still focuses on a limited number of cause-and-effect connections. Consequently, there is a need for comprehensive models that incorporate multiple cause-and-effect interactions in order to develop a full understanding of sponsorship outcomes. Therefore, a conceptual model is constructed to establish the relationship between brand slogan-sponsored event congruity (BSSEC) and brand trust (BT). This model proposes that the alignment between a business's tagline and a sponsored event has affects customers' trust in the brand. The conceptual model illustrates that the antecedent variable, BSSEC, influences consumers' perception of congruity, namely, whether the brand slogan and sponsored event align with one another or not. The model also examines customers' anticipated attitudes towards sponsorship, which subsequently influence the level of brand trust among consumers.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Brand Slogan-Sponsored Event Congruity with Mediating Effect of Attitude towards Sponsorship with Brand Trust



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brand slogans and sponsorship studies

Brand slogans are often used in long-term brand identity strategies and occasionally in short-term promotions linked to major events (Kohli et al., 2007; Johan et al., 2022). Since sponsorship is a part of advertising and brand slogans are integral to advertising, there is a common connection between brand slogans and sponsorship (e.g., Mulcahy, 2003; Parvizi et al., 2016; Rahman, 2021; Rosengren & Dahlén, 2006). However, the majority of research on sponsorship has not consider brand slogans as primary antecedents, but rather as a supplementary or subordinate element of the primary antecedents. For example, in the study conducted by Mason and Cochetel (2006), the focus was only on examining and evaluating the brand slogan within the construct of brand awareness. Specifically, the researchers studied the effectiveness of matching the brand phrase with an appropriate symbol on a pack of cigarettes. Brand slogans have primarily been examined in the context of sponsorship as a stimulus in experimental studies. For example, Huang (2020) conducted a study where a brand slogan was presented on the sponsorship page of a fictional fitness mobile application called "RUNIT," without directly influencing the outcome investigated in the study. Besides, the study of Coppetti et al. (2009) focuses on brand slogans being used as part of the

stimulus material which was on-site signage of a sponsored event. Also, the study of Xu et al. (2024) involved brand slogans being incorporated into on-site signage at a sponsored event to evaluate brand recognition. Furthermore, the research conducted by Aissa and Matar (2016) involves identifying the sponsoring company by analysing the slogans shown on several components associated with the athletic event, including the players' T-shirts, access tickets to the match, and billboards. On the other hand, the study by Rahman (2021) focuses on a brand's slogan being adapted to match a television event.

2.2 The concept of congruity in sponsorship

The words "fit" and "congruence" in the context of sponsorship are considered to be equivalent (McDonnell & Moir, 2014). "Fit" is sometimes described as a strategic alignment in goals, target audiences, and/or values between a sponsoring company and a sponsored not-for-profit service provider (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). In addition to the commonly used term "fit" in the sponsorship sector, academics also often use the term "congruity." The term "congruity" is defined by Jagre et al. (2001) to refer to the extent to which customers consider a sponsoring business's brand, product, or service as being closely related to an event, according to their understandings and assumptions. Sponsor and sponsee congruence, as defined by Weeks et al. (2008), refers to the extent to which a sponsor and a share a logical connection. The congruence of the sponsor's and the sponsored entity's values and image is known as "sponsorship congruity" (Barve, 2023).

2.3 Sponsorship congruity levels and their results

Previous research suggests that sponsors and events that are perfectly matched produce favourable consumer attitudes towards the sponsor (Kim & Choi, 2022). However, Fleck and Quester (2007) and Mazodier and Quester (2014) found contradictory findings regarding to consumers' perception of the congruity between a sponsor and an event. This discrepancy may be attributed to the possibility that congruity can change over time, despite the literature's view of it as a generally stable variable. According to Olson and Thjomoe (2011) and Trendel and Warlop (2007), low sponsor and event congruity is likely to result in higher identification than high sponsor and event congruity. This is because individuals may find certain elements of incongruence to be fascinating. According to the study of Moharana et al. (2023), both high-congruent and low-congruent sponsor brands can be successful depending on the extent to which consumers identify with the brand community. The study by Aguiló-Lemoine et al. (2020) discovered that when evaluating sponsorship effectiveness based on attitudes toward the sponsor brand, Study 1 revealed a strong positive impact of congruence, while Study 2 found no notable differences in brand attitudes regardless of congruence. Aguiló-Lemoine et al. (2020) claim that except in cases when the sponsorship seeks to increase recall of new brands, congruence is preferred over incongruence non sponsor brands. These researchers' findings support the significance of controlling congruence degrees in online sports event sponsorship because of the effects on sponsorship efficacy and mental processing. Thus, while sponsorship congruity is generally associated with positive consumer attitudes, its effects are not always consistent.

