

Examining the Influences of Theory Reasoned Action towards Buying Fashion Branded Goods

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Abstract. Malaysia's main consumer market consists of three major ethnic groups that include Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Each ethnic group maintains their cultural traditions and values, including religion and languages that leads to heterogeneity in their behaviors and preferences. The theory of reasoned action explained the influential factors that include individual's attitude and subjective norm that affect intention and behavior. Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine whether the theory of reasoned action influences the buying behavior of female consumers in Malaysia towards buying fashion branded goods. A survey method was utilized in collecting the data. Questionnaires were distributed at random to females working at both public and private universities. Out of the 300 distributed questionnaires, 260 were returned and completed. Regression analyses were utilized to examine the influence of theory of reasoned action towards buying fashion branded goods. The respondents' attitudes significantly influenced their behavior towards buying fashion branded goods. The Regression analyses indicated there were differences by ethnic groups on beliefs, attitude, purchase intention and subjective norms. However, the Malaysian females were not highly influenced by their subjective norms. Results from the analyses partially supported the influenced of theory of reasoned action towards buying fashion branded merchandise.

Keywords: Theory of Reasoned Action, fashion, brand, female, ethnic, behavior

1 INTRODUCTION

The retailing industry has faced massive changes over the past decade (Dunne & Lusch, 2005). The retail sector has moved forward ranging from brick and mortar, mail order, catalogue, television shopping, vending machine, door to door to the recent ones that is internet shopping (Dunne & Lusch, 2005). The development of the retail sector has somehow offers opportunity for consumers to purchase local and imported goods without so much of hassles.

In recent year, Malaysian shoppers have increasingly become more discerning and sophisticated, which, in turn, has contributed towards retail development in the market (Chuang, 2007). The growing Malaysian retail market has gained an average of 6.1% a year from 2001 to 2006 (Chuang, 2007). Malaysia's retail sales have increased by RM77.3 billion (USD 232 billion) in 2007 (Chuang, 2007). With the emergence of big shopping malls that sell international fashion brand names such as the Pavillion in the Kuala Lumpur region and Johore Premium Outlet in Johore, this somehow reflects that Malaysian consumers are quite inclined to buy branded goods. For the past years, fashion has affected the urban landscape such as mobile phones, cars, media and restaurants (Tungate, 2005). Fashion brands play an important factor in affecting current consumers' lifestyle (Tungate, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to determine if the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) could be used as a prediction tool in examining the purchase intention of Malaysian female consumers towards fashion branded goods. For this study, interest focused on fashion merchandise that carries a brand name, either with a local or foreign brand name.

One of Malaysia's unique characteristics is its multicultural society. Several diverse cultures have been congregating and shaping the country since the very beginning of its history. Malaysia's culture has been formed by three main ethnic groups: Malay (50%), Chinese (22%), and Indian (7%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2013). Each ethnic group is quite strict in maintaining its cultural traditions and values, including religion and language (Amir, 1995). This diversity has made Malaysia a unique marketplace. Cultural differences that exist among the different ethnic groups have contributed to the heterogeneity in the behavior of Malaysian consumers, where the domestic market is characterized by the "ethnically segmented consumer markets" (Mohd. Salleh, Teo & Pecotich 1998, p. 481). This study is essential since findings would help to confirm whether the Theory of Reasoned Actions really applies towards the unique culture of Malaysia in relation to buying fashion branded merchandise.

Several objectives are outlined for this study: 1) To investigate the influence of Theory of Reasoned Action on Malaysian consumers in buying fashion branded goods; 2) To identify factors that influence Malaysian female consumers in purchasing fashion branded merchandise and 3) To examine any differences exist among the main ethnic groups in buying fashion branded goods in relation to the Theory of Reasoned Action. In order to meet the research objectives, three (3) research questions are proposed: 1) What is the relationship between the Theory of Reasoned Action and Malaysian females towards buying fashion branded goods; 2) What are the key factors that influence Malaysian female consumers in buying fashion branded merchandise; 3) Are there any differences in terms of attitude and behavior among the main ethnic groups?

