

CUSTOMER VALUE CREATION OF FRESH TOMATOES THROUGH BRANDING AND PACKAGING AS CUSTOMER PERCEIVED QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a value proposition and a development model of customer value based on consumer perceived quality to utilize branding and packaging for a particular perishable commodity such as fresh tomatoes. The terminology of customer value is varied across the analysis stage and is crucial for projecting marketing activity. However, it will be distinctive based on its definition. The study was conducted in September 2014 - January 2015 at one of the biggest hypermarket retail centers in Bandung City, with descriptive and explanatory survey data of 41 respondents. In this regard, the hypotheses were examined by describing customer value mapping and providing a conceptual framework using path analysis technique. Value proposition showed fresh tomatoes achieved superior perceived-quality with competitive price. This means branding and packaging have successfully increased the external marketing value at a considerable price. Path analysis model defined that branding and packaging provide significant contribution to customer value. This indicated that explicit focus on customer role as the driver for premium fresh vegetables market was successful. Hence, the value conceptualization is needed to facilitate a better understanding of fresh produce consumer behavior.

Key words: marketing, value proposition, consumer behavior, product attribute, vegetables

INTRODUCTION

Customer value terminology is varied across analysis stage. Customer value concept is a proposition of customer relative perspective on benefit and cost (Kotler and Keller 2006), adjustment on perceived quality (Gale and Wood 1994), and customer appraisal on benefit and cost for buying a product (Nilforushan and Haeri 2015). The process of defining customer value can be distinctive based on the subjectivity of its definition. Differentiating horticultural product is important to win the market competition nowadays (Utami and Sadeli 2013). Packaging and branding as vegetable product attributes could enhance product value with its appealing display and uniqueness. These two product attributes are important for evaluating product quality (Ludwig and Spiller 2007; Ulaga and Chacour 2001). This value could be useful as a reference and feedback for commodity supply chain actors nowadays in considering the consumer's awareness on the branding and packaging, especially for the fresh produce in modern retails.

Branding is one of the focal points in the Asian marketing (Fam and Merrilees

2000), and a source of customer loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). Several fruits and vegetables brands complement each other and ensure different quality attributes to consumers. In order to be successful in agribusiness sector, building a strong brand of food product is urgently needed to establish a customer top-of-mind (Miles et al. 1997; Pierce and Hogan 2000), and to discharge price competition (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000).

Packaging is one of the product elements to differentiate from other relatively homogenous perishable consumer goods (Ampuero and Vila 2006). In collectivist developing countries, consumer orientation on product packaging may focus more on its function (Lal et al. 2015). Moreover, it can be developed as a technique to increase the perishable crops quality such as tomato (Saeed et al. 2010). The packaging on fresh produce is a part of the product attributes which consumer needs and values.

There are many perspectives on customer value creation and its measurements. The exchange value of fresh produce like fresh tomatoes is relevant to analyze. The basic function of a product is to fulfill consumer's basic needs and the benefits are valued by product attributes on branding and packaging. Packaging utility was investigated by the importance of packaging application and by packaging function, while branding utility was examined by basic function of branding. Customer perceived value comes after its perceived quality. Consumer's perceived value is defined as a trade-off between customer perception and product quality or benefit and the price that he or she is willing to pay (Monroe 1990). Customer perception on quality (Zeithmal 1988) affected customer perceived value (Ranjbarian et al. 2012). Some studies further examined the value as a driver for customer satisfaction and loyalty (e.g. Cretu and Brodie 2007; Koller et al. 2011; Spiteri and Dion 2004; Sugiyati et al. 2013). However, they did not present sufficient information on the proposition of the value which elaborates the factors of each and/or overall value aspect that affects customer value creation. Cost was identified by how much the consumer is willing to spend for certain product. The benefit of fresh produce branding and packaging needs further research to prove its competitive advantages. This study particularly investigated the customer value on premium tomatoes which are using packaging and branding as product attributes based on its utilities and market demands (Nilforushan and Haeri 2015). These were applied as evaluation determinant of value proposition which compares product utility and how much consumer is willing to pay. They are also applied as customer's rationalization of a value.

In developing countries, many consumers are still anxious on the branding and packaging, especially on vegetables. Recently, most of the studies present the customer value on manufactured goods, yet there are only limited studies on the agricultural products. Modern retail should consider the exact key value needed in the product development, including packaging and branding, to gain consumer interest in premium vegetables, due to the restricted amount available in the market. This study replicates the previous researches on customer value, with additional study on the importance of product attributes, such as branding and packaging as product's perceived quality, as the driver for customer perceived value. Table 1 summarizes the studies development with customer value as the major contexts with its influential factors.