2.4 Sponsorship effects on brand trust

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as a consumer's confidence in the brand's capacity to fulfil its stated purpose. Also, consumers' perception of a brand's honesty, positive intentions, and superior quality is known as brand trust (Tosun, 2020). Khuong and Chau (2017) assert that brand trust is a pivotal factor in consumer-brand interactions, as it is defined as the connection between a customer and a brand that may be influenced by satisfaction. According to Aaker and Moorman (2023), branded social programs can help develop a consumer relationship built on trust and respect. As for sponsorship effects on brand trust, the study by Pan and Phua (2021) revealed that the game location and team performance had both primary and secondary effects on sponsor brand loyalty and trust. Additionally, the combined

impacts of team performance and game location on sponsor brand loyalty and trust were mitigated by fan identification (Pan & Phua, 2021). Pfeuffer and Huh (2020) discovered that consumers' trust in the product reviewer and their attitudinal reactions are significantly impacted negatively by sponsorship disclosure: customers are more likely to have negative opinions and less trust in the reviewer when sponsorship, in any form, is revealed than when it is not. In terms of sponsorship congruity, the study by Khuong and Chau (2017) revealed that there was no discernible relationship between sponsor-event fit and brand trust. Such finding probably suggests that more studies on sponsorship congruity should be conducted To reach more conclusive results. As proposed by Shin et al. (2018), further research is needed to investigate other sponsorship impacts, such as brand trust, in relation to brand loyalty and brand image-event alignment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study used a quantitative research approach, specifically an experimental design, to gather input from participants through a survey. The research strategy utilised in this study is a true experiment, where pre-designed stimuli were shown to participants in order to elicit their answers. There were three distinct degrees of congruity between brand slogans and sponsored events, each assigned to three separate randomised groups of participants. The experiment used a between-groups design, including 3 levels of BSSEC (high, low, moderate). The same slogan was used in three newspaper stories, with three different events included.

3.2 Stimulation/manipulation development

The stimulations/manipulations used in this study consisted of three news reports containing objective or neutral reports about a brand slogan, a sponsored event and a description of the event that represented the 3 different BSSEC levels. The manipulations' contents were developed in stages and validated through 4 pre-tests. Through iterative testing and refinement, the manipulations were optimised to achieve the desired experimental conditions.

3.3 Questionnaire development

The researchers adapted the items developed by Speed and Thompson (2000) to assess the alignment between a brand's slogan and a sponsored event. The scale used by Olson (2010) was employed to assess the participants' attitude towards sponsorship. Also, the researchers decided to assess brand trust by using the brand trust measuring items used by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). The questionnaire developed by adapting these researchers' items was later verified by selected expert reviewers.

3.4 Population and sampling method

According to Lehto et al. (2014), using a student sample is a frequently used method in experimental design. Yuan et al. (2019) state that a substantial body of research across several disciplines used university students as respondents. Given that the current research does not analyse the demographic features of the participants as its variables and students are also generally consumers of products, it is reasonable to choose university students as the sample. According to Andrade (2021), a convenience sample is obtained from a readily available source for the researcher. Thus, firstly, the current investigation employed convenience sampling, a form of non-probability sampling method, by choosing university students from the local area and adjacent regions to represent consumer population. Andrade (2021) claims that a study utilising a convenience sample may have significant internal validity if the results are credible and the data were appropriately analysed and the study followed acceptable methodology, this would be feasible (Andrade, 2021). As Andrade (2021) proposed, random sampling is possible within convenience samples (Andrade,

2021), participants from the student sample were next randomly selected based on their matric numbers using simple random sampling until the targeted sample size was achieved.

3.5 Data collection method

Online surveys provide challenges for researchers due to factors such as physical distance, limited personalisation, and potential distractions and as a result, researchers have little control over the conditions in which respondents take these surveys (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017). Most experimental studies' data collection is conducted in a laboratory setting because it allows the researcher to accurately control the context in which controlled circumstances are applied and findings are assessed (Crano et al., 2023). Therefore, in order to verify the credibility of the participants' responses [through](#) real-time monitoring, the researcher opted to conduct a laboratory-based data collection using a controlled setting (Geuens & De Pelsmacker, 2017). However, the participants were randomly assigned the manipulations of the study.

