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Brand switching behaviour of Muslim consumers: Development of a Cnceptual

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to develop a model to investigate the impact of brand image and religious beliefs on Muslim consumers switching intention. Moreover, it also intends to examine, how switching intention affect the customer equity of international branded products. This study seeks to expand the body of knowledge in consumer behaviour research with emphasis on religious beliefs (Islamic beliefs). The benefits that will be yielded from this study will not only provide guidelines to business researchers, but will also enhance the current understanding of Muslim consumers. It studies how the Muslim consumer's brand switching behaviour is influenced by religious beliefs of Muslim consumers and image of a brand, yet previous studies have only attempted to understand brand switching without considering the religion specifically Islam.

Keywords: Brand Image, Brand Switching, Islam, Brand equity, Malaysia

JEL classification: M31

Introduction

Impact of Islam on Muslim consumer behaviours is immensely strong. It is not limited to only in case of halal and non halal issue. Boycotting participation against companies or countries; for example the boycotting campaign against USA and UK products/ service providers in Arab countries due to and after the Iraq war (Abou Aish et al, 2005). There are many examples of certain events that show the impact of

Islam on Muslim consumer behaviour. For example, when Dutch legislator Greer Wilder produces a fitna film, which is claimed to have insulted Islam and Muslims. The Muslims all over the world were urged to boycott Dutch products in protest (CBS News, 2008). The former prime minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahtir Mohammad, in his response to the clip, urged the world's 1.3 billion Muslim consumers to boycott Dutch products following the release of anti-Islam movie (Jakarta post, 2008).

Similarly, it is reported that (Harrison and Akeel, 2006) when the Danish newspaper Jyllends-Posten" published 12 cartoons of Prophet Muhammad SAWW on September 2005. Muslims all over the world conducted demonstrations and were urged to boycott Danish goods in protest. Muslim countries stepped up political and economic pressure on Denmark after the publications of cartoons. During the boycott, Europe's the second largest dairy company named "Arla Foods" claimed that supermarkets in Muslim countries removed their products because consumer did not want to buy that products. Danish companies bear loss of 1.36 million per day, and these companies also dropped their stock price and values. After the attack by U.S on Iraq and Afghanistan, there is also negative response towards U.S branded products in Arab countries (Palliser, 2003). U.S companies reported a drop of sales upto 40%. This negative response towards U.S products increased in later years. The Malaysian Muslims switch from Star Bucks and MacDonald because of their support for Israel and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and in response of this boycott Star Bucks issued a statement that they do not fund Israel (Sivalingam, 2014).

The above mentioned Muslim consumers behaviour showed that image of brand and Islam as being their religion have a great importance and also strongly influence their behaviours that can severely hurt the customer equity of business organizations in Muslim countries. Thus, it triggers a new research trend in the switching literature and the current study is an attempt to develop a model in consumer behaviour research on religion generally and brand switching aspect of Muslim consumers specifically within the context of religion (Islam).

Review of Literature

In recent years, academic and business researchers' interest on Muslim consumer behaviour has increased considerably. This interest is led by important reasons (Sandıkcı & Rice, 2011). Firstly, due to growing number of Muslim entrepreneurs who creatively merge religious values and capitalist objectives, the middle class Muslim consumers interested in modern consumption has been increased. Secondly, Muslim scholars are more active on social media as compared to earlier time. Thirdly, Islamic social movements have created political, social and economic pressure on business markets. Finally, the post 9/11 forces have influenced the international economy and relations of Muslims with others. Moreover, a new term "the futurist" is being used for Muslim consumers. The futurists are crucial to businesses as they are influential on businesses, have considerable spending power, associated to the Islam and willing to speak loudly and proudly about their Islamic identity. (Shari'ah conscious consumer driving demand by Economist Intelligence Unit commissioned by Kuwait Finance House).

As being global segment estimated at 1.8 billion Muslim people; Pakistan and Malaysia are the two prettily emerging Islamic markets for multinational organizations. In 2013, 66% consumers switch brands that are against their identity (Carter, 2013). Muslim consumer's identity is Islam. Consumers assess a brand due to its image in the market. Negative image of brand or anti Islam image hurt Muslim consumers. The brand switching intention of Muslim consumers is driven by their religion Islam and brand image. Muslim consumers will not switch brands and show respect and loyalty to the brands that support them in public space. They are not asking for political and media support but they want companies to treat them as mainstream consumers with mainstream needs. "Fully engaged" customers (those with a strong attachment to the brand, or brand ambassadors) deliver a 23% premium over the average customer in share of wallet, profitability and revenue (Cap Gemini). But companies lose more consumers as compare to ten years ago. In a survey of loyalty 46% of consumers said they're more likely to switch brands than they were 10 years ago (Carter, 2013). Switchers are not only financial threats to a brand but also hurt the consumer based brand equity.