With the increased competition from foreign brands, local merchants have increasingly introduced myriad brand names to accommodate local needs (McColl & Moore, 2011). According to Singh (2011), Malaysia's local retail market is expected to increase due to the growth of retail chains. The enhancement of retail sectors in Malaysia has brought towards the needs to better understand the attitude and behavior of female consumers. Identifying factors that affecting local female's behaviors would be advantageous for retailers to form strategies to target their customers appropriately. Therefore, results from this study would aid fashion retailers in establishing their local brand competitiveness in meeting Malaysian consumers' needs and wants. Findings from this research also would offer strategies for local merchants to enhance their market offerings through branding in which this would help their market positioning. Finally, outcome from this research also enable retailers to increase local consumers' brand loyalty through identification of consumers' behavioral intention towards purchasing branded fashion goods.

1.1 Literature Review

A variety of factors shape consumers' purchase decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Consumers are highly influenced by both internal and external factors in buying clothing goods (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), Theory of Reasoned Action explains the influential factors that include individual's attitude and subjective norm that affect intention and behavior. Individual attitude is related to personal evaluations of beliefs about a particular behavior and subjective norms are concerned with the influence and beliefs of people in one's social environment. These two factors influenced an individual's perception and attitude and affect the individual's behavioral intention. However, research examining the affect of Theory of Reasoned Action focusing on Malaysian female consumers in buying fashion branded goods is somehow limited. With the diversity of culture in Malaysia, this would definitely leads to an interesting insight of the Malaysian females' distinctive behaviors and attitudes towards their fashion consumption.

The emergence of European and American branded retail stores in the country have somehow driven consumers' to purchase branded fashion goods extensively. Local brand

fashion goods face great competition from international brand fashion goods (Herche, 1992). Hence, examining the influence of Theory of Reasoned Action is essential in knowing what factors really influence the Malaysian consumers towards buying imported branded merchandise. Malaysian populations are composed of multi-ethnic societies that somehow lead to differences in their values and beliefs towards their consumption behaviour (Mokhlis, 2009). Findings from this study would assist clothing retailers in providing fashion merchandise that will meet consumers' expectations as well as a source of information for retailers' marketing strategy.

Consumers often perceive imported branded goods distinctively in relation to local made products (Herche, 1992). Imported apparel products were identified to have an effect on consumer perception of the quality of clothing brands (Morganosky & Lazaede, 1987). When comes to status, consumers are normally influenced to purchase branded goods despite its high price (Mason, 1981). Mason (1981) found that consumers are always motivated by a desire to impress others with their ability to buy imported branded goods. Indeed, social factor seems to dominate consumers to buy imported branded clothing compared to their actual financial abilities (Mason, 1981).

Meanwhile, ethnicity is a complex construct that has a strong affect on the consumption pattern that shapes consumer's behavior (Zmud & Arce, 1992; Mokhlis 2009). Ethnicity is one of the important elements for marketers in determining and planning their market segment. Ethnicity is composed of both inherited and acquired characteristics that highly influence the behavior of consumers in the market (Zmud & Arce, 1992). The social environment and type of product influences the relationship between ethnicity and consumer behavior (Stayman & Deshpande, 1989). Consumer's ethnicity background and the surrounding environment will predict the type of product that consumers will purchase and this contributes to different preferences among consumers (Stayman & Deshpande, 1989; Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995; Kim & Arthur, 2003). Past research related to retailing has investigated the influence of ethnicity on various aspects of consumer behaviors, including brand loyalty, consumption patterns, shopping patronage, and perception towards advertising (Shagger & O'Hara, 1995; Zmud & Arce, 1992). Ethnicity is viewed as an influence on consumer attributes that affect consumer's buying behavior. Individual differences and backgrounds yield distinctive preferences on apparel attributes that influence consumers buying (Hsu & Burns, 2002; Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995; Chen Yu, 1995, Ko, 1995).

