

Part Time Students' Benefit Perception on Online Shopping in Malaysia

LA PERCEPTION DES AVANTAGES DE L'ACHAT EN LIGNE DES ETUDIANTS A TEMPS PARTIEL EN MALAISIE

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Abstract: In Malaysia, studies on consumers' benefit perception have been extensively examined. Results of the studies show that Malaysian consumers are still sceptical in this form of shopping due to factors linking to their preference in becoming recreational shoppers. These studies, however, examined this issue using consumers in general as their sample study. This study used a more specific sample group, namely, the part-time students, in examining consumers' benefit perception on online shopping in Malaysia. Part-time students were chosen in this study as they represent the group of people whose time are highly occupied with working and studying. Therefore, they are likely to become convenience shoppers and may opt to shop online. The results show similar pattern to previous studies using other samples. The findings shed some lights to the marketing managers on the importance of the internet as a shopping medium to cater for people who are lacking luxury of time.

Key words: Online shopping; part-time students; Malaysia, benefit perception

Résumé: En Malaisie, on a beaucoup étudié la preception des avantages des consommateurs. Les résultats de ces études montrent que les consommateurs malaisiens restent toujours sceptiques sur cette forme d'achat en raison des facteurs liés à leur préférence d'être des acheteurs de divertissement. Ces études, toutefois, ont examiné ce sujet en utilisant les simples consommateurs en tant que leur échantillon d'études. Cet article a utilisé un groupe de consommateurs plus spécifique, à savoir les étudiants à temps partiel, pour examiner la perception des avantages de l'achat en ligne des consommateurs en Malaisie. Les étudiants à temps partiel ont été choisis dans cette étude car ils représentent le groupe de personnes très occupées par le travail

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et les études. Par conséquent, ils pourraient probablement devenir des acheteurs qui préfèrent la commodité et opter pour l'achat en ligne. Cette étude montre des résultats similaires à ceux des études précédentes utilisant d'autres échantillons. Ces découvertes permettent de mettre en lumière l'importance de l'Internet comme un moyen d'achats pour les managers de marketing, à fin qu'ils puissent penser à mieux répondre aux besoins des personnes pour qui le temps est un luxe.

Mots-Clés: achat en ligne; étudiants à temps partiel; Malaisie; perception des avantages

1. INTRODUCTION

The internet has become the means for both firms and consumers to conduct businesses (Wigand, 1997). The rise of personal computer ownership and the improvement of internet access have led to the widespread use of the internet. This in turn allows the creation of online trading among suppliers, traders, bankers and consumers to transact their business in a virtual market (Quelch and Klein, 1996; Borenstein and Saloner, 2001). Studies have shown that many consumers have started to shop their desired products online (Sefton, 2000). Shopping online seems to be a more convenient way for them to get hold of their desired goods or services without much hassle (Kargaonkar and Smith, 1986). The phenomena of shopping online has now become an increasing and common trend globally (Sefton, 2000). It is anticipated that online shopping could affect consumers' shopping behaviour. This is caused by marketing campaigners driving consumers all the way through the process and eventually persuading them to shop online (Goodwin, 1999).

International Data Corporation (IDC) Asia-Pacific has anticipated that the prospect of online shopping would grow tremendously from US\$15 million in 1998 and US\$46 million in 1999 to US\$2.57 billion in 2005 in Malaysia (Louis and Leon, 1999). However, the number of consumers shopping online does not reflect the number anticipated. For example; in 2000 and 2001, the number of consumers shopping online was reported to be only 1% of the total population (Wui, 2000; Ghani et al., 2001). This figure has not increased tremendously (Khatibi et al., 2006). In fact, Kee-Sook (2002) reported that online shopping has decreased from 5% in 2000 to 2% in 2002.

One factor that has a direct link to consumers' decision to buy or not to buy is their attitude. (Armstrong and Kotler, 2000; Wu, 2003). Many studies have conducted attitude and its linkages to the online shopping literature. These studies have mainly focused on using the public as respondents. Although undeniably they represent the online shoppers, arguably, there is a need to re-examine this issue by focusing on part-time students. This is because part-time students represent the group of people whose time are highly occupied with working and studying. Therefore, it is likely that they would face limited time to expense for shopping. Examining this issue is evident as it provides further insights to the marketing managers to understand and predict where their future online shopping business would be.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a review of relevant literature. Section 3 provides the hypotheses underpinning this study and section 4 outlines the research design. The results are presented in section 5. A summary and conclusion are provided in the last section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of online shopping has led to the existence of online shopping literature. One theme that has received a wide attention is the factors that facilitate consumers' willingness to purchase online.

