

Journal of Nusantara Studies 2019, Vol 4(2) 247-264
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin
ISSN 0127-9386 (Online)
<http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol4iss2pp247-264>



Journal of Nusantara
Studies (JONUS)

SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE AMONG YOUNG ADULT MUSLIMS

*¹Syadiyah Abdul Shukor & ²Nor Asiah Omar

¹Faculty of Economics and Muamalat, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia,
Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan

²Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
43600 UKM, Bangi Selangor

*Corresponding author: syadiyahas@usim.edu.my

Received: 21 Apr 2019, Accepted: 17 Nov 2019

ABSTRACT

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is a general trait that varies across persons and affects a number of consumer behaviour. This study assessed the similarities and differences in terms of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence between young adult Muslim living in a Muslim country (i.e. Malaysia) and non-Muslim country (i.e. Britain). To investigate the differences in susceptibility to interpersonal influence between young adult Muslim in Malaysia and Britain, the Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence Scale was used. A total of 175 and 217 completed survey questionnaires were collected from Malaysian Muslim and British Muslim sample, respectively. Data collected were analysed using exploratory factor analysis and independent t-test. Findings suggest that irrespective of group, there were two-factor dimensions underlying an individual's susceptibility to interpersonal influence; namely normative and informational influence. In comparison to British Muslim, Malaysian Muslims were more

susceptible to normative influence. This finding may suggest the importance of group approval among Malaysian Muslims' decision-making. While most Muslim consumers' lifestyle, dietary and financial rules are determined by the Islamic faith, findings from this study suggest that they are far from homogeneity. This study reveals that Muslim consumer from Malaysia and Britain demonstrate differences in terms of their susceptibility to interpersonal influence which consequently will affect marketing practitioners around the world on how to serve their relatively young Muslim consumers from different countries.

Keywords: Muslim, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, young adult

Cite as: Shukor, A. S., & Omar, N. (2019). Susceptibility to interpersonal influence among young adult Muslims. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, 4(2), 247-264.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol4iss2pp247-264>

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Muslims are the fastest-growing consumer segment in the world. Muslims account for 23 per cent of the world's population and expected to grow by 35 per cent to be 2.8 billion in 2050 (Pew Research Centre, 2015a). Muslims population have increased over the past 10 years Omar, Zainol, Thye, Ahmad Nordin, and Nazri (2017). Asia's one (1) billion Muslims increased by 12 per cent, and a quarter of them are in the high growth areas of India and China. The European Muslim population has grown 140 per cent in a decade and is continuing to outpace that of non-Muslims. Approximately 30 million Muslims make their homes in the Russian Federation. Muslim communities in North and South America, Australia and Africa are also large and growing (Lever, 2013; Walker, Buchta, Reuter, & Gott, 2007). In sum, Muslim populations are a growing and influential group, making them a desirable market for mainstream brands.

Muslim consumers present significant opportunities. A study reveals that the Islamic lifestyle economy is thriving, representing USD\$2 trillion in consumption globally (DinarStandard, 2014/2015). One demographic factor makes the Muslim market particularly attractive to a variety of companies – it is largely young and part of an emerging middle class on the road to greater consumption (Ahmad, 2017; Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Malaysia, and Qatar presents substantial economic and business

opportunities due to the higher purchasing power and the rise of middle class among Muslim population (Lever, 2013; Walker et al., 2007). Studies have urged companies around the world to serve Muslim consumers due to the high spending power represented by these consumers (Goby & Nickerson, 2016). The GDPs of countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE are among the highest in the world (World Economic Outlook Database-September, 2011). In the USA, Muslim spending power is cited as \$170 billion (Hastings-Black, 2011), and, according to Wilson and Liu (2010) halal as a concept has the full potential to become the source of a company's competitive advantage in marketing as well as in other disciplines such as management, organizational behavior, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Thus, any global brand ignoring Islamic marketing is missing out on a huge growth opportunity. The economic benefits generated by the rise in Muslim purchasing power have led more companies to focus their business on the Muslim consumer as a compelling target market. Despite the tremendous growth on the Islamic markets, past studies have highlighted the lack of attention among business leaders and researchers toward the Muslims market. Majority of Muslims across the world share some commonalities such as Islamic faith, and practices the same Islamic pillars such as daily prayer, observance of fasting month during the month of Ramadhan, paying an alms (or annual tax) for the poor and once in a lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca (Maulan, Omar, & Ahmad, 2016; Rashid, Abdeljawad, Manisah Ngalim, & Hassan, 2013).

