

ADAPTATION OF MALAYSIAN RETAIL DESIGN TOWARDS OMNI- CHANNEL AND CONTEXTUAL RETAIL CONCEPT

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ABSTRACT

A new concept of Omni-Channel interactive retail design in Malaysia could revolutionize the Generation Y's (Gen Y) shopping experience. Studies found that the Gen Y's culture and behaviour is the key to their changes in their shopping nature. The study is to identify how the amalgamation of the Omni-Channel shopping concept with fashion retail design could provide the ultimate shopping experience for Gen Y. This desktop study recommends an interactive retail's cum Omni-channel space programming in creating an interactive retail design typology. It would benefit designers implementing successful retail design whilst catering current consumers shopping needs especially in Malaysia.

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Keyword: *Interactive retail design, Consumers' culture, Omni – channel, Retail design*

INTRODUCTION

Two decades ago until today, the internet had become the primary platform for communication and commercial activities that connects the world via interconnectivity of individual networks (Alba et al., 1997; Margherio et al., 1998; Zwass, 1996). Advancement in communication and information technology has further strengthened the role of the internet in reformation of connectivity, people's lifestyle, education, political and business society. It has revolutionised how business is conducted and has helped create a more efficient market by making advertising and selling products more interactive and appealing. Internet business transactions called E-commerce provides an advantage to business owners. In 2016, the Malaysian government established E-commerce to encourage the local industry to grow (Country Commerce, 2005; Kraemer, Gibbs, & Dedrick, 2005). However, the Malaysian society is still adapting due to technological challenges, security and lack of confidence in using an online method to purchase products (Che, 2014; Siti Zobidah Omar et al., 2008; SKMM, 2010). In this sense, 66.3 % Malaysians prefer to buy in store compared to purchasing via the Internet (SKMM, 2010).

Interestingly, despite the lack of confidence in online product purchasing among the society, Marketing Interactive.com 2011 saw an increment of 70% in online purchasing worth RM 1.8 billion in 2011 and they anticipate continuation in 2014. In Malaysia, Gen Y is the highest percentage of Internet population with 38% users (San, Omar, & Thurasamy, 2015). This statistic indicates that Gen Y is a heavy internet user and highly dependent on technology (San Lim et al., 2016), making them the favourable target market for online business. Amongst the factors that allured the Gen Y to purchase online are due to the varieties of retailing website (20.5%), security (18.5%), services offered (17.5%), reputation (15.5%), purchasing experience (15%) and product price, quality, user-friendly of the website (13.4%) (Retail Research, 2012; San Lim et al., 2016). Online purchasing in Malaysia is still at its infancy as compared to other developed countries (San Lim et al., 2016). Thus, it is an opportunity for the online sellers to optimise this situation by fully utilizing the technology in innovative and creative ways to attract and influence the Gen Y towards online purchasing, leading to the eruption of online marketing in Malaysia.

Recently, the Gen Ys are demanding more from their purchasing experience including personal customization (ibid.). This occurrence is believed to be the satisfaction of physical experience from physical retail activities (Atkins, 2015) which could offer real-life experiences that a consumer could not experience via the web such as socialization, dining, entertainment, mixed use programming and outdoor experiences (ELS, 2017). Here, the online and the offline purchasing are not competitors but they are complementary to each other. With the physical and digital complementary, the overall consumer purchasing experiences could be enhanced. At the moment, the traditional retails are unable to compete with the growth of online shopping that rewards personalization and convenience (Henry, Hill, & Leitch, 2017) therefore they would need a new channel of shopping to support these matters.

Interestingly, scholars such as Klena and Puleri (2013) predicted that in five years' time buying via or directly from the offline store will supersede the online purchasing. In this instance, the authors believed that slow changes in consumer shopping behaviour are shifting consumers back to brick and mortar retailing. Here the authors foresee that this new trend of physical retailing with online shopping could fulfil the equilibrium of shopping experience and satisfaction among the Gen Y. Therefore, the authors foresee that there is a need to study a new concept of Omni-Channel interactive retail design in Malaysia due to the evolution of the Gen Y's shopping experience.

Service is a critical component that consumer appreciates, and service availability is the key to successful retail (Hassan, Zaharudin, & Yunus, 2015). The services should include the consumers' feedback, delivering quality products and excellent consumer services which are important to uphold the organisation's image, reputation and consumers' relationship. Warehouse and distribution centres (DC) are the main links in the supply chain between the supplier and the end consumers; while performing valuable functions that support the movement of materials, storing goods, processing products, de-aggregating vehicle loads, creating stock and assembling shipments (Langevin & Riopel, 2005).

