




UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***THE DIMENSIONALITY OF CONSUMER DECISION MAKING STYLES :
COMPARISON BETWEEN U.S. AND MALAYSIAN YOUNG CONSUMERS***

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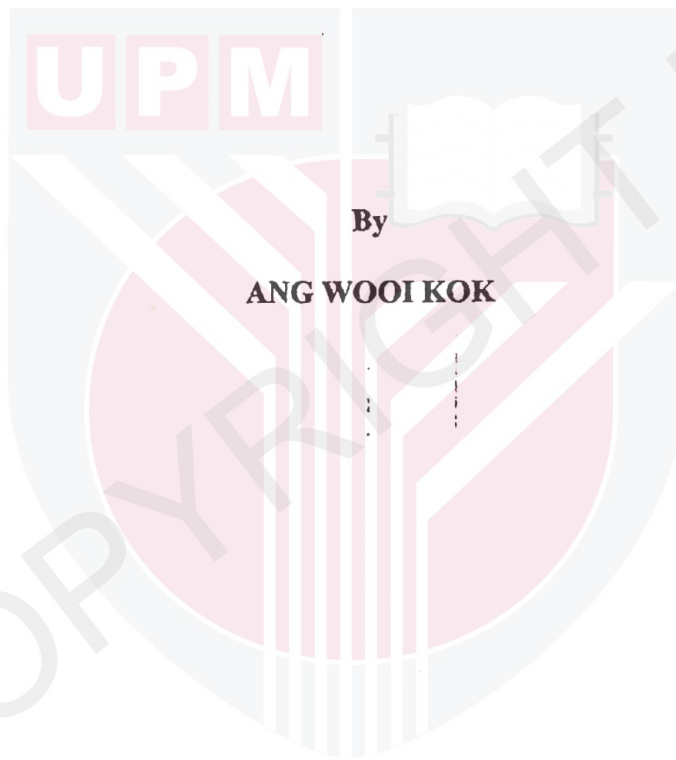
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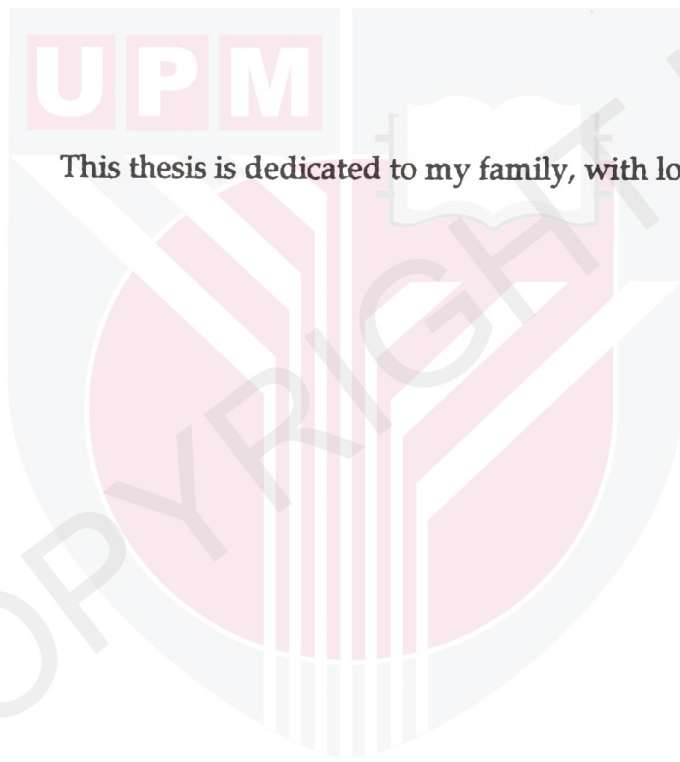
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The dimensionality of consumer decision making styles :
comparison between U.S. and Malaysian young consumers / Ang
Wooi Kok.



