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UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PURCHASE PREFERENCES TOWARDS FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC BRANDED APPAREL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the purchase preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparels. A total of 200 students took part in this survey. It was found that preferences towards foreign branded apparels are related to the level of purchasing power and is not related to the demographics variables. 58% of the students surveyed preferred foreign branded apparel. There is a positive relationship between media influence and preferences towards foreign/domestic branded apparels. The more a person is exposed to the media, the stronger will be the influence of the media in "persuading" the individual to purchase the apparel.

Keywords: Purchase behaviour, apparel industry, marketing, business environment, brand, brand loyalty

INTRODUCTION

Fashion has become more important in teenagers' daily life. Most of the teenagers are reading the latest fashion news from magazines, newspapers and internet everyday. Besides that, some of them are creating their own fashion blog to share their fashion experience with the public (christianet, c2010). Teenagers are now more knowledgeable on fashion than teenagers of yesteryears (Diane, 2008). Malaysia Industrial Development Authority (2009) revealed the growth of Malaysia's textiles and apparel industry accelerated in the early 1970s when the country embarked on export-oriented industrialization. Malaysia had become a net exporter of textiles and textile products with the exports valued at RM 10.49 billion while its imports amounted to RM 5.46 billion. There are 662 licensed companies in production with investments of RM 8.3 billion. The industry employs more than 68,264 workers. Over the years, apparel companies have evolved to become the most prolific, dynamic and successful category of international retailers (Wigley and Moore, 2007). Seung-Eun and Chen (2000) found that in today's apparel market, most consumers desire to personalize the style, fit and colour of the clothes. They require high-quality customized products at low prices with faster delivery. However, Solomon (1996) reveals that many western countries, particularly Australia, US and UK are materialistic. He defines materialism as the importance people attach to owning worldly possessions and materialists place great importance on possessions. In this situation, the retailers have to identify the preferences of the consumers, so that, they can adopt an effective strategies to increase the consumers' loyalty towards their apparel brand. According to Rayuso (c2009), "The media creates the ideal image of a beautiful men and women and tells the consumer about what is the characteristic of a successful person. It is a subliminal way to tell the consumer that if they do not portray themselves like them, they are not cool yet so it is the time to buy the apparel displayed and dress like them." Times (2008) found that Saudi customers have became increasingly sophisticated, demonstrating brand awareness and brand loyalty, demanding quality service and value for money and carefully looking out for few new product lines from their preferred brands. Hence the purpose of this study is to examine the purchase preference of apparels of foreign and domestic brand among university students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Kreps (1990), "Preference is a concept, used in the social sciences, particularly economics. It assumes a real or imagined choice between alternatives and the possibility of rank ordering of these alternatives. More generally, it can be seen as a source of motivation." Meeting changing consumers' needs by providing the right products or services has been an ongoing market challenge for retailing in for competitive global markets. According to Cui (1999), "Some may place high priority on price while others may prioritize quality, aesthetics, or other product attributes." 79% of consumers said that they "cross-shop" for clothes, meaning that they shop at different outlets looking for the best price, value, and fashion (cottoninc.com, 1999).

Table I: Influences on Apparel Purchases (percent of consumers)

Country	Store Displays	Already Own	Magazine	Peers	TV	Catalogue
Taiwan	85	45	51	53	38	18
Hong Kong	72	55	63	56	39	15
Korea	72	29	31	55	32	9
France	71	59	37	35	21	42
Brazil	62	70	35	36	37	9
Colombia	61	16	28	31	22	9
Italy	59	27	21	16	11	5
Japan	51	40	44	18	19	24
U.K.	51	40	40	35	25	32
U.S.	43	56	25	38	25	30
Germany	38	47	39	44	26	27

Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™ and Global Lifestyle Monitor™