The authors foresee that with this new trend merging, brick and mortar stores could adopt the ease, convenience and excitement that is currently

defined by the online shopping. The physical retailing must undergo significant changes in the future to fulfil the equilibrium of shopping experience and satisfaction similar to online shopping (Henry et al., 2017). In Malaysia, the highest percentage of online shopping is the Generation Y with 38% of Internet population (Comscore.com, 2011; San et al., 2015). Based on that statistics, the author seeks to study how to develop the design of the future retail in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Young generation consumers recognise organisations or companies with a virtual online store that could reflect consumer-oriented, responsive, informative, high tech, supplicated and matured in the business (Griffith & Krampf, 1998). The demand from the consumers has led many organisations to improve their services regarding performance measures in the internet market place. An effective strategy and efficient operational decision making will satisfy and maintain loyal consumers thus increasing the overall business performance.

Gen-Y purchasing behaviour

Individual's consumption related attitude and behaviour is the direct outcome of their learning experience (Martin & Bush, 2000). The Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggested that human behaviour learned by observation (Martin & Bush, 2000; Solomon, 2004). The theory indicated that the learning involves four sequential processes of attention, retention, production and motivation (Malhotra, Agarwal, & Peterson, 1996). Attention processes refers to the way in which an individual attempts and extorts information about the main features of the modelled behaviour (ibid.). Consequently, retention process will take place when the individual retains the observed models' behaviour in his/her memory (ibid.). Therefore, the authors foresee that sequential processes of attention, retention, production and motivation could be the potential criteria in extorting customer's information and behaviour

In terms of decision making, Aliman et al. (2018) stated that consumer decision-making style is referred to the pattern; mental and cognitive orientation towards buying and shopping; and choice to buy something or rejecting them. Aliman et al. further defined that decision-making style is a mental orientation describing on how a consumer makes choices. In 1979, Consumer Style Inventory (CSI) was developed by Sproles in measuring consumer shopping attitudes and behaviours. Among the discoveries are:

- Perfectionist, high-quality consciousness - referring to those consumers who search carefully and systematically for the best quality product;
- Brand consciousness-type of consumer that focus on buying more expensive and well-known brand;
- Novelty-fashion consciousness – referring to consumers who like new and innovative products;
- Recreational, hedonistic consciousness-focusing on consumers who find shopping as a pleasant and leisure activity;
- Price conscious and ‘value-for-money’ consciousness; those with high consciousness of sales prices and lower prices in general;
- Impulsiveness-those who tend to buy at the spur of the moment and appear unconcerned about how they spend;
- Confused by over choice-those consumers who experience an information overload because there are too many brands and stores from which to choose;
- Habitual, brand loyal-referring to the consumers who have favourite brands and stores and keep on choosing the same brand.

Malaysian National culture index

Culture can be defined as a way of life and also a value that can be manifested itself. “To say that a person ‘has a value’ is to say that he has an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence” (Rokeach, 1968). In 2007, Hofstede presented the core elements in culture as values and uses various ways in defining values such as “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over

others” (Hofstede, 2001; page 19). The values are described as a tendency of an individual that respond to provocations within the cultural field in an expected manner given by a particular value profile. Additionally, values act as guidance to the suitability of individual’s attitude and thus justify his/her behaviour and help to morally judge and provide a standard of comparison with others (Rokeach, 1968).

According Hofstede, four dimensions (individualism versus collectivism, power distance, masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance) could classify national culture values (Sumaco et al., 2014). Each of the dimension determines norm values of symbol, heroes and rituals (Hofstede, 1997). In the Malaysian culture index, Malaysia scores low on the individualism (score of 26 out of 120) indicating Malaysians are highly committed to group ties such as family, extended family and relationship. Malaysians are a collectivist nation and relationship is based on trust or loyalty (ibid.). The second dimension is the Power Distance Index (PDI) that dictates hierarchical relationship within the group. Malaysia has scored a high number on the power distance dimension (score of 100 out of 120) indicating power and respect are at the top of the hierarchy ladder

The third dimension is masculinity versus femininity that discusses on the masculine values (such as achievement orientation) as they are dominant to femininity values (such as modesty). Malaysia has scored 50 out of 120, representing the Malaysian society as a masculine society but much emphatic towards femininity values of the eastern beliefs and norms. The fourth dimension is uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) that defines as to what extent uncertainties or variances are tolerated. Malaysia scores significantly low (36 out of 120) in UAI compare to the other dimensions. The low UAI scores elaborate that the society has a relaxed attitude and felt confident on the unnecessary additional rules if they are uncertain or shall be omitted or change. There are several techniques used by humans to cope with uncertainty such as technology (defending uncertainty caused by nature), law (defending uncertainty with others’ behaviour) and religion (to accept uncertainty that cannot be defend or against) (Hofstede, 1997).

