



The Influence of Proactive Branding Strategies on Brand Performance: Evidence from Supplementary Food Firms in Thailand

อิทธิพลของกลยุทธ์การสร้างแบรนด์เชิงรุกต่อผลการดำเนินงานของแบรนด์: หลักฐานจากบริษัทอาหารเสริมในประเทศไทย

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การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลของกลยุทธ์การสร้างแบรนด์เชิงรุกต่อการสร้างความแตกต่างของแบรนด์ คุณภาพการมีส่วนร่วมของลูกค้า การเพิ่มพูนประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า และผลการดำเนินงานของแบรนด์ พร้อมทั้งวิเคราะห์บทบาทของตัวแปรคั่นกลางเหล่านี้ที่มีต่อผลการดำเนินงานของแบรนด์ นอกจากนี้ยังพิจารณาบทบาทของระดับการเปลี่ยนผ่านสู่ดิจิทัลในฐานะตัวแปรแทรกในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างตัวแปรต่างๆ เหล่านี้ ข้อมูลถูกรวบรวมจากธุรกิจอาหารเสริมในประเทศไทยจำนวน 122 แห่ง ผ่านการสำรวจแบบสอบถาม และวิเคราะห์ด้วยการถดถอยเชิงพหุ (Multiple Regression Analysis) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) กลยุทธ์การสร้างแบรนด์เชิงรุกมีอิทธิพลทางตรงเชิงบวกต่อการสร้างความแตกต่างของแบรนด์ คุณภาพการมีส่วนร่วมของลูกค้า การเพิ่มพูนประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า และผลการดำเนินงานของแบรนด์ 2) การสร้างความแตกต่างของแบรนด์ คุณภาพการมีส่วนร่วมของลูกค้า และการเพิ่มพูนประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า มีอิทธิพลเชิงบวกต่อผลการดำเนินงานของแบรนด์ และ 3) ระดับการเปลี่ยนผ่านสู่ดิจิทัลไม่ส่งผลกระทบต่อความสัมพันธ์ส่วนใหญ่ในโมเดล แต่เสริมความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างคุณภาพการมีส่วนร่วมของลูกค้าและผลการดำเนินงานของแบรนด์ได้อย่างมีนัยสำคัญ การศึกษานี้ช่วยเติมเต็มช่องว่างทางวิชาการในด้านกลยุทธ์การสร้างแบรนด์เชิงรุก โดยเฉพาะในตลาดเกิดใหม่ เช่น ธุรกิจอาหารเสริมในประเทศไทย พร้อมทั้งเสนอแนวทางให้ธุรกิจเน้นการใช้กลยุทธ์การสร้างแบรนด์เชิงรุกควบคู่กับเทคโนโลยีดิจิทัล เพื่อเสริมสร้างความสามารถในการแข่งขันและความภักดีของลูกค้าในระยะยาว ทั้งนี้ การวิจัยในอนาคตควรศึกษาปัจจัยเชิงสาเหตุที่สนับสนุนการนำกลยุทธ์การสร้างแบรนด์เชิงรุกไปใช้ และการประยุกต์ใช้ในอุตสาหกรรมหรือบริบทที่หลากหลายมากขึ้น

คำสำคัญ : กลยุทธ์การสร้างแบรนด์เชิงรุก; การสร้างความแตกต่างของแบรนด์; คุณภาพการมีส่วนร่วมของลูกค้า; การเพิ่มพูนประสบการณ์ของลูกค้า; ระดับการเปลี่ยนผ่านสู่ดิจิทัล



ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of proactive branding strategies on brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement, and brand performance, as well as analyzed the mediating roles of these variables on brand performance. Additionally, the study also explored the moderating role of the digital transformation level in the relationships among these variables. Data were collected from 122 Thai supplementary food businesses through a structured mail survey, and multiple regression analysis was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that 1) proactive branding strategies had a direct positive influence on brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement, and brand performance; 2) brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, and customer experience enhancement had a positive effect on brand performance; and 3) digital transformation level did not moderate most relationships in the model, it significantly strengthened the relationship between customer engagement quality and brand performance. For the implications, this study filled the existing literature's void on documenting the effect of proactive branding on brand performance in emerging markets. Firms should focus more on strategic branding and adopt technology applications to make communications more effective, deepen customers' attachment, and increase industry competitiveness. Further studies should extend to examine the casual factors that contributed to the implementation of proactive branding and its generalizability to different industries and contexts.

Keywords : Proactive Branding Strategies; Brand Differentiation; Customer Engagement Quality; Customer Experience Enhancement; Digital Transformation Level

Introduction

In an era of ever-changing business environment, consumer behaviors, competition and technological advancements, businesses have multifaceted challenges. Such conditions require firms to have a strategic response as well as the development of advanced capabilities to stay resilient and attain sustained competitive advantage (Dash & Chakraborty, 2021). In particular, success in such volatile environments comes down to establishing forward looking strategies in line with market dynamics and customer expectations (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2020). Specifically, these strategies include proactive branding as a central means to instilling differentiation, advancing engagement, and achieving superior brand performance.

