

FACTORS AFFECTING PAKISTAN'S UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARDS FOREIGN APPAREL BRANDS

Syed Iqbal Shah^{*}

Akmal Shahzad^{**}

Tanvir Ahmed^{***}

Irfan Ahmed^{****}

Received: 2. 10. 2011

Accepted: 29. 3. 2012

Preliminary communication

UDC 658.7-053.81(549.1)

This paper aims to study factors affecting Pakistan's university students' purchase intention towards foreign apparel brands. Purchase intention is explained in terms of general consumer variables (normative influence, consumer confidence) and brand specific variables (perceived quality, emotional value). The sample comprised of students enrolled at two universities in major cities of Pakistan (Islamabad & Rawalpindi), with 315 participants completing the self-administered questionnaire during scheduled classes. Results reveal that susceptibility to normative influence and consumer confidence had positive impact on brand consciousness. Brand consciousness had positive impact on perceived quality of international apparel brands & emotional value that these brands generate. Both quality and emotional value had significant impact on purchase intention. The findings of this paper cannot be generalized to other consumer products, or other segments of society, such as children, professionals. However, results reveal that foreign apparel brands need to focus on quality and their brand's emotional attributes if they want to succeed in Pakistan's apparel market.

* Syed Iqbal Shah, Iqra University, 5, Khayaban-e-Johar, H-9, 44000 Islamabad, Pakistan, E-mail: iqbal.shah70@yahoo.com

** Akmal Shahzad, Iqra University, 5, Khayaban-e-Johar, H-9, 44000 Islamabad, Pakistan, E-mail: everbrighter2011@gmail.com

*** Tanvir Ahmed, Assistant Professor, Allama Iqbal Open University, 44000 Islamabad, Pakistan, E-mail: tanvir.aiou@gmail.com

**** Irfan Ahmed, Iqra University, 5, Khayaban-e-Johar, H-9, 44000 Islamabad, Pakistan, E-mail: irfisam@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The retail market in developed countries of the world is at the mature stage (Berner et al., 2001). Intense competition and sluggish population growth is motivating leading apparel brands of the world to enter in new markets and attract new customers (Steenkamp & Hofstede, 2002). The emergence of economies (China, India, other Asian countries) with a strong middle class is impelling these apparel firms to ensure their presence in such economies ((Dickson et al., 2004). Economic growth and emerging young customers who have brand and fashion awareness (Morton, 2002; Bryck, 2003) in Asian markets such as China, India, Japan and South Korea have attracted attention from multinational apparel firms. The consumers in these countries are witnessing many brands in their market. Therefore, they are more sensitive to brands as to what it offers, what it speaks to them, and how it addresses their needs (Anholt, 2000).

The consumer decision to buy a particular brand is effected by different factors. Aside from functional benefits, he/she may choose a particular brand to express his/her personality, social status, affiliation or to fulfill his/her desire for newness (Kim et al., 2008). Searching for information is a key stage of a consumer's decision-making process that may include search for the internal and external environment.

Internal information will be gathered from experience or prior exposure to advertisement. External information may be collected from sources such as reference groups (e.g. peers, family members) and/or marketplace (Blackwell et al., 2001). Both internal and external information will reduce the perceived risk and thus search behavior (Moorthy et al., 1997). The assessment of an apparel item is an important step in the decision-making process. It includes aspects such as the judgment of quality of the item, but may also include aesthetics (De Kleark & Lubebe, 2006). Understanding what consumers want and developing targeted strategies may be one of the biggest challenges for multinational apparel firms.

1.1. Objective of the study

This paper aims to study factors affecting Pakistan's university students' purchase intention towards foreign apparel brands. Consumers' brand perceptions may be driven by their unparalleled needs and brand knowledge derived from personal experience (Keller, 2001). Young customers have a desire to bolster their image and to look "cool". The outcomes of this research

will allow the foreign apparel firms to better understand Pakistan's market and will help them to adopt effective strategies for Pakistan's apparel market.