The above literature references showed that there were limited researches that observed or investigated the antecedent variables of customer value, in particular, the branding and packaging as basic attributes of tangible products that represent the product quality and their contribution proportion and effect in the customer value of branded and premium packaged tomatoes. There are less concern in developing research on customer value model and its construction which focused on experiencing product value of premium

vegetables and its attributes, such as branding and packaging. On that account, vegetables are commonly sold in the undifferentiated condition without additional product attributes. This results in slightly different customer perception between a particular product and its competitors (Christopher 1996). In Indonesia, agricultural product especially fresh produce, are commonly sold in traditional market. Only limited numbers are sold in modern market with up-to-date marketing. Due to the increasing number of modern retail in emerging economy as in Indonesia, marketers have shifted their sales of premium vegetables from the traditional into a modern market to fulfill today customer food choice.

Table 1. Studies development on customer value creation and the antecedents

Reference and Study Objective	Value Aspect	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
Zeithaml (1988), company and consumer	Value proposition	Price and perceived quality	Perceived value
Ulaga and Chacour (2001), industrial business market	Customer value	Value through buyer's and seller's perspective	value creation through networks
Evans (2002), company marketing campaign	Customer value management	Price and non-price drivers to customer satisfaction	Customer loyalty
Spiteri and Dion (2004), intensive industry	New customer value scale	Perceived relationship benefits	Customer value, Buyer satisfaction, end-user loyalty, market performance
Fernandez and Bonillo (2007), literature review	Perceived value	Uni-dimensional and multi-dimensional model	Measurement of perceived value
Cretu, and Brodie (2007), business market	Customer value	Brand image, company reputation	Perceived quality, perceived customer value, loyalty
Jin <i>et al.</i> (2008), fresh produce vs other products	Brand value	Product value for consumer	Willingness to pay
Sial <i>et al.</i> (2011), young consumer	Value of Brand	Packaging and labeling	Brand image and consumer buying behavior
Koller <i>et al.</i> (2011), non-green product	Ecological value	Functional value, economic value, emotional value, and social value	Loyalty intention
Mensonen and Haloka (2012), beverage packaging	Novel value perception	Role of packaging in the value chain, role of advertisement on the packaging	Value of packaging
Agariya <i>et al.</i> (2012), manufacture product	Branding value process	Brand communication	Brand value for customer
Sugiati <i>et al.</i> (2013), retail store consumer	Customer value	Customer value, customer satisfaction	Customer loyalty
Taranko and Chmielewski (2014), manufacture industry	Brand value for buyers and owners	Brand value equity	Customer value

Based on the context, the following conceptual model (Fig. 1) was applied. This investigated the effect of customer perception towards utility of branding and packaging as consumer perceived quality on customer value. Utility is one value concept as the desirable product from a customer perspective (Fernandez and Bonillo 2007). It was assumed that branding and packaging affected customer perceived value as product perceived quality based on customer experience on buying branded and packaged fresh tomatoes.