This proactive brand strategy helps firms predict market trends, understand the needs of their customers, and use innovative means to create distinctive differentiation in a brand, increase customer involvement, and improve the customer experience (Temprano-Garcia et al., 2020). Through proactive branding, firms are able to anticipate future market demands and technological trends, aligning branding initiatives that will help the firm to navigate the uncertainty and connect emotionally as well as remain relevant in a highly competitive industry. Apart from enhancing brand equity, this approach results in quantifiable customer loyalty, market share and financial performance (He & Zhang, 2022). Whereas, today in a fast-paced ever-changing digital world, the level of digital transformation of firms is a critical moderating factor in the context of enhanced ramifications over proactive branding activities. By facilitating the adoption of advanced technologies, digital transformation enables firms to better analyze and respond to consumer behaviors, individualise customer interactions and improve branding strategies, all of which facilitate a greater competitive edge and allow the firm to position itself higher within the market (Levy, 2022).



Although the importance of a proactive branding strategy is well recognized, its overall effect on brand performance, especially in emerging markets such as Thailand, has not been extensively studied (He & Zhang, 2022 ; Temprano-Garcia et al., 2020 ; Ameyibor et al., 2021). To study, the dynamic capabilities perspective framework was utilized. It refers to a firm's capacity to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments (Shiamwama, 2022). The more these capabilities allow firms to take advantage of opportunities as well as respond adequately to external changes. Proactive branding strategies are best leveraged by firms through dynamic capabilities such as aligning organizational resources with market demands, thereby fostering innovation in transforming their existing resources and creating new resources (Kero, 2023).

These relationships were investigated in the context of the Thai supplementary food industry, a fast-growing sector driven by increasing consumer health awareness and a rising demand for wellness products. The market for dietary supplements in Thailand was valued at 179.53 billion baht in 2023, and it is projected to grow to 258.75 billion baht by 2029, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.6% (The Federation of Thai Industries, 2024). Given this rapid market growth, innovativeness and alternative branding approaches are essential tools that organizations in this sector can not overlook for retaining market share and customers in an environment characterized by intense competition and ever-changing consumer needs. In this fast-growing market, proactive branding strategies are deployed to differentiate firms, boost the quality of engagement, enhance customer experiences, and improve brand performance.

Objective

1. To examine the influences of proactive branding strategy on brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement and brand performance.
2. To examine the influences of brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement on brand performance.
3. To examine the moderating effects of digital transformation level on the research relationships.

Literature Review

Proactive Branding Strategy (PBS)

In this study, proactive branding strategy is defined as a firm's approach to strategically position its brand in anticipation of future market demands, building meaningful customer connections, and sustaining a competitive advantage in dynamic environments. Proactive branding, such as anticipating market trends, anticipating customer preferences, and implementing innovative branding techniques allows brands to differentiate themselves, enrich customer engagement quality, and specifically enrich customer experience (Temprano-Garcia et al., 2020). Proactive branding strategy contributes significantly to firms' branding outcomes by determining, explaining and developing firms' branding outcomes. In this case, these outcomes are brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, brand performance and, most importantly, the enhanced customer experience. Firstly, proactive branding is crucial for achieving brand differentiation by crafting a distinct market identity. Firms can leverage unique attributes, forecasting, innovative and more importantly data driven insights to become unique, predictable, innovative and work with insights which enable them to develop standout value propositions (Simpson, 2024). Keeping a consistent communication of a unique brand message strengthens a firms' market position and deepens resonance with target audiences which in turn would ensure sustained differentiation in markets that are in a state of evolution (Ameyibor et al., 2021). Secondly, proactive branding has a positive impact on the quality of customer engagement, as proactive branding helps have engaging, interactive and bespoke customer interactions.



Firms develop trust and emotional bonds while escalating the ongoing relationships and loyalty in a progressive fashion through the personalized communication and progressive engagement programs (Zhang & Li, 2022). Thirdly, instead, proactive branding takes brand creating to a new level by enhancing customer experience through delivering seamless and personalized customer experience at every touchpoint. It prevents issues in the future, hones service delivery, and brings operational alignment with customer expectations to build the meaningful brand value and a sense of trust. (Sury, 2024). By incorporating innovative technologies, proactive branding ensures a consistently positive customer journey. Lastly, with the rise of proactive branding, customer experience is enhanced by providing seamless and personal experiences that happen across every touchpoint. This strategy prevents potential problems, improves the quality of service delivery and synchronizes services with customers' expectations to create significant brand value and create mutual trust (Mariyudi, 2021). As innovative technologies are incorporated into a brand, experiential marketing means that proactive branding can ensure a consistently positive customer journey, which in turn enhance brand performance. Therefore,

H₁: Proactive branding strategy has a positive influence on (a) brand differentiation, (b) customer engagement quality, (c) customer experience enhancement, and (d) brand performance.