Table I indicates that Asian consumers were most likely to cite external influences in their purchase behaviour. More than half of the shoppers in Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan said their apparel ideas are from their peers, while almost as many cited magazines. Four out of ten consumers in France get apparel ideas from catalogues, and the same percentage get ideas from magazines in the UK. In Germany, most consumers (44%) get apparel ideas from their peers. In Latin America, consumers tend to rely less on outside influences – 37% of Brazilians get ideas from TV, and 31% of Colombians are influenced by peers (cottoninc.com, 1999). According to Hornby (2004), "Media refers to the main ways that large numbers of people receive information and entertainment, which are television, radio and the newspaper." Besides that, he also defines mass media as any medium used to transmit mass communication. Lane (2007) concludes that mass media comprised of eight mass media industries which are books, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radio, movies, television and internet. In the last 50 years the media influence had grown exponentially with the advance of technology, first there was the telegraph, then the radio, the newspaper, magazines, television, and now the internet. In the daily lives, people rely on the media to get the current news and facts about what is important and what they should be aware of. They place their trust on the media as an authority to give them news, entertainment and education (Rayuso, c2009). The influence of media is phenomenal in today's society because media are carriers of popular culture which includes dress and appearance (Cusic, 2001). Beside that, the media makes billions of dollars with the advertising they sell and that the people are exposed to. According to Shang (2009), "In China, the power of young consumers had become an important target market for mass media and advertising. They are easily influenced by advertising, especially when familiar celebrities are endorsers. For this generation, endorsements by highly popular stars can guarantee the quality and prestige of the products. An appealing design or impressive narrative in an advertisement can also exert much weight on young people's assessment of the product." Sen (2003) reveals that TV shows have such a profound impact on the buying behaviour of young women that buyers would watch every episode of the shows on a particular weekday night and pay attention to what the actresses wear.

Peers have been viewed as the primary socialization agents as an adolescent. During the teenage years, friendship becomes an important aspect. They provide safe venues where youth can explore their identities, where they can feel accepted and develop a sense of belongingness. Friendship allows youth to practice and foster social skills necessary for future success (Brown and Klute, 2006). National Retail Federation (2008) reveals that when it comes to buying apparel, shoppers are most interested in hearing from their peers about products, retailers and past shopping experiences. This peer pressure can influence how children dress, what kind of music they listen to, and what types of behaviour they engage in, including risky behaviours such as using drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol, and engaging in sex. The intensity of peer pressure differs from situation to situation (Jim and Alley, 2003). Meyer and Anderson (2000) reveal that peer acceptance or approval of an individual's apparel is important. Persons as young as 11 and 12 years old have expressed the importance of peers liking the apparel they purchased. Undergraduate fashion followers are conformists and seek to adhere to the apparel standards of a comparison group within the college community (Stanforth, 1995; Workman and Kidd, 2000).

All experiences will have a better and worse impact on one's future. These experiences are critical in establishing (or destroying) the perceptions and emotional connections that are the key drives of brand preference and loyalty. Different emotional experiences during shopping process are cherished by consumers with different shopping motivations. Environmental psychology studies have identified arousal, pleasure, and dominance as the three dimensions of emotions that can affect an individual's decision to approach or avoid an environment (Huang, 2003). According to Chang et al. (2005) point of views, satisfaction is predicted primarily according to consumer confirmation of expectations based on their experiences. Quality is an ongoing process to build and sustain relationships by assessing, anticipating, and fulfilling stated and implied needs. Quality is the customers' perception of the value of the suppliers' work output. It cannot be separated between the process and human factor. When built into a product, it generates emotions and feelings within those who have taken part in its creation. Shang (2009) found that although young consumers are craving on fashionable brands and foreign products, but they do not blindly buy Western brands or recklessly chase luxury symbols. Rather, they are savvy shoppers who look for quality at a good price. On the other hand, Amin and Richards (2002) found that a majority of the Indonesian respondents indicated that imported brand-name apparel is good, better or excellent in regards to durability (98.8%), fashionability (96.1%), appearance (95.3%), prestige (90.6%), availability (88.8%), and monetary value (71.8%).

Kim et. al, (1996) found that market opportunities for any one brand image may vary across international markets due to the cultural and socioeconomic conditions of a market, as well as individual consumer variables which influences the effectiveness of a given brand image. Hence, brand image strategies for specific international markets must reflect the needs of targeted consumer markets. Companies have to work hard on consumer experience to make sure that what consumers see and think what they want them to be. A well-communicated brand image enables consumers to identify the needs by the brand and differentiates the brand from its competitors. Modern consumers are increasingly becoming brand conscious and are opting for apparel with brand images or logos. Branded apparels not only add a stylish image to the apparel, but it also gives something extra to the consumers. It enables them to create perceptions about the value of the apparel and the brand itself. According to Aaker (1999), "Brand image plays a role in brand preference because it adds to the self-expressive and symbolic value of the brand for the buyer." Most of them prefer a higher price for top brands because of the belief that owning top brands conveys prestige and status (Shang, 2009). Farris and Quelch (1987) suggested that price promotions can encourage service trial which helps to smooth demand fluctuations and allows differential service pricing to be targeted at different segments. These add excitement to the purchase of services that might otherwise become mundane or perceived as commodities. Promotions are able to produce quantifiable responses. Customer satisfaction is an important key to success (Albrecht and Zemke, 1985). It has been recognized as a key success factor in being competitive and differentiating products to obtain customer loyalty (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Good customer services is about bringing customers back and sending them away happy. The essence of good customer service is forming a good customer relationship. Customer-friendly systems add value and build customer loyalty. Customer-friendly systems are designed to make things easy for customers. A better consumer service will influence purchase decision. Often, customer loyalty is considered to be a consequence of good service (Boulding et al., 1993; Zeithaml et al., 1996). With many factors influencing the preferences of the university student in terms of foreign and domestic branded apparels, the objective of the study is to determine which factor influences the student more.