Examining these factors are important as it has been suggested that they play an important part in determining the success or failure of online shopping business (Goodwin, 1999; Ghani et al., 2001; Wu, 2003; Kolsaker et al., 2004; Khatibi et al., 2006). These studies reported advantages and disadvantages with respect to online shopping in comparison with traditional shopping. A survey by Ernst and Young (2000) reported that consumers use the internet because of good product selection, competitive prices, and ease of use. However, there are consumers who expressed concerns associated with high shipping cost, lack of opportunity to examine the product prior to purchase, high price, confidentiality of credit card and personal information (Goldstein and O'Connor, 2000).

Within the Malaysian context, many studies that have examined online shopping have focused on variables that linked consumers to shop online. Among variables examined are factors that influence or hinders consumers to shop online (Ghani et al., 2001, Mohd Suki et al., 2002); demographic profiles (Gupta et al., 1995; Haque and Khatibi, 2005; Khatibi et al., 2006) and consumers' characteristics (Haque and Khatibi, 2005; Harn et al., 2006). These studies found significant differences between genders where male consumers tend to shop online more compared to women consumers (Gupta et al., 1995; Haque et al., 2007). Other studies found that age also influence online shopping behaviour. These studies show that younger generation do more online shopping compared to the older generation (Sulaiman et al., 2008); education level and higher income bracket (Harn et al., 2006; Haque and Khatibi, 2005; Sulaiman et al., 2008).

Recent studies have focused on more specific characteristics such as gender and race (Haque et al., 2007) and motivations (Mohd Suki et al., 2008). Mohd Suki et al. (2008) examined the link of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to students' buying intention using one of Fishbein's theories, i.e Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA concerns with the implication of people's actions and act based on the information available to them. However, study examining the link between attitude and online shopping has yet to be thoroughly examined.

Wu (2003) described attitude as "a person's relatively consistent evaluations, feelings and tendencies toward an object or idea". Attitude could be developed from personal experiences and learning with reality. Attitude could also come from information obtained from friends, relatives and other sources such as the salespeople and newspaper (Wu, 2003). Wu (2003) further stated that attitude is influenced by four consumer's dimensions: namely, demographic profile, purchase preference, benefit perception and lifestyle. Loudon and Della Bitta (1993) suggested that attitude could also come from direct and indirect experiences in life. They further argued that since attitude is not easily change, therefore, attitude plays a significant indicator on evaluating online shopping rate as well as predicting future growth of online consumers.

Studies within this literature found that attitude plays a significant role in influencing online shopping (Yang et al., 2007). Few of these studies examined positive and negative attitudes and their effect on consumers' behaviour to shop online. The results shown in these studies implicate that negative attitude deters consumers to shop online due to their preference to do what-in-store shopping. This group is known as the recreational shoppers. On the other hand, those consumers who have positive attitudes normally gain the benefit of shopping online such as convenience, flexibility of opening hours and saving money (Hong et al., 2005). This group is known as the convenience shoppers. Since most consumers are constrained by their work load and time, they tend to seek ways to reduce their shopping effort. Further, this group of people normally falls under the younger generation that have higher utilities in communication, distribution accessibility and more knowledge (Rissa and Jarvinen, 1996; Haque and Khatibi, 2005).

In examining attitude, studies often used one of Fishbein's theories known as the Fishbein's attitude theory (Wu, 2003). This theory is different from Theory of Reasoned Action since this theory focuses on the way that people form attitude towards an object on the basis of their beliefs which then form their perceptions and knowledge (Fishbein, 1967). (WU, 2003, p.38) states that "Fishbein's model was constructed so that a person's overall attitude toward an object could be derived from his beliefs and feelings about various attitudes about the object". Therefore, arguably, the Fishbein's model could be used as an attitude measurement model (Wu, 2003). However, this theory has yet to be thoroughly tested

in the context of online shopping in Malaysia. This study aims to examine this issue using one dimension of attitude; benefit perception using a specific sample group, the part-time students.

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Figure 1 illustrates the framework in this study. This framework is based on Wu's (2003) that proposed one of the dimensions of attitude towards online shopping. The framework posits out that consumers' benefit perception would influence their attitude to become positive or negative towards online shopping. In consequence, the attitude formed based on the consumers' benefit perception would affect their shopping decision.