Brand Differentiation (BDF)

In this study, brand differentiation is defined as the process by which a firm differentiates its products or services from those of competitors, in a manner that is of consumer relevance. These attractions consist of unique attributes, characteristics, and benefits that appeal to target consumers generating a separate identity for that product in the marketplace. Brand differentiation explicitly reflects its effective perceived value, to affect the purchase of consumers is to affect brand loyalty (Mwazuna & Museve, 2023). Through better meeting of customer needs, a brand can obtain a competitive advantage by being able to realize a larger market share and a higher profit. This consequently provides brands with more options to distinguish themselves and more likely to improve the performance of the brand including different metrics such as sales growth, market penetration, and customer retention. Furthermore, customer satisfaction is highly dependent on a brand's unique attributes being in tune with consumer expectations, which results repeatedly in customer repurchases and favorable word of mouth (Lee et al., 2019). In addition, it creates solid proof of strong brand loyalty by developing a strong emotional connection with the consumers (Jiang, 2023). Essentially, brand differentiation which is effective increases customer satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn leads to superior brand performance. Therefore,

H₂: Brand differentiation has a positive influence on brand performance.

Customer Engagement Quality (CEQ)

Customer engagement quality is defined as the depth, relevance, and interactivity of the interactions between customers and a brand (Al-Nsour, 2020). This stretches to encompass emotional connection, responsiveness, and the perceived value of the interactions themselves. Customer engagement quality that is effective has explicit strength between the customers and the brand, which affects customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Higher financial performance, including increased customer retention, as well as being a source of positive word of mouth. Hence, customer engagement quality will most likely have a huge effect on brand performance through the development of sales growth, market share, and brand loyalty. Various factors can be used to analyze the quality of customer engagement, such as personalization of interaction, the duration of time taken by agents to respond, and the quality of the customer experience (Wijaya & Simamora, 2023). In addition, these factors dictate the depth and focus of interaction with customers, leading to emotional and emotional relationship building as they related to the



brand. Firms which prioritize high quality customer interactions, build strong relationships that enable improved brand performance and ensure long term success and sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore,

H₃: Customer engagement quality has a positive influence on brand performance.

Customer Experience Enhancement (CEE)

In this study, customer experience enhancement refers to the ongoing improvement of every interaction a customer has with a brand, from initial contact to post-purchase support (Nguyen, 2022). This includes the product quality, customers service excellence and every other point where touchpoints have built the interaction among the different channels without any break. This is important for brand performance because the customer experience is improved resulting in loyalty and advocacy (Rane et al., 2023). Customers who are inherently rewarded and have a personalized experience of the flow of interaction with the brand, will then start to develop emotional connections with the brand, which are associated with repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth (Nam, 2023). Increased brand equity, resulting from the factors described previously, enables firms to continue to hold an edge in the competitive turbulent market. Brands that focus on and invest in customer experience consistently grow sales faster, expand market share, and retain more customers. Consequently, improving customer experience is a major driver of brand performance, allowing firms to provide superior value and establish long-lasting relationships with their customers (Aprilia, 2024). Therefore,

H₄: Customer experience enhancement has a positive influence on brand performance.

Brand Performance (BPF)

Brand performance, in this study, refers to the successful achievement of marketing and financial targets that are easily quantifiable, including market share increase, customer retention, brand value, sales increase, profit increase and improvement of competitive positioning (Ameyibor et al., 2021). The result of its ability to forge an enduring, differentiated brand image, communicate its value proposition well and countenance competition by consistently delivering against or surpassing market expectations (Jahan et al., 2024). Assessing brand performance is routinely done through financial indicators such as revenue growth, return on investment, and profitability; as well as non-financial metrics including customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and reputation strength (Li et al., 2022). The firm's ability to innovate, reflect its brand consistently in all branding activities and forge real connections with its intended audience are closely related to these outcomes. Further, brand performance showcases the influence of proactive branding strategies, brand differentiation, customer engagement quality and customer experience enhancement on a firm's market success. Strong brand performance is a signal to firm's ability of sustaining and enhance firm's positioning in dynamic markets. Therefore, it is proposed that proactive branding strategies, brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, and customer experience enhancement lead to brand performance.