Researchers likened different aspects of Muslim consumer behaviour and Islam in marketing literature. Resultantly, some domains of Muslim consumption and Marketing came forward. Despite the contribution in Muslim consumers behaviour research, Islam is considered as segmentation variable in previous literature, and used to separate consumers of one religion from another and perceive that Muslims are practicing Islam today exactly like, it was fourteen centuries ago and will remain so. This approach has ignored the historical development of Islam in the context of socio-cultural. Because cultural variations have impact on consumer behaviour (Shweder 1991; Manstead 1997). It also impacts if the consumers belong to a same religion but have different cultures. Religious construct on consumption are not independent or static; they are shaped by the received knowledge, socio cultural environment (Jafari, 2012) and might be considered as a predictor of consumer behaviour (Worthington et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2001; Sandicki & Ger, 2010). Thus, there is a need to study Muslim consumers from two different cultures.

The phenomenon of brand switching has long been of interest to marketing researchers (Bass 1974) but it is not studied within the context of Muslim consumers. There is a need to study this because brand switching behaviour is viewed as a social dilemma phenomenon whereby consumers confront a conflict whether to maximize own interest or conform to group objective (Sen, Gurchen-Chauli, 2001).

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Table 1: Existing Models and Theories in Brand Switching Literature

Source	Model/Theory	Variable/Elements	Context
(Morgan & Dev, 1994)	Product Importance Model-Based Switching Model	Context, Control, Customer	Hospitality Industry of U.S
(Keaveney, 1995)	A Model of Consumer's Service Switching Behaviour	Price, Inconvenience, Core Service Failure, Service Encounter Failure, Competition, Ethical Problems, Involuntary Switching.	Different Services in North America
(S. H. Bansal & Taylor, 1999)	Theory of Planned Behaviour	Service Quality, Perceived Relevance, Satisfaction, Attitude Towards Switching, Subjective Norms, Perceived Switching Cost.	No Industry
(Roos, 1999)	A Catalytic Switching Model/SPAT	Triggers, Switching Path, Switching Determinants.	Telecom Industry of U.S
(Colgate & Hedge, 2001)	The Switching Process Model	Core Service Failure, Pricing, Denied Services	Retail Bank in Australia and New Zealand
(H. S. Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004)	Three Component Model of Consumer Commitment to Service Provider	Affective Commitment, Continuance Commitment and Normative Commitment.	Auto-repair and hairstyling services in Canada
(S. H. Bansal, Taylor, & James, 2005)	Push Pull Mooring Theory	Push factors; Low service, Quality, Satisfaction, Value, Trust, Commitment and High Price. Pull Factors; Alternative Attractiveness. Mooring Factors; Unfavourable attitude Towards Switching, Unfavourable Subjective Norms, High Switching Cost, Infrequent Prior Switching Behaviour and low Variety Seeking	Auto-repair and hairstyling services in Canada
(Aish, Kortam, & Hassan, 2008)	Agency Theory of Consumer Switching	Information asymmetry, Moral hazard, Diverse risk attitudes	Advertising Agent relationship in Egypt
(Njite, Kim, & Kim, 2008)	General System Theory of Consumer Switching	Consumer, Regulatory subsystem, Feedback loop, External environment, Internal resources.	Hospitality Industry
(Marshall, Huan, Xu, & Nam, 2011)	Prospect Theory of Consumer Switching	Psychological and Economic switching costs, Repeat purchase intention	Financial market in eastern and western world
(Nimako, 2012)	A Synthesized Model of Consumer Switching (SMCS)	Push Pull Mooring factors, Govt policy	Telecom Industry Ghana

According to the above table, from the theoretical models reviewed so far, all theoretical models in the extant literature focus specifically on the phenomenon of consumer switching behaviour in specific industry context of developed countries, without considering consumer's religion; there is a dearth of theoretical models in Muslim consumer brand switching behaviour. Thus, for a phenomenon to be well understood, a variety of theories are needed to provide a variety of frameworks for examining that phenomenon within specific contexts (Nimako, 2012). It is mentioned in the literature "without adequate theories, it is not clear what guidelines would be involved to determine the types of migration (consumer-switching), social and economic data to be collected or how such information would contribute to the cumulative undertaking of (consumer switching) process migration" (Goldscheider, 1971, p. 274). It becomes critically important to extend our understanding of consumer switching behaviour of Muslims in developing country context because: "Theoretical grounding for the study of the consumer-switching phenomenon is required if the objective of systematic investigation is to be accomplished" (S. H. Bansal & Taylor, 1999, p.201).

