Decision Orientations towards Shopping and Buying among Young-Adult Malays in the Universities

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Abstract

The learning processes that every consumer goes through would be the determining factors to the decisions a consumer makes when one is purchasing a product or paying for a service. Consumer educators and those involved with consumer interest studies in general consider the above statement as extremely obvious even though one might assume that consumers' learning and decision-making are a related phenomenon. In essence, such relationship has not been systematically explored in consumer research (Sproles & Sproles, 1990). As the number of product increases and the variety of goods available in the stores and shopping malls multiplies, this helps to broaden-up consumer choices. Similarly, with the availability of multi-component products and electronic purchasing capabilities not only it has broadened the sphere of consumer choice, it also adds complication in making a purchase decision. Based on the examination of the types of consumer decision-making styles in the literature, an instrument was developed to measure the "general orientations toward shopping and buying" and samples from undergraduate students from several universities in the northern region of West Malaysia were used.

Keywords: Consumer decision making style, Young-adult, Malay, Consumer style inventory

1. Introduction

Young adult consumers are very much drawn in with current trends as compared to other age groups. Typically, most young adult consumers are trendsetters among themselves as well as playing a role as trendsetters to the population at large. Previous studies have looked into several dimensions when examining the way the individual consumers learn during their consumption process (Martin & Bush, 2000). Several of these studies start-off from the foundation of social

learning theory, which proposes that a person learns common behaviors and attitudes from their previous experiences. Sproles (1985) as well as Sproles and Kendall (1986) used data from samples of young consumers in the United States to measure basic characteristics of consumer decision-making styles. They developed and validated a Consumer Styles Inventory (CSI) for this purpose. In order to establish generality of CSI, Sproles and Kendall (1986) recommend that it can be done by identifying and testing decision-making traits among different youth and adult groups. Socialization is a process that usually takes place within the family and may shape consumption patterns. As such, it may affect not only the present but also the future consumer well-being. The significance of young consumers is recognized when Ward (1974, p.2) defines consumer socialization as "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace." Besides the process of socialization, the interrelationships between specific consumer decision-making styles and individual learning styles as documented by Sproles and Sproles (1990) are similarly important to consumer education.

2. Literature review

In general, consumer educators and those involved with consumer interest studies agree that the decisions made by a consumer to purchase products or services are based on a certain process of learning. Even though one might assume that consumers' learning and decision-making are a related phenomenon, this relationship has not been systematically explored in consumer research (Sproles & Sproles, 1990).

Learning style is defined as "the way each person absorbs and retains information's and/or skills" (Sproles, 1990). Every learner possesses an individual learning style, which is thought to be an enduring, patterned, and preferred mode of learning. Evolving from early work on cognitive style, several major approaches to measure and characterize learning styles have emerged (Fan et al., 1998). These range from approaches characterizing the cognitive aspects of learning, such as abstractness or concreteness in learning, to those that consider students' preferences for teaching methods (lectures, labs, etc.) and environments (lighting, seating) (Fan et al., 1998). The central goal in understanding learning styles is to explore how the mind operates during the process of learning.

A consumer decision-making style is defined as "mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making consumer choices" (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Relevant literatures suggest that consumer styles may be characterized by the lifestyle approach, the consumer typology approach, and the consumer characteristics approach (Bettman, 1979, Miller, 1981, Sproles, 1985). Based on these literatures, Sproles & Kendall (1986) reported the factor analytic validation of a Consumer Styles Inventory measuring eight basic characteristics of Consumer Decision-Making Styles:1) Perfectionist, High-Quality-Conscious Consumer - a characteristic measuring the degree to which a consumer searches carefully and systematically for the best quality in products; 2) Brand-Conscious, Price-Equals-Quality Consumer - a characteristic measuring a consumer's orientation toward buying an expensive, well-known national brands; 3) Novelty and Fashion-Conscious Consumer - a characteristics of identifying consumers who appear to prefer new and innovative products and gain excitement from seeking out new things; 4) Recreational and Shopping-Conscious Consumer - a characteristic measuring the extent to which a consumer finds shopping a pleasant activity and shops just for the fun of it; 5) Price-Conscious, Value-for-Money Consumer - a characteristic identifying a consumer with particularly high consciousness of sale prices and lower prices in general; 6) Impulsive, Careless Consumer - a trait identifying consumers' who have a tendency of buying at the spur of the moment and appear to be unconcerned about how much he or she spends (or getting "best buys"); 7) Confused by Over Choice Consumer - a person perceiving too many brands and stores from which to choose and who are likely to experience information overload in the market; and 8) Habitual, Brand-Loyal Consumer - a characteristic indicating a consumer who repetitively chooses the same favorite brands and stores.