Digital Transformation Level (DTL)

Digital transformation level refers to the degree to which a firm utilizes technologies to perform all its operations, interact with customers and as part of its business strategy (Siagian, 2024). Firms with high level of digital transformation are expected to experience a greater impact of proactive branding strategy on brand differentiation. By taking on advanced digital and analytics tools, firms can become better at predicting market trends and customer preferences, in order to develop more distinctive and relevant brand propositions (Cao & Tian, 2020). Brands can stand out in a competitive market with data-driven insights that feed into their differentiation strategy. Additionally, digital transformation level enhances the efficacy of



proactive branding strategies in supporting customer engagement quality. Firms that take advantage of digital platforms can leverage more personalized and strengthened emotional bonds, and thus the relevance of brand engagement (Levy, 2022). A greater engagement is encouraged to improve customer loyalty which results in increased performance of a brand. Moreover, digital transformation level also moderates the relationship between proactive branding strategy and the enhancement of customer experience. The firms that adopt digital transformation are more likely to facilitate the customer journey and better touchpoints, hence making the customer's journey smoother and more satisfying (Mele, 2024). Higher customer satisfaction and retention boosts brand performance which is backed by enhanced customer experience. In addition, the expected effect of proactive branding strategy on brand performance is more pronounced in firms with superior level of digital transformation. Digital technology can be a means of optimizing firm branding initiatives including running targeted marketing campaigns and real time customer feedback mechanisms (Risdiyanto, 2023). The result is more sales, superior market share, stronger brand equity, because customers are drawn to respond to and become ambassadors for, brands they think of as innovative and responsive. Based on the above, it is expected that digital transformation would further fortify the connection between proactive branding strategy and its outcomes. Therefore,

H₅: Digital transformation level moderates (a) proactive branding strategy-brand differentiation relationship, (b) proactive branding strategy-customer engagement quality relationship, (c) proactive branding strategy-customer experience enhancement relationship, (d) proactive branding strategy- brand performance relationship, (e) brand differentiation and brand performance relationship, (f) customer engagement quality and brand performance relationship, and (g) customer experience enhancement and brand performance relationship.

Conceptual Framework

This study empirically investigates the effects of proactive branding capability on brand performance using dynamic capabilities theory as its foundation. Dynamic capabilities theory provides valuable insights into how firms can leverage, integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to adapt to changing environments (Pundziene et al., 2022 ; Shiamwama, 2022). This theory is relevant to proactive branding strategy as firms can be able to anticipate what the market needs and innovations enhance, all in line with the firm's resources for possible resilience and competitiveness. The hypothesized relationships are presented in Figure 1.

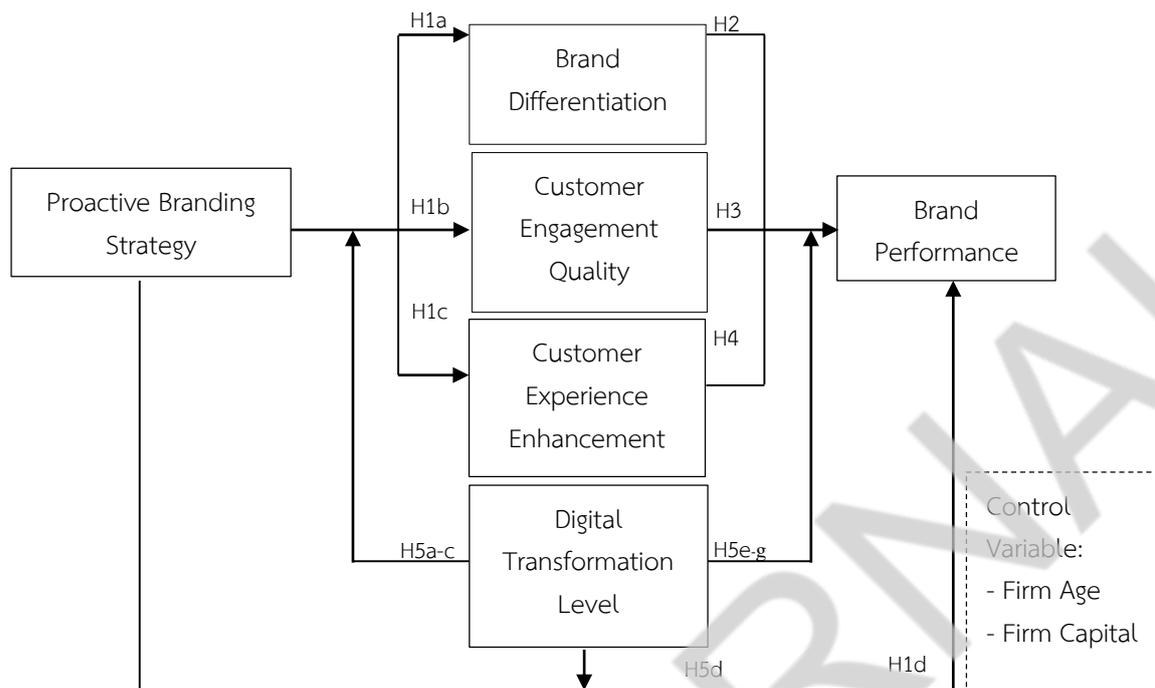


Figure 1 The Conceptual Model of Proactive Branding Strategy-Firm Performance Relationships

Research Methodology

This section consists of information about population and sample, research instrument, data collection, and data analysis, which the detail as below.