While investigating the Malaysian Gen Y purchasing behaviour, the authors are convinced that the targeted consumer’s culture index is similar and worth to be taken into account. Petermans and Huerta (2014) and

Davis and Lindridge, (2008) support that culture is an important influence on consumers responses store atmospheric. Given Hofstede's cultural dimension as a reference point, the identification could be an advantage in enhancing the retail space quality and experience. For example, potential provision of leisure and consumer space on top of the hierarchy space could give relaxed attitude to consumers whilst tangible and easy access could give clear communication of fashion with reference group (immediate group of people such as close family or peers for society insight). High connectivity to social media could also create trust and high end services in purchasing the new fashion apparel while input from customers through social media could customize customers' preferences and therefore yield confidence in customers' purchasing decision.

Retail Typologies

Statistics has pointed that the overall young generation spending demographic in U.S had decreased from \$175 billion in 2003 to \$159 billion in 2005 (Breazeale & Lueg, 2011). The decline in the spending power also has become a highlight for retailers to be more responsive on the demographic (ibid.). In the past, malls have introduced curfews with the intention to restrict the young generation from entering malls during peak shopping period. Seen as blight in malls (ibid.), the purpose of the curfew is to keep out teenagers from adults who are the true consuming consumers. The introduction of teen curfew has cause negative impact mainly on retailers that have invested on both online and offline retailing. In the same vein, Petermans and Huerta, (2014) stated that designated space should be approachable and aid users to interact, feel and behave within a space.

Many previous scholars developed retail typologies that are segmented to consumers based on different shopping channels. Reynolds, Ganesh, and Luckett (2002) developed typologies that defined physical retail user formats (traditional mall versus factory outlets), while Ruiz, Gehrt and Hansen (2004) developed various shopping mall behaviours based on physiographic dimensions. Bosnjak, Galesic, and Tuten (2007) expanded the affection of the internet on its consumers. However, there is no study that support shopping channels that accurately justify consumer behaviour.

A study by Breazeale and Lueg (2011) discovered categories of retail

typologies based on consumers' shopping motivation. The first shopping motivation is self-esteem (SE) that is the confidence and satisfaction of consumer personality that impacts his/her behaviours. SE is considered an important motivator that easily enhances consumer's purchasing decision. Darley (1999) believed that SE is an essential motivation (shopping enjoyment) and a significant predictor of search effort and product knowledge. The second motivator is interpersonal communication (IC) that facilitates interaction with members of one's social network. Clark and Goldsmith, (2005) saw Gen Y's consumer socialization as a knowledgeable generation and has a positive link to SE. Many scholars have identified the consumer socialization are peers and relatives. The third consumer motivator is extraversion that can be referred to personality dimension with relation to traits such as activity, energy and sociability (Breazeale & Lueg, 2011).

Lucas, Diener, and Grob (2009) further defined extraversion as the dominant of the Five-Factor Model across cultures that influence consumer behaviour. Interestingly, Coshall and Potter, (1986) had criticised that extraversion does not affect the pattern of consumer shopping behaviour but claiming extraverted consumers prefer to shop in a familiar or known environment to them. However, Bosnjak et al. (2007) do not find any relation between extraversion consumers and shopping motivation in the Croatian adult internet consumers.

In summary, with advance technology such as the internet, retailers shall acknowledge the possible symbiotic relationship between various shopping channels and consumer's shopping motivation. Consumer's shopping channel is the relation between extraversion consumer and its behaviour. The two traits can be related to IC in consumer socialisation process—current active activities by young generation (Breazeale & Lueg, 2011). Despite consumer typologies that were designed for various age groups, Reynolds and Beatty (1999) believed that such typology should reflect young generation consumers' motivation based on their preference shopping channel.

METHODOLOGY

The study conducted a desktop study together with building precedents

to examine the amalgamation of the Omni-Channel shopping concept with fashion retail design in reaching the ultimate shopping experience specifically for Gen Y. The comprehensive Omni-Channel retail design covers the understanding of general conceptual perspective regarding digital retail merging with physical retailing that added-value towards the future of retail design. An investigation from the existing literature of Gen Y purchasing behaviour, Malaysian national culture index and retail typologies are thoroughly done to enhance the effectiveness of Omni-Channel in creating an interactive and immersive shopping experience.

The study led to the development of the theoretical understanding of the interactive retailing with respect to target consumer shopping preferences such as aesthetic, functions, commercial, financial and regulatory aspects. The study of Omni-Channel as an interactive concept together with retail design are examined in detail to identify the factors that influence Gen Y's purchasing behaviour and thus boost the Gen Y's decision making. The paper then presents how human culture could affect present retail typologies and redefine the retail space programming into an interactive brick and mortar retail. In conclusion, the paper discusses the potential theoretical concept for fashion retail design to align towards advanced technological change and demand.