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This thesis is dedicated to my family, with love

ABSTRACT

A consumer decision-making style is defined as a mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making consumer choices. All consumers are thought to approach the market with eight mental characteristics of consumer decision-making style: (1) Perfectionism or high-quality consciousness; (2) Brand consciousness; (3) Novelty-fashion consciousness; (4) Recreational, hedonistic shopping consciousness; (5) Price and "value for money" consciousness; (6) Impulsiveness; (7) Confusion from over choice of brands, stores, and consumer information; and (8) Habitual, brand-loyal orientation toward consumption.

The purpose of this study is to identify the dimensionality of consumer decision-making styles of young consumers in Malaysia and to find if these styles are similar to those of U.S. young consumers. Most studies that have developed and validated models and instruments in consumer affairs research have used U.S. samples.

However, companies and marketers cannot be based on research and survey conducted in U.S. to segment consumers in other countries. Such studies may be inapplicable. Thus, in this research, a questionnaire based on previous research in the U.S. was used to collect the data. Questionnaires were distributed to 250 university students at Universiti Putra Malaysia during December 2000. Of 212 returned questionnaires, 38 had incomplete information and were deemed invalid for this research. Data are factor analyzed and alpha coefficients are computed for scale reliability. The factor analysis explained 58 percent of the variance in the correlation matrix; a very reasonable proportion and all eigenvalues exceeded 1.0.

Finding indicates that all the eight dimensions of consumer decision-making style were confirmed in Malaysia data. Decision-making styles of young consumers in Malaysia were classified, and several similarities and a few differences in decision-making styles were identified between Malaysia and U.S. consumers. The most important finding is that there is an indication of the generality of several consumer decision-making styles of young U.S. and Malaysia consumers. This study concludes with a discussion of these similarities and differences of consumer decision-making styles between young U.S. and Malaysia consumers.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will give an overview of the whole thesis, beginning with problem statement, research objectives, and ending with significance of the research. In addition, the organization of the thesis will be discussed as well.

1.1 Problem Statement

First and foremost, research into consumer behavior has gained wide acceptance worldwide. The research on consumer decision-making styles has become more extensive and complex as purchase involvement increases. This is due to the fact that many companies are presenting consumers with information about their products through various promotional media. The purpose of this section is to understand the characteristics of consumer behavior and their decision-making styles.

Consumer issues have become very important in Malaysia, notably, consumer decision-making, is more complex and even more complicated today than in the past. As stated by Hafstrom, Jung, and Young (1992), consumers are besieged by advertising, new articles, and direct mailings that provide an abundance of information, much of it with mixed message. In addition, increases in the number and variety of goods, stores, and shopping malls, and the availability of multi-component products and electronic purchasing capabilities have broadened the sphere for consumer choice and have complicated decision-making.

Hence, consumers are faced with mixed products. They mixed up in their mind when choosing between alternative products. They have confused by over-choice. For that reason, the individuality in consumer behavior when choosing between alternative products is perhaps the most widely analyzed topic in consumer interest studies. Although many factors influence consumer decision-making, consumers are thought to approach the market with certain basic decision-making styles. (Sproles and Kendall, 1986). Therefore, basic characteristic of decision-making styles is central to consumer-interest studies to perceive the meaning of complex and complicated consumers.

Second, no single study exists in which consumer decision-making styles in Malaysia have been examined. For that reason, most studies that have developed and validated models and instruments in consumer affairs research have used U.S. samples. As a result, cross-cultural generality remains

unknown. Consumer affairs specialists should not assume that instruments validated in the U.S. are immediately applicable to other countries. Perhaps, a more parsimonious version of the inventory with fewer scale dimensions that exhibits greater internal consistency could be developed and validated (Durvasula, Lysonski, and Andrews, 1993).