3.6 Data analysis method

IBM SPSS version 28 and Hayes' PROCESS Macro were used for data analysis. SPSS was chosen for its ability to handle large datasets and perform various statistical analyses. Hayes' Process Macro was selected for its specialized features in mediation and moderation analysis, which were crucial for understanding relationships between variables and interpreting the data effectively.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic data

Table 1: Demography Data for the Three Cells (Stimuli)

Demographic details	Cell 1 (Stimulus 1)		Cell 2 (Stimulus 2)		Cell 3 (Stimulus 3)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Gender						
Male	32	30.8	17	15.7	32	27.1
Female	72	69.2	91	84.3	86	72.9
Age						
18	5	4.8	2	1.9	5	4.2
19	63	60.6	64	59.3	102	86.4
20	3	2.9	15	13.9	9	7.6
21	3	2.9	10	9.3	1	0.8
22	1	1.0	2	1.9	0	0
23	25	24.0	15	13.9	1	0.8
24	3	2.9	0	0	0	0
25	1	1.0	0	0	0	0
Educational level						
Pre-diploma	1	1.0	0	0	5	4.2
Diploma	71	68.3	82	75.9	112	94.9
Bachelor's degree	31	29.8	26	24.1	1	0.8
Master's degree	1	1.0	0	0	0	0
Study program						
TOTAL	104	100.0	108	100	118	100

The demographic data for the three stimuli cells shows the distribution of participants based on gender, age, educational level, and study program. In Cell 1 (Stimulus 1), there were 104 participants, with 30.8% male and 69.2% female, while in Cell 2 (Stimulus 2), there were 108 participants, with 15.7% male and 84.3% female. In Cell 3 (Stimulus 3), there were 118 participants, with 27.1% male and 72.9% female. The age distribution varied across cells, with the majority falling between 19 and 23 years old. Educational levels were predominantly diplomas and bachelor's degrees.

4.2 Consumers' brand slogan-sponsored event congruity (BSSEC) influence on their attitude towards sponsorship (ATS)

Table 2: ANOVA Test Results of ATS Mean Scores across Three BSSEC Levels

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	646.324	2	323.162	266.057	<.001
Within Groups	397.186	327	1.215		
Total	1043.510	329			

The ANOVA analysis indicated substantial variations in mean scores for ATS across the three levels of BSSEC. The findings demonstrated a statistically significant F-value of 266.06 ($p < .001$) with degrees of freedom of 2 and 327. The data obtained from the analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates a significant distinction. The findings enhance the comprehension of the connections between levels of BSSEC and ATS means scores, corroborating hypothesis 1 that a greater degree of congruity perceived by consumers between a brand slogan and a sponsored event leads to a more favourable attitude towards the sponsorship.

4.3 Consumers' brand slogan-sponsored event congruity (BSSEC) influence on their brand trust (BT)

Table 3: ANOVA Test Results of BT Mean Scores across Three BSSEC Levels Represented by Three Cells

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	286.548	2	143.274	87.786	<.001
Within Groups	533.688	327	1.632		
Total	820.236	329			

The ANOVA test results indicate a significant difference in BT mean scores across the three levels of BSSEC (between groups), with a statistically significant F-value of 87.786 ($p < .001$). This suggests that there is a significant variation in BT scores among the different levels of BSSEC. The between-groups sum of squares (286.548) and the within-groups sum of squares (533.688) contribute to the total sum of squares (820.236). The significant F-value indicates that the differences in BT scores among the BSSEC levels are not likely due to random variation, but rather due to the levels of BSSEC. The Tamhane results showed that when comparing moderate BSSEC with high BSSEC, there is no significant mean difference ($p = .511$, 95% CI [-0.2959, 0.0936]). Thus, the results suggest that there are significant differences in BT scores between low and moderate level of BSSEC ($p < .001$, 95% CI [-2.4322, -1.4410]), as well between low and high level of BSSEC ($p < .001$, 95% CI [-2.5429, -1.5326]), except for the comparison between moderate and high BSSEC, where the difference is not statistically significant.