1.2. Consumer market in Pakistan

Pakistan's per capita income is \$1000 annually and is the eighth most populous country in the world (Asian Development Bank, 2002). It has the highest per capita income in the entire south Asian region (Asian Development Bank, 2002).

Pakistan has a consumption-oriented society and people tend to spend more on rituals and social engagements (Burki & Muhammad, 2008). Thus, it can be inferred that in order to show their status and style, Pakistani consumers spend a considerable amount of money on their clothing. Thus, it is a lucrative market for multinational apparel firms.

1.3. Significance of the study

Pakistan, as a developing country, is considered one of the emerging economies of the world, after China, Russia and India. Retailers of foreign apparel entering the Pakistan market are faced with a tough competition from already established fashion brands – both national, and foreign. The findings of this paper will serve as a guide to such foreign apparel retailers who have limited knowledge of Pakistan's apparel consumer. This will help them to formulate marketing strategies to gain from Pakistan's apparel markets. This paper will also help national apparel producers to reflect on their marketing strategies and compete effectively in the cutthroat competition that exists in the apparel industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase decisions are affected by the group during the selection of brands for identical products, with the group cohesiveness playing a decisive role in the selection of a brand (Witt & Bruce, 1972). Along with the group cohesiveness, the members' information about the brand used by other group members also affect the decision to quit the existing brand and purchase the brand used by other group members (Witt 1969). Thus, the greater the consumer's orientation with the group members, the greater its impact will be that he/she will show an inclination towards a specific brand used by the group members (Moschis 1976). However, the decisions of a group member regarding products that were

low in visibility, perceived risk, complexity and high in testability were not affected by group influence (Ford and Ellis 1980). Burki & Muhammad (2008) inferred that the individual choices regarding brands were greatly affected by the group associated in the collectivist society of Pakistan. This has led us to the hypothesis:

H₁: Normative influence has a positive impact on brand consciousness.

The degree of certainty that buyers perceive towards the brand is called consumer confidence in the brand (Howard and Sheth, 1969). The overall confidence in the brand is directly related to the consumer's intention to purchase that brand. Confidence is hypothesized as an antecedent to subjective product knowledge (Park, 1994). A consumer's confidence functions to enable the consumer to operate effectively when faced with complex decisions involving large amounts of information (Bearden et al., 2001). The effect of the consumer's confidence in the brand led to the second hypothesis:

H₂: Consumer confidence in the brand has a positive impact on brand consciousness.

The American Marketing Association defined brand as "a name, term, design, symbol or any other characteristic that makes the selling of goods or services different from the goods and services of other sellers". When making purchases, the consumer perceives brands as the sign of quality (Vranesevic & Stancec 2003). In addition, the price of the brand is considered as an indicator of its quality (Sjolander 1992). Earlier studies have proved the fact that a brand name is closely linked with qualities followed by other factors such as price and retailer reputation (Agarwal & Teas, 2002). The perceived brand origin has a significant impact on the brand image (Thakor & Lavack 2003). Some brands closely link themselves with their origin in order to enhance their image and to project themselves as a symbol of quality (Thakor & Lavack 2003).

Also, the country of manufacture had no impact on product quality evaluations when the country of corporate ownership was also present (Thakor & Lavack 2003). High-professed quality is said to drive a consumer to choose one brand above rival brands (Yoo et al., 2000). The consumer's perception of the quality of brands serves as a source of the third hypothesis:

H₃: Pakistani students who have a higher level of brand consciousness will perceive a foreign apparel brand to have higher quality.

Perceived benefits were a combination of different product dimensions (tangible or intangible; extrinsic and intrinsic), available in relation to the purchase and use of the product (Snoj et al. 2004). Emotional value was the benefit which one gets by experiencing something new or different (Lee et al., 2006). The products and brands provided other benefits (such as a fun and enjoyable experience) that generate emotional values for the consumers (Holbrook, 1986). Consumers perceived foreign brands to be more superior in all aspects to the national brands (Iyer and Kalita, 1997; Kinra, 2006). This enabled us to formulate the fourth hypothesis:

H₄: Pakistani students who have a higher level of brand consciousness will perceive a foreign apparel brand to have higher emotional value.