Companies and marketers have found that segmenting consumers in foreign countries cannot be based on research and survey conducted in U.S. Identification of such factors requires marketers to make long-term commitments and conduct extensive research on the potential market (Aaker and Day, 1990; Levitt, 1991; Kotler, 1996). In brief, the empirical research investigating consumer decision-making styles used U.S. samples may be inapplicable to other cultures or countries.

In the last place, consumer decision-making styles are constantly changing. In order to address this constant state of flux or continuous change and to create a proper marketing mix for a well-defined market, marketing managers must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of consumer decision-making styles. Consumer decision-making styles described how consumers make purchase decisions. As stated by Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff, and Terblanche (2000), understanding how consumers make purchase decisions can help marketing managers in several ways, expressly influencing consumer behavior and finally buyer behavior.

1.2 Research Objectives

This paper is to identify the basic characteristics of decision-making styles of young consumers in Malaysia and to find if these styles are similar to those of young consumers in U.S. This paper reports a cross-cultural examination of a scale for profiling consumer decision-making style dimensions using young Malaysian sample. Therefore, the objectives of this research were:

- To identify characteristics of decision-making styles of young consumers in Malaysia
- To find if the characteristics of decision-making styles are similar for Malaysian and U.S. young consumers

1.2.1 To identify characteristics of decision-making styles of young consumers in Malaysia

The first objective of this research is to identify characteristics of decision-making styles of young consumers in Malaysia. In detail, this research is to examine the dimensions of consumer decision-making style in Malaysia by using Consumer Styles Inventory to determine Malaysian young consumers. Sproles and Kendall (1986) had established the reliability and validity of the Consumer Styles Inventory.

As stated by Sproles and Kendall (1986), consumers are thought to approach the market with certain basic decision-making styles, for example, consumers have characterized as quality seekers, novelty-fashion seekers, comparison seekers, information seekers, and habitual or brand loyal consumers (Bettman, 1979; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Maynes, 1976; Miller, 1981; Sproles, 1979; Sproles, 1983; Thorelli, Becker, and Engeldow, 1975).

1.2.2 To find if the characteristics of decision-making styles are similar for Malaysian and U.S. young consumers

The second objective of this research is to find if the characteristics of decision-making styles are similar for Malaysian and U.S. young consumers. In brief, Sproles and Kendall (1986) recommended validating the instrument across other populations. Consequently, the intent of this research is to validate the Consumer Styles Inventory proposed by Sproles and Kendall (1986) by examining its generality to another country. The empirical research investigating consumer decision-making styles used U.S. samples may not be applicable to other cultures or countries.

For that reason, the objective of this research will respond to the criticism that models and empirical findings developed with U.S. may not be valid in other countries, and further research is required to demonstrate applicability (Albaum and Peterson, 1984; Hui and Triandis, 1985; Lee and Green, 1991). This research, therefore, to present a method for measuring characteristics of consumer decision-making styles in Malaysia compared to U.S. young

consumers. In sum, the objective of this research also wants to examine the cross-cultural applicability of a scale for profiling consumer decision-making, which is to determine the similarities and differences in decision-making styles in Malaysia.

1.3 Significance of the Research

Among the importance or benefits of this research are to the following groups:

1.3.1 Marketers

The first group is the marketers. The findings of the Consumer Styles Inventory could help to indicate the similarities and differences of consumer decision-making styles to a young population in Malaysia. Although the research on the young consumers decision-making styles, however, the role of young, especially in consumer decision-making should be defined and examined. Young consumers are recognized as a specialized market segment for a variety of goods and services (Moschis and Moore, 1979). Therefore, marketers need to have a thorough understanding of their consumer decision-making styles, and because each individual behavior is different, therefore, they could create products that are identical or closely resembling the consumer ideal products.

Marketers need to understand the consumer decision-making styles in Malaysia and not using the U.S. samples to analyze the Malaysian market. Therefore, they could use the right promotional tools such as advertising, sales promotions, or publicity to convey their messages to a large population of the market in the most effective and efficient way. Therefore, an overall understanding of the consumer decision-making styles of this research will assist marketers in designing a marketing strategy to persuade more people to purchase their products and gain more profit and market share than their competitors.