Population and Sample

The population of this study was acquired from the database of the Department of Business Development, Thailand (Department of Business Development, 2024). After filtering out unrelated firms, 505 food supplement firms were selected as the population for this study.

The sample size calculation method suggested by Yamane (1973) at five percent allowable error ($e = .05$) was used to calculate the number of sufficient members of a sample for this study. After calculation, a sample size of 224 is sufficient for data analysis. However, it is impossible to receive 100 percent response rate from a mailed data collection method. For questionnaires that are applying mailed as a survey method, 20 percent for a response rate is considered as acceptable and is satisfactory for subsequent analysis (Aaker, et al., 2001). Thus, 1,120 questionnaires are required ($224 \times (100/20)$) to receive 224 as a sample size. However, the total population is only 505, the whole population was selected for receiving mailed questionnaires for hypothesis testing.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was utilized to measure key constructs in this study: proactive branding strategy, brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement, brand performance, and digital transformation level. Each construct was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree." The questionnaire items were adapted from established literature to ensure content validity. Firstly, proactive branding strategy was assessed using a seven-item scale evaluating a firm's ability to anticipate market trends, implement



innovative branding techniques, and foster meaningful customer connections, adapted from Temprano-Garcia et al. (2020) Secondly, brand differentiation was based on Mwazuna & Museve (2023), and the scale used was five items focusing on a firm being able to create unique attributes and value propositions. Thirdly, the customer engagement quality was captured through a five-item scale measured by the extent, relevance and interactivity of the customer engagement interactions, taking cues from Al-Nsour (2020). Fourthly, customer experience enhancement was measured using a five-item scale that measures customers' satisfaction enhancements through customer touchpoints, adapted from Nguyen (2022). Fifthly, brand performance was measured using a five-item scale adapted from Jahan et al. (2024), which includes financial and non financial metrics of market share, customer loyalty and profitability. Lastly, digital transformation level was measured using a five-item scale that measured the level of technological integration into operations and customer interactions (Siagian, 2024).

Furthermore, this study's validity and reliability are demonstrated. Initially, confirmatory factor analysis is utilized to examine the underlying relationships among several items and to determine the feasibility of condensing these items into a more limited collection of factors. Consequently, all factor loadings ranging from 0.58 to 0.91 exceed the 0.40 threshold and are statistically significant (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Secondly, discriminant power was evaluated to determine the validity of the measures using item-total correlation. In terms of scale validity, item-total correlations ranging from 0.44 to 0.85 exceed the threshold of 0.30 (Churchill, 1979). Finally, the reliability of the measures was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for scale reliability range from 0.83 to 0.92, exceeding the threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Accordingly, the research instrument of the study is qualified for collecting the data in order to investigate the aforementioned research relationships.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were sent to food supplement firms in Thailand in the mid of January to the mid of February 2025. The key informants of the study are marketing managers or marketing directors. With regard to the questionnaire mailing, the valid mailing was 484 surveys because some firms have relocated, from which 124 responses were received. Of the surveys completed and returned, 122 were usable. The effective response rate was approximately 25.21% ($122 \times 100 / 484$). If response rate for a mail survey, with an appropriate follow-up procedure, is greater than 20% is considered acceptable as stated by Aaker et al. (2001). To verify potential non-response bias to detect possible problems with non-response errors, a comparison of the first and the second wave data as recommended is considered (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). In this regard, neither procedure showed significant differences because there were no statistically significant differences between the first and second waves at a 95% confidence level as standard ($p > .05$).

Data Analysis

The data distribution was summarized using descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation. A correlation analysis was conducted to determine initial relationships among the variables, with variance inflation factors (VIFs) computed to proxy multicollinearity. The direct relationships between proactive branding strategy and its outcomes which include brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement and brand performance were assessed using multiple regression analysis. In addition, the moderating effects of digital transformation on these relations were examined. Multiple regression was selected because it enables the quantifying of effects that independent variables have on dependent variables and the use of both continuous and categorical data. In particular, this method is suitable for the testing of complex hypothesis including interaction terms or moderating effects (Hair

et al., 2010). To maintain compliance with standard significance thresholds ($p < 0.05$) all statistical analysis was performed using available robust and widely used analytical tools.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for all variables. Multicollinearity could occur when the inter-correlation among predictor variables exceeds 0.80, indicating a strong relationship (Hair et al., 2010). The scores are show in table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

Variables	PBS	BDF	CEQ	CEE	DTL	BPF	VIF
Mean	4.29	4.34	4.08	4.10	4.10	3.83	-
Standard deviation	0.53	0.58	0.60	0.58	0.70	0.68	-
PBS	1.00						2.44
BDF	0.71**	1.00					3.14
CEQ	0.68**	0.74**	1.00				3.19
CEE	0.46**	0.49**	0.61**	1.00			1.62
DTL	0.71**	0.77**	0.75**	0.52**	1.00		3.28
BPF	0.59**	0.60**	0.58**	0.42**	0.57**	1.00	-

** $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed)

In accordance with table 1, the correlations, ranging from 0.42 to 0.77, indicate that the potential relationships among the variables in the conceptual model are testable. Furthermore, variance inflation factors (VIFs) were employed to assess the degree to which non-orthogonality among independent variables increases standard errors. The VIFs range from 1.62 to 3.28, which is significantly below the cut-off value of 10 (Hair et al., 2010). Consequently, in this study, there are no substantial multicollinearity problems encountered. All independent variables are suitable for the study as they indicate no inter-correlations.