This study is concerned with understanding of Muslim consumers switching behaviour. Therefore, for the first time linkages among brand image, religion, customer equity, and switching intention have been integrated into one relationship model. In addition, this study also seeks to contribute to existing literature by investigating staying reasons (perceived behavioural control) as a moderator variable in the purposed model. Based on the literature review, the purposed conceptuall model of this study shown in figure 1.

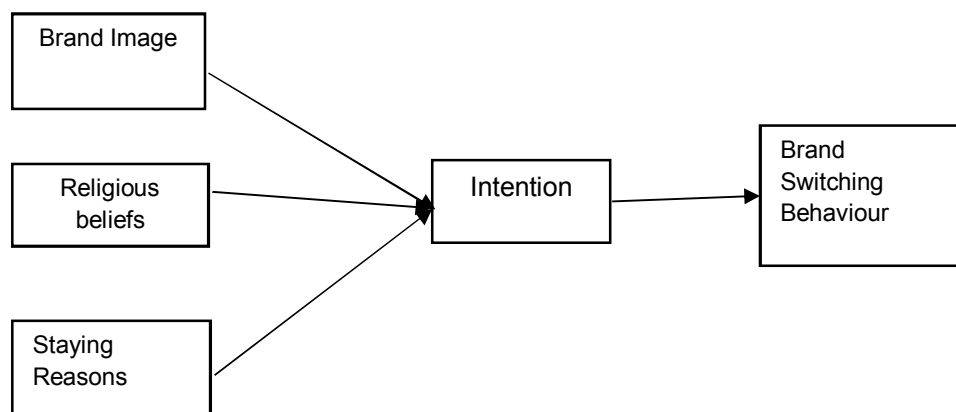


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study

Brand image is defined as reputation of a brand perceived by the consumer and strong brand image makes a company credible that leads to customer loyalty (Andreassen & Lindestad 1998; Fombrun & Shanley (1990). At the same time, inconsistent and weak brand image will hurt the company reputation. Research shows that, the role of brand image is more significant when competing firms are perceived as identical on performance, price and availability. At that time brand image can be treated as an outcome of experience and reputation of that brand (Andreassen and Linestad, 1998). In addition to this, according to push pull mooring theory (Bouge, 1977) and theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985) behaviour is followed by the intention towards that specific behaviour. For example international firms that have Muslim consumer. Their image belongs to their policies and actions on religious issues. Because it was found that, image plays an important role in decision making process (Roig et al, 2006). More specifically, brand image that hurt Muslim consumers' religious emotions lead to towards intention to switch brand.

Religion is widely accepted as predictor of consumer behaviour. This argument is supported by Zimbardo and Ruch (1979), LaBarbera (1987) and Foxall and Goldsmith (1994) religion influence goals, motivations, decisions, satisfaction and behaviours. The link between religion and behaviour can be found in activities of consumers. For example, if a firm involve in anything that hurt Muslim consumers' religious beliefs, it leads them towards brand switching intention. Consumer behaviour literature shows that, religion has been studies from two main dimensions: religious affiliation and religiosity (Essoo and Dibb 2004). Religious affiliation is the adherents of individuals to a particular religious group while religiosity, or religious commitment, is the degree to which beliefs in specific religious values and ideals are held and practised by an individual.

Consequences of intention can be categorized into two groups: favourable and unfavourable behaviour (Zeithaml, 1996). Favourable intensions are repeat purchase and word of mouth recommendation. Unfavourable recommendations are say negative things, switch to another company, complain and do less business the company. Theory of planned behaviour and theory of push pull mooring factors present individual's intention as a critical factor to perform a particular behaviour. The evidences to predict switching behaviour from intention by applying the theory of planned behaviour (Bansal et al, 2004: Bansal & Taylor, 1999) and push pull mooring theory (Nimako et al, 2014: Nimkao & Nitem 2013: Nimkao, 2012: Bansal et al, 2005) can be found in literature as shown in the table 1.

Perceived behavioural control is staying reasons, why customers choose to stay after a serious consideration to leave. Based on this definition it argued that the staying reason is an important factor to take into consideration when examining the switching behaviour. Related literature suggest that consumer may decide to switch the relationship if they found the alternatives better offerings (Sharma & Patterson, 2000), positive characteristics of competitors influence consumer switching behaviour (Jones et al, 2000). In contrast to above, if competitors' offerings are not attractive the switching intention might be discouraged the actual switching behaviour.

Conclusion

This paper presents a comprehensive review of Muslim consumer behaviour literature Review and key theories and models of consumer switching behaviour. It justifies the need for more theoretical models in understanding the concept of switching behaviour within Muslim consumer behaviour. Given that switching is more prevalent in competitive business environment, the paper, proposes a synthesized model for switching behaviour in Malaysia and Pakistan. It is hoped that this literature review will be followed by an empirical study to test the proposed model of consumer switching behaviour in Malaysia and Pakistan.

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