1.2 Theory of Reasoned Action

The theory explains how an individual's attitudes towards a particular behavior combined with the individual's subjective norm influence intention and behavior. Individual's attitude is related to personal evaluations of beliefs about a particular behavior and subjective norms concern with the influence and beliefs of people in one's social environment (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) stated that an individual's behavior intention is influenced by his/her own evaluations of beliefs that are their assessment on some attributes of certain product. For example, an individual who intends to purchase online apparel will first evaluate the attributes that he or she can gain from online purchase. The behavioral intention will also influenced by the subjective norm that represents people views and beliefs of the importance of these attributes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). These people are normally those related and close to the individual and the individual will seek their opinions before making the final decision and intention. The logic is that human beings are basically rational and make systematic use of information available to them when making decisions.

The principle theorem of this theory is to explain, predict and understand individual's intentions and behaviours (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Previous study found that the Theory of Reasoned Action explained and predicted young consumers purchase intention of products made by emu leather (Belleau, Summer, Xu, & Pinel, 2007). This study also identified that attitude toward the behaviour was the most significant predictor variable in the model. By identifying the personal attitude and subjective norms that may influence an individual actual behaviour, marketers can re-examine and revise their marketing strategies to target customers precisely and secure a competitive advantage.

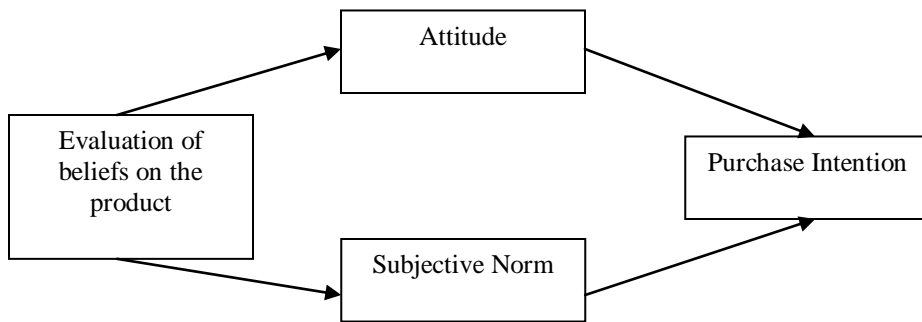


Fig.1. Conceptual framework

2 METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research methodology was utilized to collect the data. Female respondents studying at local universities were selected using a snowball sampling approach. The questionnaires were personally hand-delivered. Female respondents' aged between 21-35 years old were the target sample of the study. Females were selected because women were perceived as the primary purchasing agents for the majority of consumer products as well as traditional buying agents of apparel for themselves and family members (Cassill & Drake, 1987; Fuller & Blackwell, 1992). In order to gain well diverse participants that represented the Malaysian multi-ethnic society, female participants were selected from both private and public universities.

In assessing the relationship of Theory of Reasoned Action towards Malaysian female consumers in buying fashion branded merchandise, a self-developed scale that reflects the main variables in the theory was constructed. Indeed, a self-developed scale was utilized to accommodate with the cultural and ethnicity values of Malaysian females in relation to the Theory of Reasoned Action in buying fashion branded fashion merchandise. The self-designed measurement was initially done in the Malay language and then translated into English for the final distribution of the questionnaire. Close-ended questions were used in the questionnaire. Responses were captured on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by 1 as "Strongly disagree" to 7 as "Strongly agree". Demographic information on age, gender, education, income, marital status, ethnicity, and employment background was obtained by asking participants to select appropriate category.