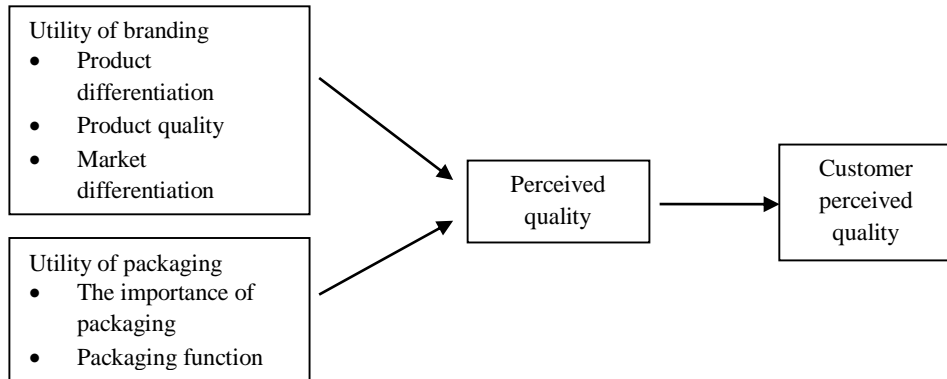


Fig. 1. The conceptual framework

Tomato is one of the premium vegetable commodities, sold in modern market such as supermarket in Bandung City, Indonesia. The city is a metropolitan with prominent tomato production center in Pangalengan District. The area has been formed as an agribusiness cluster and one of the farmer groups has penetrated modern market and been affiliated as partner of Bank of Indonesia. They distributed new product of premium tomatoes to supplier which sold almost 80% of the produce to supermarket. They started to adapt a modern marketing strategy by adding branding and packaging attributes to create a more competitive product. The knowledge and requirements of the product attributes are delivered by supplier companies as modern retail buyer. They require product specifications to standardize the product quality and tag five to ten times price, higher than its competitors' in local or traditional market. This is an opportunity for all parties in the tomatoes supply chain to gain more profit. In particular, local farmers will be able to trade for a fair and stable price, thus to be more competitive in the market. Above all, tomato is one of the famous horticultural crop commodities, used for medical and nutritional purpose (Saeed et al. 2010). Therefore, our study's objective is to analyze the proposition of customer value on packaged and branded fresh tomatoes based on relative product benefit and production cost, and to investigate factors that drive consumers' evaluation when it comes to experience the value of vegetables product such as branded and packaged tomatoes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey Instrument Development

In order to gain insight of value proposition and the effect of utility of branding and packaging on customer value, data were collected through a consumer survey. The research was done at one of hypermarket retail in Bandung City as one of the biggest retails in West Java Province and partnering with farmer group who produces the supplied fresh tomatoes. A four-part questionnaire (customer demographic, utility of brand, utility of packaging, and customer value) was developed as survey instrument. The questionnaire was designed based on literature and previous studies.

Participants responded to a total 32 questions. There were several response choices for each section of the questionnaire. In demographic section, response choices included multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank answers. On the other part of the questionnaire, response choices comprised multiple response options for brand utility and packaging utility, Likert's scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree), 5-point-inclined-rating for overall product benefit scale response (1=extremely low to 5=extremely high) and 5-point-agreement-rating for overall monetary cost scale response ((1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree), the last two respectively measured customer value. After pilot test, the questionnaire was revised to improve clarity and consistency thus maximizing data collection quality. We only included questionnaire items with acceptable level of validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.829). The final version of the questionnaire contained five indicator items of the utility of branding and it was computed using factor weights from utility of brand as product differentiation, product quality, and market differentiation. The utility of packaging was represented by nine indicator items and was calculated using factor weights from utility of packaging as its importance for the product and its functions. Whereas, customer value was embodied by eleven indicator items and was computed as a ratio of brand and packaging benefit to monetary sacrifices.

Data Collection

This study applied descriptive survey method using questionnaire and face-to-face interview with 41 customers who bought branded and packaged tomatoes during September 2014 to January 2015 at one of the biggest retails in Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia. The desired level to determine sample size for multiple regression analysis is between 15 to 20 observations for each independent variable (Hair et al. 2006). This present study had two independent variables; branding and packaging as the drivers for product perceived quality and one dependent variable that is customer value; hence 41 participants met the appropriateness of sample size.

Data Measurement

The study was conducted in three phases after collecting data from the questionnaire. The first phase was preparation phase to collect and check the filled questionnaires. Afterwards, we did tabulation to describe value proposition based on customer value mapping. The last phase was data application phase using customer value mapping to describe the value proposition and path analysis to investigate a complete correlation among each observed variable.

Customer Value Mapping

Customer value mapping was used to describe the position of premium fresh tomato products with their branding and packaging attributes. Firstly, customer value analysis was applied before developing customer value mapping in four-quadrants of mapping, in which vertical axis represented relative benefit and horizontal axis represented cost relative of the analyzed product. The customer value analysis was measured by calculating the ratio or comparison of benefit and cost, and counting each scores of product overall benefit and cost overall product. Afterwards, the ratio of customer value score was counted. The score indicated customer value position of fresh tomatoes based on the product value of brand and packaging, and the product monetary cost.

Path Analysis

We tested the effect of branding and packaging on customer value using path analysis, assisted by SPSS 15.0 program, as described in Figure 2. Path analysis was chosen to assess the pattern of causation of branding and packaging or both variables on the observed customer value variable. The analysis elucidated the distinctive features between

marginal coefficient if the response variable is regressed by single regression variable and the partial regression coefficient if one or more extra regression variables are involved when the causal explanation are not appropriate (Bartholomew et al. 2008).