The level of quality and emotional value is theoretically related (Babin et al., 1994). Some authors use perceived quality and perceived value interchangeably (Snoj et al. 2004). Therefore, perceived quality brought emotional value to consumers. This leads to frame the fifth hypothesis:

H₅: University students in Pakistan perceiving a foreign apparel brand to have higher quality will also perceive it to have higher emotional value.

As discussed in the outset, the consumer who perceives the product to be of higher quality will buy that product in assessment to a product of lower quality (Vranesec & Stancec 2003). The brands that were linked with high quality will be purchased by the consumers (Snoj et al., 2004). The consumer implied perception of quality from the brand supersedes its price when he/she is making a purchase decision (Dodds et al., 1991). This leads to the formulation of the sixth hypothesis:

H₆: University students in Pakistan who perceive a foreign apparel brand to have higher quality will have a higher purchase intention toward the brand.

Agarwal and Teas (2000) observed that a consumer is likely to give more importance to emotional value derived from a product than the perceived quality of that product. In addition, Dodds et al. (1991) concluded that there was a positive impact of emotional value on a consumer's purchase intention. As a customer expects a high emotional benefit from foreign apparel brands (Iyer and Kalita, 1997; Kinra, 2006), they would therefore purchase that brand to

satisfy their emotional needs from the product. This leads to the seventh hypothesis:

H₇: Pakistan's university students who perceive a foreign apparel brand to have higher emotional value will have a higher purchase intention toward the brand.

The model explains purchase intention in terms of different variables i.e. Normative influence, Consumer confidence, Brand consciousness, Perceived quality and Emotional value. Normative influence and Consumer confidence impact Purchase intention through Brand consciousness, Perceived quality and Emotional value.

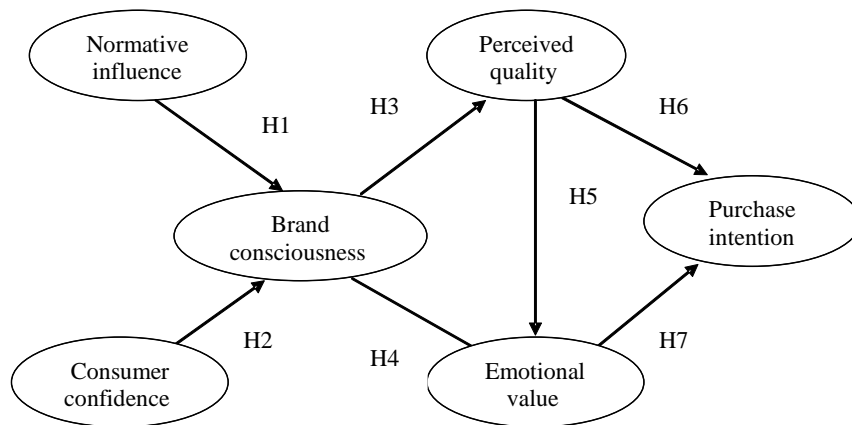


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

The sample comprised of students enrolled at two universities in major cities of Pakistan, i.e. Islamabad and Rawalpindi. A total of 315 participants completed a self-administered questionnaire during scheduled classes. The average age of the respondents was 22 years and the majority (90.8%) were aged under 25 years. Among 315 participants, 201 participants (63.8%) were male and 114 participants (36.2%) were female. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the sample.

Table 1: Demographical characteristics of respondents in percentage

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	201	63.8%
	Female	114	36.2%
Age	Less than 25	286	90.8%
	25-45	22	7%
	Above 45	7	2.2%
Education	Graduate	278	88.3%
	Postgraduate	16	5.1%
	MS or MPhil	21	6.7%

3.2. Measures

The measures were comprised of general consumer variables (i.e. Normative influence, Consumer confidence and Brand consciousness) and brand specific variables (i.e. Perceived quality, Emotional value and Purchase intention). The scale items used to measure the construct in the study were taken from previous studies. Each item in the scale rated on a five-point scale anchored by "Strongly Disagree" (1) and "Strongly Agree" (5).