METHODOLOGY

The independent variables in the study includes: media, peer, experience, quality, brand, promotions and good customer service. Data for this study is collected by means of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire will be personally administered and collected. University students had been chosen as the respondents for this research. This consumer group has the potential to have a positive impact on apparel and related markets as they have growing purchasing power. The university students were randomly identified across faculties and across universities. Students were randomly identified from the private and public universities in the southern part of Peninsula Malaysia. A total of 200 questionnaires had been distributed to the students. The reliability of a measure is established by testing for both consistency and stability. The closer the Cronbach's Alpha is to 1,

the higher is the internal consistency reliability (Sekaran, 2003). The psychometric properties of the variables are as follows:

Table II: Psychometric Properties

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Media Influence	0.864	6
Peers Influence	0.797	6
Past experience	0.821	6
Quality	0.797	6
Brand Image	0.845	6
Promotion Factors	0.776	6
Service	0.856	6
Overall	0.913	42

As shown in Table II, the variables have shown a high level of internal consistency.

Descriptive Analysis

A majority of the respondents are from the Business and Law faculty and they are aged between 21 to 25 years old. It suggests that they are in the second or final year of their studies at the university. A majority of them are female. From Table III, it shows that a majority of university students purchase foreign branded apparels and that their purchase amount is less than RM200. They purchase once every two weeks.

Table III: Purchase Preferences

Characteristics	Measuring Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Purchase Amount	Less than RM 200	149	74.5	74.5
	Between RM 300 and RM 1000	46	23.0	23.0
	Between RM 1100 and RM 1800	5	2.5	2.5
	Total	200	100.0	100.0
Purchase Frequency	More than twice a week	31	15.5	15.5
	Once a week	62	31.0	31.0
	Once every two week	107	53.5	53.5
	Total	200	100.0	100.0
Preferences	Domestic	84	42.0	42.0
	Foreign	116	58.0	58.0
	Total	200.0	100.0	100.0

As shown in Table IV, the demographic variables did not have a significant difference in terms of the purchase behaviour. The p values are greater than 0.05. It shows students are influenced by other factors. This is evidenced by the article in Cotton Incorporated (cottoninc.com, 1999). It was found that Asians in particular are influenced by external factors. It was found that Media Influence, Peer Influence and Brand Image had a positive relationship with the purchase of foreign branded apparels. The p values are less than 0.05 indicating that the relationship is significant. This is shown in Table V. Quality, Past Experience, Service and Promotional Factors have a positive relationship but since the p values are greater than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is not significant.

In terms of the media influence, the more a person is exposed to the media, the stronger will be the influence of the media in "persuading" the individual to purchase the apparel. Sen (2003) revealed that TV shows have such a profound impact on the buying behaviour of young women, the buyers would watch every episode of the shows on a particular weekday night and pay attention to what the actresses wear. Brown and Klute (2006) reveal that peers have been viewed as the primary socialization agents as an adolescent's. In the teen years, friendships are an important aspect. They provide safe venues where youth can explore their identities, where they can feel accepted and where they can develop a sense of belongingness. Students like to be viewed as part of the group. So if everyone purchases foreign branded apparel, others follow. The result indicates that there is a positive and significant relationship between brand image and preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparel. Aaker (1999) revealed that brand's image plays a role in brand

preference because it adds to the self-expressive and symbolic value of the brand for the buyer. Brand name has been identified as the most vital cue used by consumers in forming product evaluations and purchase decisions.