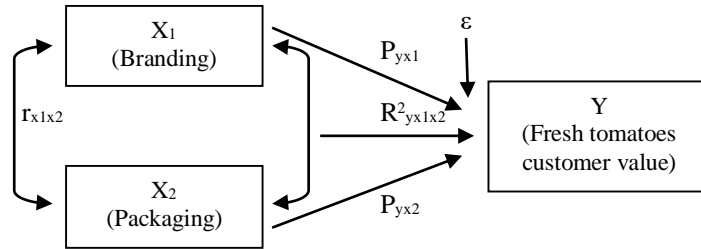


Fig. 2. Path diagram of correlation of branding and packaging on customer value
Structured equation for path diagram:

$$Y = \rho_{yx1}X1 + \rho_{yx2}X2 + \epsilon$$

The hypothesis in this research was that there is an effect of branding and packaging towards customer value in terms of utility of branding, utility of packaging as customer perceived value, and customer value based on product benefit and material cost. Furthermore, customers may have different point of views on utility of branding as product identification, market differentiation, and product quality. Also, they may have different perspectives on utility of packaging and its importance and functions. In order to define the influence of branding and packaging on customer value, the following hypothesis were set:

- a. Hypotheses for the influence of branding and packaging on customer value.
 - H_0 : there are no significant influences of utility of branding and packaging on branded and packaged fresh tomatoes customer value
 - H_1 : there are significant influences of utility of branding and packaging on branded and packaged fresh tomatoes customer value

- b. Hypotheses for the influence of branding in terms of utility of branding on customer value.
 - H_0 : there is no significant influence of utility of branding in terms of brand as product identification, market differentiation, and product quality on branded and packaged fresh tomatoes customer value
 - H_2 : there is a significant influence of utility of branding in terms of brand as product identification, market differentiation, and product quality on branded and packaged fresh tomatoes customer value

- c. Hypotheses for the influence of packaging in terms of utility of packaging on customer value.
 - H_0 : there is no significant influence of utility of packaging in terms of the importance of packaging and packaging function on branded and packaged fresh tomatoes customer value
 - H_3 : there is a significant influence of packaging in terms of the importance of packaging and packaging function on branded and packaged fresh tomatoes customer value

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio – demographic Profile

There was a significant difference in the age distribution of customers (Table 2). The majority of customers were females aged over 45 years-old. Different customer gender could give different point of view, for instance, female prefers to choose fresh produce with more information and attributes on packaging compared to male (Ragaert et al. 2004). It was also highlighted that almost half the proportion of customers had moderate family income level between IDR 2-5 million, and had no specific occupation (housewives). Nearly a quarter of the customers worked as professionals and government employees. This customer profile describes the market segment and market target of branded and packaged tomatoes.

Table 2. Socio-demographic customer profile of branded and packaged fresh tomatoes

Description	n (n = 41)	%
Age Group		
18 – 35 years	7	17.07
36 – 45 years	12	29.27
Over 45 years	22	53.66
Sex		
Male	2	5.13
Female	39	95.12
Income		
IDR 2 million – IDR 5 million	20	48.78
IDR 5 million – IDR 10 million	18	43.9
> IDR 10 million	3	7.32
Occupation		
Non-professional	5	12.20
Professional	9	21.95
Government Employee	10	24.39
Never worked (housewife)	17	41.46

Customer Value Analysis

Value proposition mapping aims to describe and to evaluate competencies and capabilities of producers in delivering efficient and effective value proposition to customer to satisfy both parties (Martinez and Bititci 2001). Each customer has unique and dynamic values which are indicated by different behavior overtime (Ulaga and Chacour 2001). Values of customer might change in a different time span and business environment. The results of customer value analysis in this study are summarized in Table 3.

Customer value is a comparison of the benefits that consumers gain from the purchase of branded and packaged tomatoes based on applied benefits with the use of branding and packaging for tomato products compared to the total cost incurred by consumers including the rationality, affordability and the cheaper price. Customer value approach was used to identify how consumers assess competitive offers from various kinds of the same product and then make the assumption that their buying decisions is associated with the product value as the key driver (Evans 2002). Analysis of branded and packaged tomatoes customer value toward assessment of customer value dimensions to produce a position map is shown in Table 2 and Fig. 3.