Scale items for the Normative influence were adopted from Bearden et al. (1989); Brand consciousness from Shim & Kotsiopoulos (1993); Consumer confidence from Bearden et al. (2001); Perceived quality from Dodds et al. (1991); and Emotional value from Sweeney & Souter (2001). The scale items for the Purchase intention were taken from Lee et al. (2006). A one page questionnaire was administered and, on average, it took about five minutes for an individual to exercise his/her judgment on the items. Overall, the questionnaire was easy to understand and jargon was avoided. Furthermore, the validity of the scale was not compromised.

The questionnaire is comprised of six constructs and measured by 23 items. Six items measure the construct Normative influence, while Consumer confidence is measured by five items, Brand consciousness by three items, Perceived quality by three items, Emotional value and Purchase intention by four and two items respectively. Only those items that were relevant to our study and had the highest factor loading in previous studies were selected. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested by using Cronbach's Alpha. Table 2 provides the description and Cronbach's Alpha for the variables in the study.

Table 2. Variables and their measures (Cronbach's Alpha)

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Normative influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By buying the same brands as my friends, I achieve a sense of belonging. • I buy the latest fashion when I am sure my friends like them. • If other people see me using a product, I buy the brand they expect me to buy. • I like to know what brands make a good impression on others. • I achieve a sense of belonging by buying the same brands that others purchase. • If I want to be like someone, I try to buy the same brands that they buy. 	0.60
Consumer confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am confident in my ability to recognize a brand worth considering. • I can tell which brands meet my expectations. • I trust my own judgment when deciding which brands to consider. • I know which stores to shop. • I can focus easily on a few good brands when making a decision. 	0.62
Brand consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to buy well-known clothing brands. • I try to stick to certain brands. • I pay attention to brand name. 	0.52
Perceived quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to buy well-known clothing brands. • I try to stick to certain brands. • I pay attention to a brand name. 	0.76
Emotional value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using international apparel brands make me feel good. • Using international apparel brands give me pleasure. • International apparel brands make me want to use them. • I feel comfortable using international apparel brands. 	0.82
Purchase intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I intend to buy international apparel brands frequently. • I plan to buy international brands more often. 	0.59

It can be observed from the table that Cronbach's Alpha for the scales measuring constructs of Normative Influence, Consumer Confidence, Brand Consciousness, Perceived Quality, Emotional Value and Purchase Intention are .60, .62, .52, .76, .82 and .59 respectively. Thus, it can be inferred that reliability statistics are satisfactory.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1. Hypothesis Testing

The objective of this paper was to understand the purchase intention in terms of variables, included into the previously discussed model. The hypotheses developed in the literature review are tested using regression analysis at a 95% confidence interval. Table 3 summarizes the results for the developed hypotheses.

In the case of H_1 , the *t-value* is $6.096 > 2$, $p < .05$ which posits that Normative influence has a significant impact on Brand consciousness. Hence, it validates our first hypothesis. In the case of H_2 , the *t-value* is $2.72 > 2$, $p < .05$ which solicits that Consumer confidence has a positive impact on Brand consciousness. The result supports H_2 . In the cases of H_3 , H_4 , H_5 , H_6 and H_7 , the *t-values* are 6.106, 7.154, 10.79, 8.121 and 10.26 respectively. Highly significant *t-values* purport that the relationships hypothesized are true and valid.

Table 3. Standardized coefficients and *t*-statistics for the structural model

Hypothesis	Structural Path	β	Standard Error	t-values	Sig (2- tailed)
H_1	NI→BC	.326	.064	6.096**	.000
H_2	CC→BC	.156	.072	2.792	.006
H_3	BC→PQ	.326	.062	6.106**	.000
H_4	BC→EV	.375	.059	7.154**	.000
H_5	PQ→EV	.518	.047	10.79****	.000
H_6	PQ→PI	.417	.050	8.121***	.000
H_7	EV→PI	.5	.049	10.26****	.000

4.2. Discussion

The study shows that Pakistan's university students' Normative influence, Confidence, Brand consciousness, Perceived quality and Emotional value are direct and indirect factors of Purchase intention. A significant impact of Normative influence on Brand consciousness indicates that Pakistan's

university students' susceptibility for Normative influence and Brand consciousness suggests that they are likely to buy a well-known clothing brand to live up to the expectations of others or to relate to a group. Confidence and its significant impact on brand consciousness points out that there is a high confidence in foreign apparel brands and that university students in Pakistan are likely to purchase brands that suit their personality.