Studies have shown that consumers' online shopping behaviour could be influenced by many factors. Among the factors examined are credit card facilities (Sulaiman et al., 2008); gender and race (Haque et al., 2007); motivation (Mohd Suki et al., 2008) and perceptions (Miyazaki and Fernandez, 2001; Sulaiman et al., 2008). However, there is yet a study in Malaysia that has used part-time students, to examine this issue and confirm whether similar results would appear. Therefore, this study re-examines this issue to provide further understanding on the factors that affect part-time students' online shopping behaviour. Online shopping behaviour becomes the dependent variable.

Studies in the online shopping literature have focused on the link between consumers' attitude and online shopping (such as Goodwin, 1999; Wu, 2003; Yang et al, 2007). Although there are studies that have examined the link between attitude and online shopping behaviour such as Haque and Khatibi (2005); Khatibi et al. (2006) and Mohd Suki et al. (2008), these studies did not examine thoroughly on the underlying factors of attitude and its relationship with online shopping behaviour. This study examines one dimension of attitude, namely, benefit perception. Wu (2003, p.39) referred benefit perception as "the sum of online shopping advantages or satisfactions that meet an individual's needs or wants". Therefore, benefit perception becomes the independent variable.

The following hypothesis is developed with the expectation that consumers' benefit perception has a significant relationship with attitude. In consequence, such relationship would influence their online shopping behaviour.

H1: The part-time students' benefit perception has significant relationship with their attitude towards online shopping.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study focuses on the effect of consumers' attitude on online shopping behaviour. Specifically, this study examines the effect of part-time students' benefit perception on attitude which consequently would affect their online shopping behaviour. This study examines this issue by way of a self-administered structured questionnaire survey.

4.1 Sample

The sample is drawn from students who are enrolled in their respective courses based on part-time basis. The reason for choosing part-time students is attributed to the fact that they are working and earning salary which allows them more opportunity to own credit cards. Since shopping through the internet requires consumer to shop using credit card facilities, this group of people would likely shop their desired goods or services through the internet. Using part-time students would also alleviate the gap in

the literature as most of the studies examining online shopping behaviour focused using general consumers (such as Haque and Khatibi, 2005; Khatibi et al., 2006; Mohd Suki et al., 2008; Sulaiman et al., 2008). In consequence, such gap led to the examination of online shopping behaviour among part-time students largely under-researched. Studies have shown that part-time students are more occupied compared to other people as they are working and studying at the same time. In consequence, this led them to consistently lack of time to shop around (Ghani et al., 2001).

4.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire is adapted from Wu (2003) with some modification to suit the context of this study. The questionnaire consists of three sections. Section A requested the respondents to complete information related to demographic profile. The questions in this section are developed on categorical basis.

Section B requested the respondents to provide information related to their experience on online shopping. The purpose of this section is to obtain information related to their perceived benefit of online shopping. This section adapts the work of Wu (2003) with some modification. Factors related to benefit perception include: effectiveness and modern, purchase convenience, information abundance, multifunction and safety, service quality, delivery speed and homepage design. The respondents are requested to respond based on a 7-point scale of 1 being "extremely agree" to 7 being "extremely disagree".

Section C requested the respondents to provide information on where do they normally access the internet for online shopping purposes and how frequent do they visit the web-sites of retailers. This section also requested the respondents to identify the rate of their online shopping behaviour in the last 12 months on a 5-point scale of 1 being 'none' to 5 being 'more than 10 items'.

The questionnaires were distributed to the part-time students in the public universities in situated in Penang, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. These 3 states in Malaysia are chosen since most of the population of internet users comes from these states (Mohd Suki et al., 2008). The researchers obtained the assistance of the teaching lecturers in the public universities to help distribute 500 questionnaires during regular class hour. The teaching lecturers were requested to return the completed questionnaire within 3 months. Out of the 500 questionnaires, 210 usable responses were received, resulting in a 42% response rate.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Demographic profile

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The results indicated that out of the 210 respondents, the percentage of the male is 33.5% whereas the percentage of female is 66.5%.

As expected, slightly more than half of the respondents are between 20 years to 25 years of age (52.4%) as this is the general age ranging for higher education. One third of the respondents are between 30 to 39 years of age (30.5%) being the remaining 16.7% as respondents of above 40 years of age.