Conducting business across international boundaries requires marketers to identify factors, which allow them to anticipate and adapt to the ever-changing marketplace, and the constant evolution of consumer decision-making styles. Therefore, the benefit and importance of this research is to formulate marketing strategies to translate into maximizing sales volume and market share, and eventually this will in turn lead to profit maximization. In general, the higher the number of units sold, the lower the per-unit costs and the absolute, profits. Therefore, understanding consumer decision-making styles brings the ability to assist marketers as well as managers in their decision-making.

1.3.2 Academicians and Researchers

This research also will be benefited to the academicians and researchers. The research will contribute additional research findings to the currently available information. According to Durvasula, Lysonski, and Andrews (1993), researchers should not assume that instruments validated in the U.S. are immediately applicable to other countries. Thus, researchers are encouraged to develop a more robust decision-making style inventory to account for the variation in findings. The administration of the Consumer Styles Inventory to a young population in Malaysia could help indicate the similarities and differences of Consumer Styles Inventory to other populations. Besides, it is a platform to many other studies to repeat the research in order to estimate its validity and to investigate into details.

Sproles and Kendall (1986) used data from samples of young consumers in the U.S. to measure basic characteristics of consumer decision-making styles. They developed and validated a Consumer Styles Inventory for this purpose. In addition, they recommended that the Consumer Styles Inventory be administered to different populations in order to establish generality. Identifying and testing decision-making traits for other youth and adult groups as well can establish generality. In summary, understanding of consumer decision-making styles provides academicians and researchers a knowledge base from which to analyze consumers.

1.3.3 Consumers

Gaining knowledge of consumer decision-making styles assists the average consumer in making better purchase decisions. Characteristics of decision-making styles, used in the Consumer Styles Inventory, can be useful in profiling an individual's consumer style, in educating consumers, and in counseling families on financial management (Sproles and Kendall, 1986). The young within the family often influence family purchasing decisions (Turk and Bell, 1972).

Consumer socialization is defined as “processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the market place” (Ward, 1974). Socialization usually takes place within the family and may shape consumption patterns. In this way, it may affect not only present but also future consumers. The interrelationship between specific consumer decision-making styles has important application for consumer education.

1.4 Organization of the Thesis

This section will deal with the organization of the thesis. The contents of each chapter are briefly discussed as follows:

1.4.1 Chapter One

Chapter one will discuss on an overall of the project paper in order to give the readers a basic understanding of the whole thesis.

1.4.2 Chapter Two

Chapter two will concentrate on the literature review of this project paper. The dimensions involved in the research will be discussed in detail. This would try to enlarge the knowledge and provide a clearer picture in conducting this research. This chapter is to understand the characteristics of consumer behavior and their decision-making style dimensions as noted by experts in this field.

1.4.3 Chapter Three

Chapter three will focus on the proposed methodology to be used in answering the research objectives stated in chapter one. A guide line to data collecting method, questionnaire construction, measurement, data analysis and relevant statistic will be included.

1.4.4 Chapter Four

Chapter four will mainly concentrate on the result and analysis of this research. This chapter examines data processing, analysis, and interpretation of the data obtained from the survey. The result or outputs of computer computation are compiled, summarized, and presented in tabular format. The researcher used the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) 10.0 for windows software program to perform complex statistical analysis on the data to determine the significance of the hypotheses and to obtain other information. In summary, this chapter will narrow on the result into statistical test.

1.4.5 Chapter Five

The last chapter will direct on discussing the conclusion of the whole research, which summarizes all the important points of the research. The relationships, significance, and implications from the research will be discussed. Suggestions and recommendations will be given based on the conclusion from the research findings. The recommendations formulated for possible marketing strategies that marketers need to implement based upon the research findings and analysis obtained. Lastly, research limitations and possible areas for future research are also included.

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