Table 3. Customer value analysis

Customer Score Component	Score	Benefit Total Score	Benefit Average Score	Cost Total Score	Cost Average Score	Customer Value Score
Benefit						
1 Brand utilization	131	-	3,20	-	-	
2 Package utilization	157	-	3,83	-	-	
3 Brand and package as product quality	158	-	3,85			
4 Brand and package as positive impression reference	159	-	3,88			
5 Brand and package as nutrient reference	159	-	3,88			
	-	764	3,73	-	-	
Cost						
1 Monetary Cost	-	-	-	-	-	
a. Reasonable and affordable cost	-	-	-	137	3,34	
b. Cheaper Cost				109	2,66	
				246	3,00	1,24

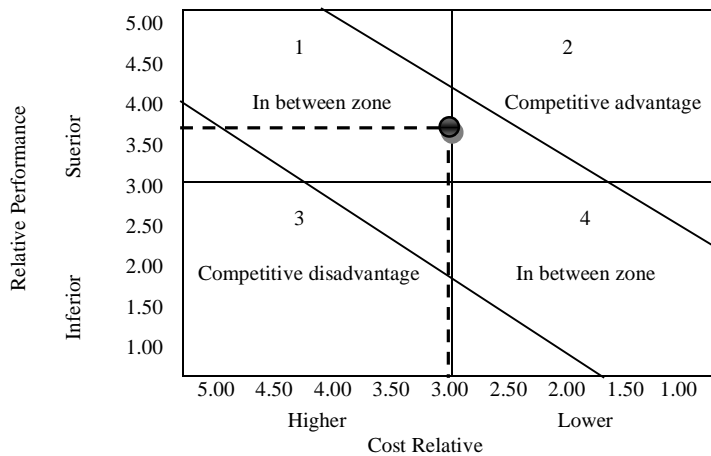


Fig. 3. Branded and packaged fresh tomatoes customer value mapping

The customer value analysis (Table 3) and customer value mapping (Fig. 3) revealed that customer perceived benefit had a high average score, while perceived cost had a fair average score. This is in line with the statement from Lovelock and Wirtz (2004) that value is subjective to each consumer and only a few of the consumers have expertise in assessing and evaluating product quality and only finally recognize the value of the product. Tomatoes growers and/or distributors should have enough information of the importance of product attribute and furthermore give in-depth explanation to customers to appraise the perceived value of a product.

Customer value mapping shows that branded and packaged fresh tomatoes belong to the area called “in between zone”. This area points out high or superior perceived benefits and fair perceived costs by customers. It means customers see branded and packaged

tomatoes as the high value products based on their high average benefits. Branding and packaging attributes could be considered as the triggers for tomatoes to be more than just a generic vegetable that are mostly sold in the market. A fair average cost perceived by customer is the key that should be considered by the tomato producers and/ or tomato distributors (wholesalers or suppliers) who used the two products attributes as marketing tools to increase the product value. The product average cost performance should be reduced in order to create lower product cost.

Correlation among Variables

Data analysis using SPSS 15.0 yielded the coefficient correlation between each variable branding and packaging on customer value (Table 4). The calculation result between utility of brand and customer value was 0.611. This indicated that these two variables had a strong relationship because it stood above 0.4 with positive heading. A strong positive connection between the utility of packaging and customer value was also found (coefficient correlation = 0.519).

Table 4. Correlation matrix among variables

	X1 (Utility of Brand)	X2 (Utility of Packaging)	Y (Customer Value)
X1 (Utility of Brand)	1.000	0.457*	0.611*
X2 (Utility of Packaging)	0.457*	1.000	0.519*
Y (Customer Value)	0.611*	0.519*	1.000

* Significant at the level 0.05 (2-tailed)

Path Coefficient

This research used a structured model consisted of two independent variables and one dependent variable. Path coefficient was signified as Beta coefficient (Table 5).

Table 5. Path coefficient

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient:	t	Sig
	B	Std. error	Beta		
1 (constant)	0.084	0.227		0.371	0.713
X1	0.118	0.034	0.473	3.483	0.001*
X2	0.144	0.064	0.303	2.236	0.031*

*Significance at the 0.05 level dependent variable Y

Coefficient Determination

Path coefficients ($\rho_{y\epsilon}$) for other variables which were not involved in this research (Table 6) were measured by calculating the coefficient using this formula:

$$\rho_{y\epsilon} = \sqrt{1 - 0.447} = 0.74364$$

Table 6. Path coefficient for other variables

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.668 ^a	0.447	0.417	0.12195

a. Predictors: (constant).