Table IV: Demographic Variables and Purchase Significance

Characteristics	Measuring Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P Value	Significant
Gender	Male	61	1.51	.504	.065	0.175	No
	Female	139	1.61	.489	.041		
Age	Less than20 years old	25	1.52	.510	.102	0.201	No
	Between 21 years old and 25 years old	146	1.62	.488	.040		
	More than 26 years old	29	1.45	.506	.094		
Race	Malay	39	1.62	.493	.079	0.787	No
	Chinese	102	1.57	.498	.049		
	Indian	30	1.63	.490	.089		
	Others	29	1.52	.509	.094		
Faculty	Business and Law	86	1.58	.496	.054	0.314	No
	Engineering	53	1.55	.503	.069		
	IT	40	1.53	.506	.080		
	Others	21	1.76	.436	.095		

Textile and apparel marketers spend millions of dollars each year attempting to build brand name recognition and establish a favourable brand image. An effective brand image translates into consumer loyalty and willingness to pay a premium price for the brand, thereby providing marketers with a sustainable competitive advantage (Valencia, 1994). When the relationship between quality and preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparel was examined, the results indicated that there is a positive but not significant relationship between them. The word "Quality" represents the properties of products and/or services that are valued by the customer. Quality is a monetary perception that occurs when something in our environment interacts with us, in the pre-intellectual awareness that comes before rational thought takes over and begins establishing order. Judgment of the resulting order is then reported as good or bad quality value. It was found that there is a positive but not significant relationship between past experience and preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparel. From the positive relationship, it shows that past experience will influence the individual to purchase the apparel in the future. This positive relationship is supported by Airey and Donnan (c2009) who indicate that brands are a collection of all the expectations and associations evoked by consumers from experience. These experiences are critical in establishing (or destroying) the perceptions and emotional connections that are the key drives of brand preference and loyalty. When the relationship between service quality and preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparel was examined, the results indicated that there is positive but not significant relationship between them. The impact of salespeople-customer relationships will generally result in long term orientation of consumers towards the store or brand. Trust in salespeople appears to relate to overall perceptions of the store's service quality, and results in the consumer being totally satisfied with the stores in the end (To and Leung, 2001). Customer loyalty is considered to be a consequence of good service (Boulding et al., 1993; Zeithaml et al., 1996). It was found that there is a positive relationship but not significant relationship between promotion factors and preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparel. The insignificant relationship could be due to the promotional tools used by the retailers. It could possibly that it did not attract the students better.

Table V: Factors influencing Purchase Behaviour

		When it comes to purchasing, which brand would you go for? Foreign/Domestic Brand	Relationship /Significant
Total Media Influence	Pearson Correlation	.531**	Positive
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	Yes
Total Peer Influence	Pearson Correlation	.415**	Positive
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	Yes
Total Quality	Pearson Correlation	.095	Positive
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.089	No
Total Past Experience	Pearson Correlation	.027	Positive
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.351	No
Total Service	Pearson Correlation	.087	Positive
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.109	No
Total Brand Image	Pearson Correlation	.353**	Positive
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	Yes
Total Promotion Factors	Pearson Correlation	.114	Positive
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.054	No

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

CONCLUSION AND AREA OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Apparel industry is one of the most important sectors in the economy. This research shows that gender, age, races and faculty are not important factors in identifying preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparel. These findings are consistent with Xu's (2000) study which indicates that the preferences towards foreign and domestic branded apparel are independent of gender, age and faculty but it is dependent on the family background. The media is a strong influential factor attracting consumers to purchase apparels. Thus, the marketers can collaborate with the media such as magazine, TV shows, radio stations and newspaper to promote their products to the consumers. Beside that, they also can invite the hot actors, actress, models or singers to become their products spokesperson. This study suggests that marketers should improve the quality of their apparel in an attempt to increase consumer perception of they pay the money for a value product. This research suggests that marketers can create a harmony environment and provide a friendly services to the consumer because it can leave a great shopping experience in the consumers' mind, so that, they will visit the store in future. A strong brand image may increase the consumers' brand loyalty. Brand name has been identified as the most vital cue used by consumers in forming product evaluations and purchase decisions (Valencia, 1994). This research focuses only the university students who are studying in Malaysia. This research used self-reported survey data obtained directly from the university students' opinions. This method may suffer from disadvantages such as inaccuracy from poor recall. Further research could be conducted by focus on more respondents who are from diverse geographic areas. This could increase credibility in the empirical findings.

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