According to Hafstrom and Chung, (1992), decision making is more complex and even more important for consumers today than in the past. Consumers today are besieged by advertising, news articles, and direct mailings that provide an abundance of information, much of it with mixed messages. In addition, with an increase in the number and variety of goods, stores, and shopping malls, and the availability of multi-component products and electronic purchasing capabilities, thus broadened the sphere for consumer choice and have complicated decision making.

Sproles (1985) as well as Sproles and Kendall (1986) who developed and tested the Consumer Styles Inventory (CSI) have helped to add a new direction in decision-making research. Characteristics of decision-making styles, used in the CSI, can be useful in profiling an individual's consumer style, in educating consumers, and in counseling families on financial management (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). A consumer decision-making style is "a basic consumer personality, analogous to the concept of personality in psychology" (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). They believe that measuring general orientations of young consumers toward shopping and buying can identify decision-making styles.

3. Method

3.1 Sampling Design

A sample of young-adult Malays from universities in Kedah, Pulau Pinang, and Perlis were used in the research reported in this paper. Samples picked from the faculty of business studies classes were used to develop the method of measurement young-adult decision making behaviors in this study.

To choose the sample for this study, probability random sampling was used. A probability sample is necessary if the sample is to be representative of the population (Reeves, 1992). Therefore, samples were picked at random based on the class list obtain from student affair department from the selected public Universities in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia.

3.2 Population and sample size

The unit of analysis for this study is individual students attending their first degree programmed in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis, Universiti Utara Malaysia and final year Diploma students from Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah, and Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang who have had an independent buying experience in purchasing goods without having any influence from their parents. The data used in this study were collected in a four months period, from University Technology MARA in Kedah (100 samples), Perlis (93 samples), and Pulau Pinang (106 samples), University Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang (101 samples), and University Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah (104 samples). A total of 504 respondents were chosen from the five universities mentioned above.

College students were chosen as our sample for the following reasons: researchers have an easy excess to respondents as the researchers themselves are academic staff and it was not feasible to collect information from a representative sample of Malay consumers. Furthermore students from these five universities come from all over the country; hence, the sample is representative of young adult Malays in Malaysia (Fan et al., 1998).

To have a representative finding, the sampling technique used must be objective. This is an important effort adopted by most researchers in order to furnish a finding pertinent to the general (Maznah Wan Omar, 2008). To choose the sample for this study, a simple random sampling method was employed during the data collection procedure. The five universities vary in size and specialization. University Sains Malaysia (USM) specializes in social sciences and basic sciences. University Utara Malaysia (UUM) specializes in social sciences. University Technology MARA Pulau Pinang (UiTM Pulau Pinang) specializes in Engineering. University Technology MARA Kedah (UiTM Kedah) specializes in industrial arts and social science, and lastly University Technology MARA Perlis (UiTM Perlis) specializes in social sciences and basic science.

3.3 Data Collection

For this study, a survey method was employed. Surveys are a better source of primary data collection in marketing and social sciences in comparison to observation and experiments (Baker, 2001). Moreover, the survey method is put into use because it does not entail control over behavioral actions and mainly focuses on current events (Mokhlis, 2006). Questionnaires were randomly collected through a self-administered method with the help of the lecturers from all five Universities in the Northern Region of West Malaysia. Self-administered questionnaire permits the interviewer to have an opportunity to introduce the research topic and encourage the respondents to give their honest answers, administer complex questionnaires and simplify difficult questions (Maznah Wan Omar, 2008). A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed. However only 509 questionnaires were returned (73% return rate). In relation to that, only 504 questionnaires were usable for this analysis. The rest of the questions had missing values for more than one items asked.

3.4 Method of Analyzing Data

Data analysis proceeded in two steps following the method used by Hafstrom and Chung (1992); Sproles (1985) and Sproles and Kendall (1986). In the first step, factor analysis, the principle components method with Varimax rotation of factors, was performed to identify characteristics of consumer decision-making. For comparability with Sproles and Kendall's work (1986), an eight-factor solution was used.

Factor analysis is designed to identify a set of variables in terms of a smaller number of hypothetical variables or to explore underlying dimensions (Hair et al., 2006). Although it is desirable to have as many factors as possible in order to capture the optimum number of consumer decision-making style variations, it also is necessary to have satisfactory reliabilities for each factor to provide an adequate basis for generalizing to the population, assuming the sample is truly representative. In the second step, Cronbach's alpha, a conservative technique for assessing reliabilities for each factor (Carmines & Zeller, 1979) was used. For consistency, it was decided that reliability should not be below .4, the same level used by Hafstrom and Chung (1992) and Sproles and Kendall (1986).