4.4 Consumers' attitude towards sponsorship (ATS) mediating effect on brand trust (BT)

Table 4: Attitude towards Sponsorship (ATS) Mediating Effect on Brand Trust Results

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval (CI)		t-stats
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
BSSEC --> ATS --> BT	1.0251 (.000)	.3045 (.010)	.7206	.4738	.9755	5.653

In order to examine Hypothesis 3, which explores the role of ATS as a mediator between BSSEC and BT, the PROCOESS Macro model 4 developed by Hayes (2022) was employed. The analysis involved running a simple mediation with 5,000 bootstrap resamples using SPSS. The indirect impact of BSSEC on BT through ATS was found to be significant, with an estimated value of .7206 (SE = .1274, 95% CI [.4738, .9755]). This means that BSSEC influences BT through ATS. The direct impact of BSSEC on BT was also significant ($b = .3045$, SE = .1184, $t(328) = 2.5710$, $p = .010$, 95% CI [.0715, .5374]). Moreover, the overall impact of BSSEC on BT was significant ($b = 1.0251$, SE = .0927, $t(328) = 11.0568$, $p = .000$, 95% CI [.8427, 1.2074]). The total effect model of BT was highly significant ($F = 122.2529$, $p < .001$), explaining 27.15% of the variation in BT.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results highlight the importance of congruity between brand slogans and sponsored events in shaping consumers' attitudes towards sponsorship. A higher level of congruity is associated with more favourable attitudes, emphasizing the strategic significance of aligning brand messaging with sponsorship activities. The results further emphasize the importance of ensuring congruity between brand slogans and sponsored events. Marketers and sponsors should strategically align brand messaging with sponsorship activities to enhance consumer attitudes and trust towards the brand. As proposed by Khuong and Chau (2017), brand managers ought to integrate the image of the sporting event with that of the sponsor, ensuring a harmonious alignment between the two. This highlights the need for careful planning and execution of sponsorship campaigns to maximize their effectiveness. Understanding the impact of congruity between brand slogans and sponsored events on consumer attitudes is crucial. Consumers are more likely to perceive sponsored events positively when they perceive congruence between the brand and the event. As claimed by Aguiló-Lemoine et al. (2020), in general, congruence is preferred over incongruence in sponsoring brands, except when the sponsorship's objective is to enhance the visibility of emerging market brands, where incongruence has demonstrated positive outcomes. This insight can inform marketers about the factors influencing consumer perceptions and help them tailor sponsorship strategies accordingly. The results highlight the importance of BSSEC in shaping BT, with higher levels of congruity associated with higher BT scores. The findings underscore the significance of aligning brand slogans with sponsored events to enhance consumer trust in the brand. The findings suggest that congruity between brand slogans and sponsored events not only influences consumer attitudes towards sponsorship but also impacts brand trust. Brands that effectively align their messaging with sponsorship activities are likely to enjoy higher levels of consumer trust. As highlighted by Liu and Jiang (2017), a key element in fostering consumer trust in the context of sport sponsorship is the degree of congruence between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored sporting event. This emphasises the importance of maintaining consistency and coherence in brand communication across different channels. Also, the findings emphasise the importance of considering the role of ATS as a mediator in understanding the relationship between BSSEC and BT. They suggest that perceptions of congruence between brand slogans and sponsored events influence brand trust not only directly but also indirectly through attitudes toward sponsorship. Congruent sponsorships signal that a brand is not merely engaging in sponsorship for exposure but is genuinely and ethically invested in the event and its values.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

8. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

In the collaborative endeavour of crafting the research paper, **Noraziah Mohd Amin** emerged as a cornerstone contributor, undertaking multifaceted responsibilities encompassing research design, problem statement formulation, delineation of research objectives, establishment of a robust theoretical framework, extensive literature review, meticulous data collection, rigorous data analysis, and synthesizing findings into a cohesive discussion and conclusion. **Nursafwah Tugiman** significantly bolstered the empirical aspect by conducting thorough data analysis, while also ensuring the manuscript's integrity through meticulous checking. Similarly, **Mohamad Noor Salehuddin Sharipudin** played a crucial role in scrutinizing the manuscript, ensuring its adherence to scholarly standards. Together, their contributions culminated in a meticulously researched and rigorously examined paper, poised to contribute meaningfully to the academic discourse.

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About the Authors

Noraziah Mohd Amin is a Senior Lecturer at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang and a PhD candidate at Universiti Utara Malaysia. Her fields of expertise are applied linguistics and marketing communication (brand slogan). She has published articles in journals (Scopus, WOS, MyCite), proceedings, and book chapters apart from creative work in local as well as international magazines and bulletins.

Nursafwah Tugiman is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Multimedia Technology and Communication, Universiti Utara Malaysia. Her research interests include marketing communication, corporate communication, consumer

behaviour, and social media users' behaviours. Her publications have appeared in Marketing Letters, WOS proceedings, and other peer-reviewed publications.