DISCUSSION

From the above literature, the paper sees potential opportunities in amalgamating Omni-Channel concept with fashion retail design. The amalgamation could result in the ultimate shopping experience for the Malaysian Gen Y. From the literature, it is suggested that retail concept needs to include technology savvy Gen Y to have a strong association between physical and online ecosystem. The concept will be further discussed to lead towards the interactive contextual retail design (CRD).

The present retail design only caters retail (commercial) and interior spaces as two different environments instead of a holistic approach. This phenomenon had become a “cyclo” in preserving the continuation of consumer's experience as they are easily spread of by period of time (before, during and after an experience). Shopping experiences requires

the integration of various kinds of processes and responses that could influence criteria such as designed environment, situation and consumer characteristics. Since culture plays a significant role in creating retail atmosphere, the Malaysian shopping culture needs to relate its retail design to its context. Emanating from investigation of the Malaysian culture, it is identified that the Malaysian society is a modest; group oriented who values relationship based on trust and loyalty. Here, the three derived culture identities are creating a continuation of shopping experience that would become the pillars of CRD.

As the rapid development of the internet is here, the Malaysian Gen Y is more demanding in their purchasing experience including personal customisation (San et al., 2015). With Omni-Channel retail concept, the shopping experience for Malaysian Gen Y could be delivered to a borderless cross-channel service system via the proliferation of social media, in-store Wi-Fi shopping and holistic usage of mobile devices in a physical showroom. These mentioned approaches could then lever persuasion to younger consumers in reducing uncertainty, accurate evaluation and customisation of fashion apparels as opposed to fashion's reference group remotely. A showroom with a comfortable semi-public interactive mirror display would excite the shopping experience that facilitated with borderless channels (Herhausen et al., 2015) and seamlessly enhances shopping experience through their mobile devices. Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) could allow haptic virtual experiences such as the assortment display of products (that are not presented at the store) and a virtual mirror that allows consumer to virtually try-on clothes without needing to go to the changing room.

Omni-Channel retailing consumer in-store journey, search history and personal data preferences are stored in individual registered account. The data collected will be useful for the retailer in mapping consumer purchasing behaviour that is essential in developing the Omni-Channel retailing. This data will further assist retailers to identify the interior retail design layout while prioritising the consumers' demands. Supplementary from the physical retail could help fulfilment centres for online counterparts. Online purchasing could further aid consumer self-collect purchased goods, allowing the consumer to examine it physically and digitally, and in-store

return purchases if needed.

Through a wide assortment of virtual product, analytical mapped data and fulfilment centre, the CRD can be further improved by utilising the conventional retail layout into addressing the consumers' needs. This typology usually facilitated many individual stores or products under one roof that consequently despair consumer experience and thus condense the uncertainty avoidance. The CRD improvement can be made by product assortment to be displayed as per analytical demand, and the products are then stored at showroom/ fulfilment store. This improvement will channel the consumers' devotion to the products and services thus enhance consumer in-store journey and experience while maintaining products' quality at the same time.

It is noted that the amalgamation between CRD and Omni-Channel retail concept could revolutionise the Gen Y shopping experience. Seamless shopping experience from mobile devices to the physical store will provide a breath of fresh air in retail design especially in Malaysia. From the discussion, there are three main spaces identified in making a CRD as the future of retail design. They are showroom, online counterparts and the fulfilment store. With the operating of the fulfilment store as the core space, this will create a seamless physical relationship between the showroom and online countertop.

CONCLUSION

Despite the possibilities of the amalgamation of digital and physical stores, it appears that there is a lack of clear conceptualisation and empirical support in defining the future of retail design. In this study, the authors choose to use literature analysis as a research method to study the Malaysian Gen Y purchasing behaviour in responding to their contextual retail design.

The study only covers the Malaysian Gen Y and their purchasing behaviour which later became the main component of CRD. Classified as millennials or echo-boomers, Gen Y is imprecisely defined as those birth years ranging from 1977 to 1997 (Aliman et al., 2018). Just like previous

generations, Gen Y could also tend to set examples for remainder and next-generation population (Martin & Turley, 2004). This study also concurs with Douglas and Craig, (1997) that ethnic and nationalist identities have emerged, resulting in market fragmentation.

The authors conclude that the amalgamation of Omni-Channel retail concept and with physical retail design can enhance the shopping experience for the Malaysian Gen Y. The improvement of CRD could attract and attract more consumers and will also be beneficial for traders to better manage the system by employing the consumer's behaviour and data. The result of this study can be used further by Malaysian architects and designers to implement a successful retail design while catering to current consumers' shopping needs.

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