4. Discussions

Reliability coefficients were used to test on the consumer style characteristics among young adult Malay consumers in UiTM Kedah. Only two style characteristics were below satisfactory level. The loading item was below .4. The Factor that should be rejected is Factor 3 (.2776) for Recreational-shopping Conscious and Factor 7 (.3831) for Habitual, Brand Loyal characteristic.

Respondents from UiTM Kedah were very conscious of the brand and price paid must equals to the Quality they received. They were a Perfectionist as well as High-Quality Conscious Consumer.

The Reliability Coefficient tested on all 8 Factors for consumers in UiTM Pulau Pinang indicates that two consumer Style Characteristics had a score below .4. The Factors are Factor 3 (.170), which stands for "Recreational-Shopping Conscious" and Factor 8 (.371), which stands for "Price Value Conscious" characteristic.

The Factor analysis done on consumers in UiTM Pulau Pinang indicates that they were Brand and Price Equals Quality Conscious consumer as well as "Confused by Over Choice"; nonetheless they were also a Habitual and Brand-Loyal consumer.

The Reliability Coefficient done on consumer's data from UiTM Perlis shows a score of above .4 for all Factors. Thus Factor 1 to Factor 8 was all accepted.

Factor analysis done on the same consumers data from UiTM Perlis indicates that consumers in UiTM Perlis were Brand and Price Equals Quality Conscious consumers, "Perfectionist" with "High-Quality conscious"; they were also a "Recreational shopper" and at the same time were "Confused by Over Choice". Nonetheless, they were concern about time when doing purchase and were also careless and being impulsive when purchasing. They were Brand-Loyal and Habitual consumers with high concern about the value of the price they pay for the product whenever they purchase a product.

The reliability coefficient done on the data of consumers from University Sains Malaysia indicates that Young Adult Malay from University Sains Malaysia (USM) were Brand and Price Equals Quality consumer. They were also a Perfectionist and High-Quality conscious consumer. Unfortunately they were "Confused by Over Choice" but were "Concerned about saving Time" when purchasing product. Nonetheless, they were Careless and Impulsive in buying.

Finally, the reliability analysis performed on 8 Consumer Style Characteristics for data on consumers from University Utara Malaysia shows a reading that is above .4 for all Factors. Therefore all the Factors tested were accepted.

Factor analysis done on respondents' data from University Utara Malaysia indicates that they were Brand Conscious and Price Equals Quality Consumer. The respondents' data indicates that Young Adult Malay from Universiti Utara Malaysia was a Perfectionist and was Highly Conscious about Quality. At the same time they were Recreational Shopping Conscious consumer and were confused by Over Choice. They were also Impulsive and Careless consumer with additional characteristics of Brand loyal and they buy product on habitual basis.

5. Conclusion

Decision-making styles of young adult Malay consumers from Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah, University Teknologi MARA Perlis, University Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang, University Sains Malaysia and Universiti Utara Malaysia show that the similarities that exist among consumers from 5 different Universities were; they are Brand Conscious and Price Equals Quality consumers.

Respondents who came from large universities like University Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pulau Pinang and University Utara Malaysia were all confused by too many choices of product available to them. On the other hand, students whose university was situated far from big/large town like University Utara Malaysia and UiTM Perlis indicates that they were Recreational-Shopping conscious consumers.

The implications obtained from the findings were that socialization and environment do shape the purchasing patterns of consumers. Young consumers themselves formed an independent specialized market segment of its own for a variety of goods because they made up a large group of people in a population.

Lastly, young people do play a great role in consumer decision making because they are at an age level, where they have the capability and are economically able in making decision of their own in terms of what, how, when and where to buy.

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Table 1. Reliability Coefficients for Eight Consumer Style Characteristics for young adult Malay Consumers from Five Universities in the Northern Region of West Malaysia

Consumer Style Characteristics	Cronbach's alpha subscale of items loading above .4	Number of items used to compute Cronbach's alpha
Brand conscious (Factor 1)	.8345	11
Perfectionist (Factor 2)	.7735	7
Recreational-Shopping Conscious (Factor 3)	**.2776**	6
Confused by Over choice (Factor 4)	.4831	5
Time-Energy Conserving (Factor 5)	.6020	3
Impulsive (Factor 6)	.5338	4
Habitual, Brand Loyal (7)	**.3831**	3
Price-Value Conscious (8)	.5362	3

From the above table, data shows that the reliability coefficients for factor 1, 2,4,5,6 and 8 were .48 and above, indicating satisfactory levels of reliability. However, the alpha coefficients for factor 3 and factor 7 had lower reliabilities, indicating that they may not be real factors in identifying decision-making styles of Young-Adult Malays from the five Universities in the Northern Region of West Malaysia.