The structured equation model of the influence of branding and packaging on customer value was as follows:

$$Y = 0.473X_1 + 0.303X_2 + 0.743$$

Model diagram of the influence of X1 (branding) and X2 (packaging) towards Y (fresh tomatoes customer value) was depicted in Fig. 4:

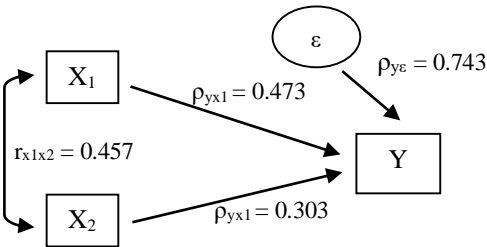


Fig. 4. Model diagram

Path Coefficient Testing

Verification of the influence of branding and packaging towards tomatoes customer value was done through two-stage statistical hypothesis testing. The first stage was the simultaneous testing to identify the significance of both branding and packaging towards customer value; followed by the identification of the partial significance of each branding and packaging on tomatoes customer value.

Table 7 illustrates the effect of branding and packaging on tomatoes customer value with $F - test = 15.327$ and was significant at the 5% level, confirming the model fitness. Furthermore, there were also significant influences of: (1) utility of branding towards tomatoes customer value ($t - test = 3.483$) and (2) utility of packaging towards customer value ($t - test = 2.236$), which were subsequently compared with t-student distribution for $\alpha=5\%$. These results confirmed the hypothesis that both branding and packaging influence tomatoes customer value.

Table 7. Estimation model customer value

Variable	Model	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-statistic	Prob.
	1 (constant)		0.227	0.371	0.713
Brand	X1	0.473	0.034	3.483	0.001
Packaging	X2	0.303	0.064	2.236	0.031
Brand and Packaging	F-statistic	15.327			
	Prob (F-statistic)	0.000			

a. Predictors: (constant), X1, X2

b. Dependent variable: Y

The Effect Proportion

Each variable of brand and packaging gave different effect proportion towards tomatoes customer value as described as follows:

- a. Branding directly determines the changes of fresh tomato customer value by 22.4%, and, along with the use of packaging, indirectly influences customer value by 6.6%. Thus, the total effect of branding on fresh tomato customer value changes was 29%.
- b. Packaging directly determines the changes of fresh tomato customer value by 9.2%, and, along with the use of packaging, indirectly influences customer value by 6.6%. Therefore, the total effect of packaging on fresh tomato customer value changes was 15.8%.
- c. Branding and packaging altogether affects fresh tomato customer value by 44.7%. Meanwhile, other variables that were not involved in the research have 55.2% proportional effect on fresh tomato customer value.

Customer value mapping analysis shows that branded and packaged tomatoes stood in an area called “in between zone” which might bring superior competitive advantage on fresh tomato marketing. Contribution of branding and packaging in creating customer value was also corroborated in this study. This means that both attributes have successfully increased fresh tomato value although the customers were aware of its higher price. Branding and packaging are examples of proactive innovation aiming at gaining superior customer value, unlike reactive innovation which merely offers an equal customer value compared to the competitors (Ingenbleek et al. 2001). Brand and packaging might increase the perceived value of commodity product such as fruits and vegetables, thus might impact consumer’s choice or decision making to buy certain fresh produce (Halaswamy and Subhas 2014; Koutsimanis et al. 2012). Brand value could contribute to reduce fresh product risk quality (Jin et al. 2008), and to nurture financial growth and prosperity of agribusiness industry (Nijssen and Trijp 1998). Therefore, producers and suppliers of premium fresh tomatoes need to sustain innovative branding and packaging to achieve superior customer value and increase their competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study findings, it is necessary to educate farmers or producers and distributors of premium quality tomatoes regarding the importance of branding and packaging to enhance the customer value of their product. This value creation would escalate the product benefits which worth its premium price that will, in turn; increase the growth of agribusiness industry. The present study affirms the positive effects of product attributes, particularly branding and packaging, on creating value of tomato commodity.

Research concerning customer value creation of fresh vegetables, is not a common issue in marketing. Compared to studies on industrial products, research on customer value creation in agribusiness is still limited. Accordingly, further studies to assess variables which are not included in this research might add more values for producers, marketing actors, and also customers of the perishable commodity such as tomato.

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