The significant impact of Brand consciousness on Perceived quality (t-value= 6.106>2, p<.05) supports the fact that Pakistan's university students perceive international apparel brands to be of high quality. As Perceived quality has a significant impact on Purchase intention, it can be easily inferred that Pakistan's university students who perceive international apparel brands to be of high quality are likely to purchase foreign apparel brands.

In addition, Brand consciousness has a significant impact on Emotional value. This indicates that Pakistan's university students feel good when they use international apparel brands. As Emotional value has a significant impact on Purchase intention, we can posit that Pakistan's university students believe that foreign apparel brands provide high emotional value and thus are likely to purchase foreign apparel brands. Thus, it can be concluded that Normative influence, Consumer confidence, Brand consciousness, Perceived quality, and Emotional value are antecedents of Pakistan's university students' purchase intention towards foreign apparel brands.

5. CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The study provides valuable information on foreign apparel brands wanting to enter Pakistan's apparel market. The study posits that Normative Influence and Consumer Confidence have a positive impact on Purchase intention through Brand consciousness, Perceived quality, and Emotional value. This signifies that foreign apparel brands must formulate their marketing strategy by focusing on the quality and emotional aspects of their brands. Their advertisement campaign must communicate that their products have standardized quality and that one will feel good by using their products. The advertisements should be emotionally appealing and reference groups or celebrities who are popular among the youth should endorse the products. In addition, it is essential that they should make their image in such a way that their brand becomes a symbol of confidence. They can appreciate their sales by guarantying standard quality at prices that are reasonable.

This paper studies the factors affecting the purchase intention of one segment of society i.e. students. Thus, its findings cannot be generalized to the whole society. Future research may take into account all segments of society such as children, professionals, etc. Also, cross-cultural studies are recommended to compare different countries of the world and their attitudes towards global brands. This research studies factors affecting the purchase intention towards apparel brands. Future studies may be conducted for other consumer products.

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ČIMBENICI KOJI UTJEČU NA PAKISTANSKE STUDENTE U NAMJERI ZA KUPOVINOM STRANIH TRŽIŠNIH MARKI ODJEVNIH PREDMETA

Sažetak

U ovom se radu istražuju faktori koji kod pakistanskih studenata djeluju na namjeru kupovine odjeće stranih robnih marki. Kupovna namjera se objašnjava na temelju općih varijabli koje utječu na potrošnju (normativnog učinka, pouzdanost potrošača), kao i varijabli specifičnih za tržišnu marku (percipirana kvaliteta, emocionalna vrijednost). Istraživački uzorak sastojao se od studenata dvaju sveučilišta u najvećim pakistanskim gradovima (Islamabad i Rawalpindi), pri čemu je 315 sudionika samostalno ispunilo upitnike za vrijeme predavanja. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da podložnost normativnom utjecaju i pouzdanost potrošača pozitivno utječu na svijest o tržišnoj marki. Ona je, pak, pozitivno utjecala na percipiranu kvalitetu međunarodnih odjevnih marki, kao i emocionalnu vrijednost, što ih navedene tržišne marke generiraju. Nadalje, percipirana kvaliteta i emocionalna vrijednost značajno su djelovali na kupovnu namjeru. Rezultati ovog istraživanja ne mogu se generalizirati na druge proizvode široke potrošnje ili segmente, kao što su djeca i profesionalci. Međutim, rezultati ukazuju da se strane odjevne tržišne marke trebaju usredotočiti na kvalitetu i emocionalne atribute, ukoliko žele uspjeti na pakistanskom tržištu.