The respondents' salary range of between RM1, 000 to RM3, 000 was the highest in this study. Only 19.1% and 11.4% of the respondents have a salary ranging of between RM3, 001 to RM5, 000 and above RM5, 001 respectively. The respondents' salary range in this study provides one possible reason as to why they pursue their study.

5.2 Effect of consumers' benefit perception on attitude towards online shopping behaviour

This section presents the results of testing the hypothesis in this study. The hypothesis states that *the part-time students' benefit perception has significant relationship with their attitude towards online shopping*. Correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis.

Panel B of table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the 7 factors. The results show that the respondents perceived the highest mean score of online shopping features is purchase convenience (3.6905), followed by multiform and safety (3.7524) and information abundance. However, the respondents did not perceive that shopping online in Malaysia is effective and modern (4.7000). Nor do the respondents perceive that the online shopping in Malaysia as highly quality in terms of delivery speed (4.3048) and service quality (4.2524).

Table 2 also provides the results of the correlation analysis and benefit perception. As shown in the table, there was no positive association in every cases except for the factor effectiveness and modern ($p=0.003$). The results do not support the hypothesis in this study. However, the results showing significant relationship between the factor effectiveness and modern support the hypothesis.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study examines whether benefit perception of part-time students could influence their attitude towards online shopping behaviour. Seven variables relate to benefit perception were chosen: effectiveness and modern, purchase convenience, information abundance, multiform and safety, service quality, delivery speed and homepage design. The results in this study could not support the hypothesis developed in this study that part time students who shopped online have higher attitude scores and this higher attitude scores would eventually influence their online shopping behaviour.

The findings in this study support the notion that although part time students have limited time allocated for shopping due to their hectic' daily life which involves working and studying at the same time, they are still reluctant to do online shopping. The results in this study showing effectiveness and modern as the main determinant to deter the part-time students to shop online indicate that the websites currently provided in Malaysia are still at its infancy. Therefore, even when these websites offer convenience in shopping, online shopping, assurance in payment and lots of information, the part-time students are still reluctant to shop online.

The key finding in this study is that part-time students tend to become recreational shopper despite lacking the luxury of time because they are still sceptical to shop online due to certain factors such as effectiveness and modern. The results implicate that companies in Malaysia need to further improve their websites in meeting the needs of the part-time students.

There are some limitations in this study. Wu (2003) provides that there are four factors that influence attitude towards an object in accordance with Fishbein's attitude theory. This study limits its focus to only benefit perception. Perhaps, future research could include the other factors in examining part-time students in Malaysia. Another limitation is that, the part-time students selected as respondents in this study are limited to those universities located in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Penang.

In summary, the results provide hindsight to the community of the internet particularly the traders on the factors influencing online shopping behaviour. Further, the findings of this study understanding on consumers' attitude as it could help marketing managers to understand and predict their future online shopping rate.

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TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Panel A: Gender of respondents		
Gender	N	Percent
Male	70	33.5
Female	140	66.5
Total	210	100

Panel B: Age		
Age	N	Percent
20 to 29	110	52.4
30 to 39	64	30.5
Above 40	36	16.7
Total	210	100

Panel C: Salary per month

Salary per month	N	Percent
RM1000 to RM3000	146	69.5
RM3001 to RM5000	40	19.1
Above RM5001	24	11.4
Total	210	100

Table 2. Benefit perception

Panel A: Descriptive statistics

Benefit factor	Mean	Standard Deviation
Effectiveness and modern	4.7000	1.36270
Purchase convenience	3.6905	1.43584
Information abundance	3.8619	1.24315
Multiform and safety	3.7524	1.35393
Service quality	4.2524	1.20530
Delivery speed	4.3048	1.19107
Homepage design	4.0238	1.42581

Panel B: Correlation analysis between attitude and benefit perception

Benefit factor	Pearson correlation	P
Effectiveness and modern	0.207	0.003
Purchase convenience	0.019	0.786
Information abundance	-0.020	0.772
Multiform and safety	-0.014	0.835
Service quality	0.075	0.278
Delivery speed	0.048	0.488
Homepage design	0.074	0.284

FIGURE

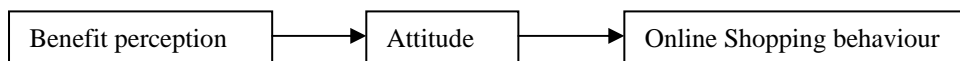


Figure 1. Consumers' demographic profile and online shopping

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