1. The influences of proactive branding strategy on brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement and brand performance.

Table 2 shows the results of the relationships between proactive branding strategy and its consequences based on multiple regression analysis. Firstly, the findings demonstrate that proactive branding strategy has a significant positive influence on brand differentiation ($\beta = 0.76$, $P < 0.01$). As outlined in existing literature, an effective proactive branding strategy not only establishes a solid brand identity but also communicates the brand's vision in the minds of its customers. This enables firms to provide a clear value proposition that differentiates them from rivals and creates a beneficial and concrete brand purpose (Ameyibor et al., 2021). Thus, the findings support the idea that proactive branding contributes to brand differentiation. Therefore, *Hypothesis 1a is supported*. Secondly, proactive branding strategy has positive influence on customer engagement quality ($\beta = 0.77$, $P < 0.00$). Proactive branding allows firms to establish enduring emotional connections with customers, cultivating loyalty via trust and consistent value-oriented engagements. This strategy corresponds with consumer expectations, fosters transparent communication, and cultivates mutual respect and engagement, hence enhancing the customer-brand relationship (Khan et al., 2024 ; Zaidun et al., 2021). This discovery highlights the significance of proactive branding in improving consumer engagement. Consequently, *Hypothesis 1b is supported*. Thirdly, proactive branding strategy positively influences customer experience enhancement ($\beta = 0.50$, $P < 0.00$), which is consistent with the



literature. A proactive branding approach improves the overall quality of the customer experience by fulfilling consumer requirements and expectations while anticipating future demand. This is achieved through the delivery of unique and consumer-focused interactions. Ultimately, this creates an emotional bond that makes interaction with customers an experience that is memorable, thus adding value to the brand and creating a higher level of customer experience (Franky & Syah, 2023). These results validate the claim that proactive branding can elevate the customer experience. Therefore, *Hypothesis 1c is supported*. Lastly, proactive branding strategy significantly contributes to improved brand performance ($\beta = 0.76, P < 0.00$). Proactive branding significantly improves key performance indicators, including brand awareness, customer loyalty, and market share. Consequently, firms experience improved customer satisfaction, elevated brand equity, and enhanced financial performance, which encompasses revenue growth and sustained customer retention (Ismail & Mohamad, 2021). These findings can affirm the value of proactive branding in driving superior brand performance. Therefore, *Hypothesis 1d is supported*.

2. The influences of brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement on brand performance

Moreover, table 2 also shows the results of the relationships between brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement, brand performance. Firstly, brand differentiation has positive influence on brand performance ($\beta = 0.71, P < 0.00$). Brand differentiation influences brand performance by focusing on specific attributes to enhance customer preferences, increase their loyalty and gain more market share. Firms are capable of creating unique values based on differentiation that not only attracts customers but emotionally connect the customers, that is enough to drive repeat customers. This distinctive creates a unique brand position, which increases brand equity and provides a competitive advantage. According with the findings of previous studies, the capacity to differentiate oneself in the market is directly correlated to improved revenue growth, greater profitability, and sustained success over the long term (Hem & Supphellen, 2022). Therefore, *Hypothesis 2 is supported*. Secondly, customer engagement quality has positive influence on brand performance ($\beta = 0.66, P < 0.00$). An exceptional level of customer engagement strengthens the relationship between the customer and the brand by cultivating trust and loyalty, both of which are essential for the long-term success of a business. Not only are customers who are engaged more likely to make subsequent purchases, but are also more likely to become advocates for the customer's brand. When it comes to financial success and long-term growth, particularly in volatile markets, high-quality engagement is highly associated with all of these things, including the building of strong emotional ties, the increase of consumer happiness, and the raising of active participation (Wijaya & Simamora, 2023). Therefore, *Hypothesis 3 is supported*. Lastly, customer experience enhancement has positive influence on brand performance ($\beta = 0.49, P < 0.00$). Great customer experiences build brand equity because they turn customers into loyal fans. That can result in more customer retention and additional sales. The positive experiences help develop trust and loyalty, both of which are fundamental for increasing market share, retaining existing customers, and enhancing profitability. Earlier research suggests that creating memorable experiences for customers can create a long-term competitive advantage, in turn, brand performance boosted (Andriyani & Yudhistira, 2023). Therefore, *Hypothesis 4 is supported*.