2.1 Procedure

A total of 300 questionnaires ($N=300$) were distributed to female students at both public and the private universities. Of the 300 distributed questionnaires, 260 were returned and retained as usable ($N=260$). Seventy two percent of the 260 participants identified themselves as Malay. Eight percent self-identified as Chinese and 12 percent as Indian. Overall,

participants were relatively young with 69 percent in the age group between 19 and 24, 16 percent in the age group between 25 and 30 and 13 percent were between 31 and 35. However, 7 percent were above than 35 years of age.

2.2 Measures

The self-developed scale included four (4) main variables which were based on Theory of Reasoned Action. The four variables consisted of six (6) items evaluated behavioral beliefs and evaluation of beliefs; four (4) items measured attitude; five (5) items on purchase intention, and nine (9) items assessed the subjective norms. In order to validate the self-developed scale, several analyses were performed included Exploratory Factor Analysis, Reliability Analysis and Bivariate Correlation Analysis. These analyses were conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the measures besides identifying the number of factors that emerged from the variables reflecting the Theory of Reasoned Action. Meanwhile, a p -value of .05 is employed to determine statistical significance.

2.3 Data Analyses

The data were quantitatively analyzed using the statistical software program Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were computed to identify the respondent's profiles and demographic characteristics. Frequency distributions of responses to the questions on respondents' demographic characteristics provided descriptive information about the respondents. Regression analyses were utilized to establish the statistical significance of the relationship between the Theory of Reasoned Action and buying fashion branded goods among the Malaysian females.

A reliability analysis was conducted on the three (3) factors solution. Based on the reliability analysis results, all the three (3) factors displayed construct reliabilities of more than .70. Factor 1: Behavioral beliefs and evaluation of beliefs consisted of eight (8) items accounted .75; Factor 2: Perceived quality included nine (9) items scored .90 and Factor 3: Influenced by others or subjective norms contained five (5) items also accounted .90 values of Cronbach Alpha. The high values of Cronbach Alpha from these factors (i.e., more than minimum value of 0.70) displayed that the measures are consistent in measuring what it is suppose to be measured. The Cronbach Alpha for all 22 items was .90.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents' attitudes significantly influenced their behavior towards buying fashion branded goods. The Regression analyses indicated there were differences by ethnic groups on evaluation of beliefs, attitude, purchase intention and subjective norms. The model regressing race on five beliefs predictor variables was significant ($F = 6.02$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .11$). The results indicates that the Malaysian females consumers were influenced by their beliefs in product lasting, price, and knowledge of the fashion branded merchandise before they purchase the product. Three variables were significant for predicting the females purchase intention when buying fashion branded merchandise. Race was also predicted by four attitude variables. Only one variable was found significant in predicting females consumers purchase intention towards fashion branded goods ($F = 3.83$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .24$). The more positively consumers attitude towards a brand, the greater their purchase intentions is.

When regressing race on the four intention predictor variables, only one variable was significant ($F = 5.35$, $p < .00$, $R^2 = .08$). The positive beta coefficient ($b = .16$, $p < .05$) indicates that the more value offered by a brand, the more positive attitude they have towards the brand that eventually lead to a positive behavior. Race was regressed on the nine subjective norm variables. A model with one predictor variable was significant ($F = 2.39$, p

$<.05$, $R^2 = .29$). The positive beta coefficient ($b = .19$, $p < .05$) reflects that the more similar brand of clothing they wear to what their friends are wearing, the more likely they were to purchase the fashion branded merchandise.

The results indicate that the Theory of Reasoned Action somehow influenced the purchase intention of the Malaysian female consumers on fashion branded goods. Eventhough the local females were not strongly affected by their friends or significant others when buying fashion clothes, but they still prefer to buy fashion goods that are similar to what their friends are wearing. Interestingly, the results show that the majority of the female consumers in Malaysia evaluate the fashion goods in terms of its sustainability, price and know-how about the item before they purchase the goods. Beliefs about the product were found to be a strong predictor on buying fashion branded merchandise. The Malaysian female consumers also were found to only consider buying fashion merchandise if it carries a brand name. This demonstrates that the Malaysian females are brand conscious and more convinced to buy goods that carry a certain brand name. The brand name can be either local or foreign as long as it is an established brand name.

This research provides useful insights in identifying factors that influenced females shopping behavior. The study offered marketers with strategic information in utilizing appropriate approaches in the marketing of fashion branded products that would appeal to different ethnic groups in the Malaysian female consumers' market. The main objective of this study was to test the Ajzen and Fishbein's Reasoned Action Model for its validity in explaining the Malaysian female consumers' attitude towards buying fashion branded merchandise. We measured Malaysian consumers' buying attitude and behavior towards purchasing fashion branded goods. The results indicated that attitude towards purchasing fashion goods with brand names significantly influenced Malaysian females purchase intentions. Results from the study showed that the Malaysian consumers were influenced by their attitude towards the product that leads to their positive behavior. However, subjective norms were not fully influenced the Malaysian female consumer's attitude towards buying fashion branded merchandise. The results reflected that the majority of the Malaysian female consumers were highly influenced by their beliefs towards the brand before making decision to buy. Results from this study somehow were found consistent with previous study (Belleau, Summers, Xu, and Pinel, 2007).

The second objective of this study was to identify factors that influence female consumers when buying fashion branded goods. Results from the study displayed that factors such as trusts, knowledge, and awareness of the brand, and brand named products were significantly influenced consumers attitude towards buying fashion branded merchandise. This indicated that the local female consumers were quite cautious in choosing the right brand for their fashion merchandise. Despite the brand name, confidentiality towards the product is vital before they decide to purchase the respective product. This also showed that the positive attitude towards the product would lead to positive behavior which is similar with previous study (Belleau, Summers, Xu, and Pinel, 2007; Shen, Dickson, Lennon, Montalto, & Zhang, 2003). According to the model and theory, a more positive attitude will result in a higher and more positive intent to purchase the product.

Finally the third objective of this study was to examine whether any differences exist among the three main ethnic groups when buying fashion branded goods in relation to the Theory of Reasoned Action. Results from the analyses showed that significant differences existed among the ethnic groups on beliefs, attitude, intention and subjective norm towards buying fashion branded goods. These results are crucial for retailers to form their marketing strategies to cater to the needs of differences preferences among the main ethnic groups.

4 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The globalization of markets offers local retailers with considerable challenges and opportunities. Understanding factors that affect consumer attitude and behavior is essential for retailers to construct their marketing strategies efficiently. Hence, conducting consumer research in Malaysia can significantly contribute to our knowledge of the heterogeneity consumer segments that would be interestingly to be explored and applied by the global market. An important step towards generalizing behavioral theory has been taken by applying consumer behavior concepts in a Malaysian setting.

This research provides useful insights in identifying factors that influenced females shopping behavior. The study offered marketers with strategic information in utilizing appropriate approaches in the marketing of fashion branded products that would appeal to different ethnic and age groups in the Malaysian female consumers' market. These variables are viable to understand diverse consumer segments that have different spending patterns, shopping orientations, and preferences. The heterogeneity of market segments somehow provide opportunities for retailers to differentiate their market segments and identify each market preferences appropriately (Wan, Siu, & Hui, 2002).

Future research may focus on applying the Theory of Reasoned Action in examining the Malaysian consumers' attitude towards buying fashion imported branded names merchandise. This study is essential in exploring the behavior of local consumers towards imported goods since the local retail setting has been fully occupied by myriad international brand names. According to Herche (1992), consumers usually perceive foreign goods distinctively than the local products. Hence, investigating the consumer behavior towards international fashion brand names would offer advantages to local retailers in enhancing their branding strategies in competing with the competitors from the international market. In addition, this future study would also provide a fruitful avenue for local retailers in identifying local consumers' preferences towards buying international brand fashion merchandise.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to the Research Management Institute (RMI), UiTM Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia for the RIF grant.

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