Table 2 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables						
	BDF	CEQ	CEE	BPF	BPF	BPF	BPF
PBS	0.76*** (0.07)	0.77*** (0.08)	0.50*** (0.09)	0.76*** (0.10)			
BDF					0.71*** (0.09)		
CEQ						0.66*** (0.09)	
CEE							0.49*** (0.10)
Firm age	0.09 (0.16)	-0.08 (0.17)	-0.09 (0.20)	-0.01 (0.22)	-0.09 (0.22)	0.03 (0.22)	0.01 (0.25)
Firm capital	0.28 (0.17)	0.06 (0.19)	0.08 (0.22)	0.19 (0.24)	0.07 (0.24)	0.24 (0.24)	0.33 (0.27)
Adjusted R ²	0.52	0.46	0.19	0.34	0.34	0.33	0.17

***p<.00 Beta coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis

3. The moderating effects of digital transformation level on the research relationships

To examine moderation effect in this study, regression analysis with interaction terms were applied. The interaction term was constructed to investigate how the association between the independent variable and dependent variable varies at different values of a moderator (Hayes, 2018). Table 3 presents the results of the moderating effects. Surprisingly, digital transformation level does not moderate the relationship between proactive branding strategy and its outcomes, including brand differentiation ($\beta = 0.05$, $P < 0.69$), customer engagement quality ($\beta = 0.07$, $P < 0.59$), customer experience enhancement ($\beta = 0.00$, $P < 0.10$), and brand performance ($\beta = 0.06$, $P < 0.73$). The level of digital transformation represents how much digital technologies are integrated within a firm's functions. Yet, proactive branding has a value of uniqueness and identity for product through strategic clarity and creativity, and thus, it does not rely only on the use of digital selling tools. Strong messaging that clearly communicates the value proposition and differentiates a firm from its competitors can be particularly effective in less digitally advanced environments (Chandra, 2023). In less digitally advanced environments, relational strategies are even more critical in establishing trust, emotional resonance, and clear communication that foster high-quality customer engagement, irrespective of the level of digital transformation (Sashi, 2021). While digital tools play a role in engagement, it is relational strategies, rooted in a deep understanding of customer needs, that are key to the success of proactive branding in improving engagement quality and customer experience (Khan et al., 2024). Proactive branding synchronizes consumer expectations and perceptions, cultivates trust and loyalty, and promotes an emotional bond with customers, consequently enhancing brand performance through amplified profits and market share, regardless of the degree of digital transformation (Atulkar, 2020). Therefore, *Hypothesis 5a-d are not supported*. Furthermore, digital transformation level does not have moderate effect on brand differentiation-brand performance relationship ($\beta = 0.03$, $P < 0.57$) and customer experience enhancement-brand performance relationship ($\beta = 0.00$, $P < 0.93$). Brand differentiation, which is the reflection of a brand's uniqueness as it relates to their competitive market position, is essential to developing brand preference and loyalty, which ultimately drives enhanced performance irrespective of level of digital progressive



(Ambarwati & Astuti, 2024). Differentiated brands are able to build emotional and personal bonds which translate to hard metrics like improved market share and customer satisfaction (Apria & Parahiyanti, 2023). Likewise, improving customer experiences in ways that meet customer expectations are strong means to improve brand performance without a massive reliance on digital transformation. Therefore, *Hypothesis 5e and 5g are not supported.*

Table 3 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables						
	BDF	CEQ	CEE	BPF	BPF	BPF	BPF
PBS	0.36*** (0.08)	0.32** (0.09)	0.20 (0.12)	0.48*** (0.14)			
BDF					0.47** (0.15)		
CEQ						0.38** (0.13)	
CEE							0.20 (0.11)
DTL	0.43*** (0.06)	0.48*** (0.07)	0.32** (0.09)	0.30** (0.10)	0.27* (0.11)	0.31** (0.11)	0.47*** (0.09)
PBS* DTL	0.05 (0.11)	0.07 (0.12)	0.00 (0.16)	0.06 (0.18)			
BDF* DTL					0.03 (0.06)		
CEQ* DTL						0.33* (0.17)	
CEE* DTL							0.00 (0.05)
Firm age	0.12 (0.13)	-0.06 (0.15)	-0.07 (0.20)	0.00 (0.21)	-0.03 (0.22)	-0.01 (0.21)	0.02 (0.22)
Firm capital	0.18 (0.15)	-0.05 (0.16)	0.00 (0.21)	0.13 (0.24)	0.04 (0.24)	0.17 (0.24)	0.14 (0.24)
Adjusted R ²	0.65	0.61	0.25	0.37	0.36	0.38	0.32

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.00 Beta coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis

Conversely, the level of digital transformation moderates the relationship between customer engagement quality and brand performance, with a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.33$, $P < 0.05$). In particular, firm are increasingly adopting predictive capabilities through digital tools, like analytics and Customer Relationship Management systems (CRMs), which help boost the effectiveness and scalability of engagement. These digital tools allow firms to optimize their key touch points, increase customer interaction and ultimately create positive outcomes such as loyalty, referral, and profitability (Weber, 2024). The collaborative transformation of a digital transformation enables the firm to analyze the behavior of customers in a more advanced way, creating the functionality of predicting customer needs, adjusting strategy in the interaction between both parties, and thus reinforcing the brand perception of the firm. These outcomes demonstrate

that digital transformation is not merely an auxiliary tool but plays a pivotal role in amplifying the impact of customer engagement on brand performance (Yu et al., 2024). Therefore, *Hypothesis 5f is supported.*

Conclusion

Proactive branding strategy is a pivotal factor influencing brand performance, particularly in a competitive market context. In this study, the effects of a proactive branding strategy on critical business outcomes are examined, while the moderating role of digital transformation level is considered. The study focuses specifically on interrelationships between proactive branding strategy, brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement, and brand performance in the Thai supplementary food industry. A structured mail survey was applied using a validated questionnaire to collect data from 122 firms. Multiple regression analysis was rigorously used to examine the hypothesized relationships and to test the moderating effects proposed by this framework. The results of this study are presented as below.

1. Proactive branding strategy has a positive influence on brand differentiation, customer engagement quality, customer experience enhancement, and ultimately, brand performance. The findings indicate the crucial role that proactive branding plays in enabling unique market positions, meaningful customer connections and superior brand outcomes.

2. This study also validates that brand differentiation, quality of customer engagement, and customer experience can influence brand performance significantly. Customer preference and loyalty can be built through brand differentiation while creating high quality engagement helps build trust and further emotional connection. Customer experiences that are enhanced lead to higher satisfaction, advocacy, and retention, in turn, improve brand performance and reinforce the role of these mediators in achieving long term success

3. Though the level of digital transformation does not significantly moderate many of these relationships, it does strengthen the effect of customer engagement quality on brand performance, highlighting the necessity of highly targeted technological investment in engagement activities. Consequently, to deliver sustained growth and superior competitive advantage, firms should concentrate on digital strategies that support customer engagement as well as overall business goals.

Contribution

For theoretical contribution, in particular, this study focuses on uncovering how proactive branding strategy contributes to brand performance through brand differentiation, customer engagement, quality, and the enhancement of customer experience in Thai food supplement firms. Findings verify that proactive branding has a significant positive effect on brand performance and its mediators, and points to the importance of strategic foresight in branding. Results also show that most relationships are not moderated by digital transformation, suggesting that proactive branding can be effective also in low digital contexts. Although customer engagement quality is linked to brand performance, digital transformation mitigates this relationship, demonstrating technology as a way to boost engagement and drive outcomes. It reveals the intersection between traditional branding practices and digital maturity by industry.

For managerial contribution, superior brand performance for Thai food supplement firms lies in proactive branding. There's the need for firms to forge trust, emotional connections, and loyalty, and choose a unique value proposition. Digital transformation is critical for maximizing customer engagement quality and less so for differentiation and customer experience. Thus, managers should acquire tools such as CRM



and analytics to improve interactions, harmonizing traditional strategies with the digital ones are the essential component needed to ensure the competitiveness and growth.

Suggestions

1. Future research should examine the implementation of proactive branding strategies across various industries or sectors to determine if the outcomes are consistent in diverse cultural and economic environments. Examining across different sectors would provide participants with a comprehensive grasp of the link between proactive branding and brand performance.

2. Although it was discovered that digital transformation moderated certain linkages, the total effect that it has on the entire spectrum of branding may be investigated thoroughly. New customer-facing technologies, such as social media platforms and data-driven customer engagement technologies, should be taken into consideration in future research in order to broaden the scope of the measurements that are employed to evaluate the processes of digital transformation in firms. It has been demonstrated that the presence of these components can enhance the effectiveness of branding strategies.

3. Given the rapid evolution of markets and branding tactics, longitudinal studies are recommended to provide a more profound understanding of the relationship between proactive branding initiatives and their consequences throughout time. This strategy may enhance clarity in comprehending the long-term ramifications of proactive branding and its role in fostering a sustainable competitive advantage.

4. Assessing additional organizational variables, including innovation capability and leadership orientation, can enhance the conception of proactive branding strategies in future research. These dynamics will elucidate the suitability of proactive branding strategies employed by firms and their consequent performance.

Limitations

1. One of the main limitations of this study is the focus on the Thai supplementary food industry, which may reduce the applicability of the results in other industries or geographical areas.

2. This study measures the level of digital transformation primarily in terms of operation, without taking into account customer facing technologies and social media integration.

3. Because of this study's cross-sectional nature, it does not permit an examination of how the relationship between proactive branding strategy and its outcomes develop over time, especially in fast changing markets.

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