While most Muslim consumers' lifestyle, dietary and financial rules are determined by the Islamic faith, they are far from homogeneity. For instance, Malaysian and Turkish Muslims speak different languages, wear different styles of clothing and eat different foods. Hence, in dealing with the Muslim population around the world, companies must recognise the similarities and differences among these consumers. Muslims living in a Muslim country may behave differently from Muslim living in a non-Muslim country (Abdur Razzaque & Chaudhry, 2013). According to Ahmad (2017) understanding of the "third-billion market" of Muslim consumers is more complex as Islamic markets stretch across Muslim majority and minority countries. Even though Muslims populations continue to be a minority group in Europe and North America (about 38 million and 5 million respectively), they will constitute a growing share of the total population (Ahmad, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015b). Hence, this study aims to assess the similarities and the differences between young adult Muslim living in a Muslim country (i.e. Malaysia) and non-Muslim country

(i.e. Britain) in terms of their susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The findings of this study will help global companies to reach out and capture the Muslim market globally.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social influence in consumer behaviour

The importance of social influences in consumers' purchasing decision is well established. This is reflected in models of consumer decision-making that incorporate social norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) as antecedents of behavioral intentions. Consumer buying decisions are subject to influence from several potential reference group; family, friends, associates, salespeople and even strangers who may express an opinion. The influence of others on Muslim consumers is relevant. Islamic societies are collective societies, where the family unit is more important than the individual (Abd Al Hameed & Al Sheikh, 1978).

The impact of reference group influence on different aspects of consumer behaviour has been examined by numerous researchers. For instance, some researchers have investigated the impact of reference groups on: brand preference (Ford & Ellis, 1980; Stafford, 1966), purchase decisions (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Sadachar, Khare, & Manchiraju, 2016), shopping behaviour (Mangleburg, Doney, & Bristol, 2004; Chakraborty & Sheppard, 2016), product evaluation (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; White & Dahl, 2006), the number of investment transactions made (Hoffman & Broekhuizen, 2009), pay satisfaction (Hauret & Williams, 2019), and advertising implications (Lessig & Park, 1982).

A number of researchers have also demonstrated the importance of reference group on the purchase of different types of products and brands, ranging from bread (Stafford, 1966), services (Mehta, Lalwani, & Ping, 2001; Lalwani, 2002), organic food (Chang & Chang, 2017), designer apparel (Khan & Khan, 2005; Millan & Mittal, 2017), recycle intention (Tih & Zainol, 2012), to mobile phones (Jia, Wang, & Liu, 2007). In addition, the impacts of reference groups on different demographic profiles (e.g. students, housewives, teenagers, and children) have also been explored in several previous studies (Fernandes & Panda, 2018; Park & Lessig, 1977; Mangleburg et al., 2004; D'Rozario, 2001; Bachmann, John, & Rao, 1993). The findings from these studies show that individuals' decision, attitude, and behaviour are frequently influenced by other people. Indeed, interpersonal influences play a major role in shaping consumer choice decisions.

It has been suggested that people differ in their responses to social influence, with some individuals being naturally more inclined to social influence than others. The underlying concept of susceptibility to interpersonal influence has since been proposed as a general trait that varies across individuals (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989, 1990). In consumer research, susceptibility to interpersonal construct is an important factor in determining consumer behaviours. It is possible to make predictions concerning the relative importance of interpersonal antecedents to consumers' purchase intentions by measuring consumers' predispositions to act on the social cues available at the time a purchase or consumption decision is being made (Bearden & Rose, 1990).

2.2 Susceptibility to interpersonal influence

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is defined as the need to identify with, or enhance, one's image in the opinion of significant others through: the acquisition and use of products and brands; the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions; and, the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others (Bearden et al., 1989). A person's relative influenceability in one situation tends to have a significantly positive relationship to his or her influenceability in a range of other social situations (Bearden et al., 1989).

Generally, susceptibility to interpersonal influence has been conceptualised into two dimensions, which are: normative and informational influence (Bearden et al., 1989, 1990; D'Rozario, 2001). Normative influence involves a desire to conform to the expectations of people in the group (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). A number of researchers have distinguished between two forms of normative influence: utilitarian and value expressive influence (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Childers & Rao, 1992).

Utilitarian influence is reflected in an individual's attempt to comply with the expectations of others in order to receive rewards or avoid punishments, and it operates through the process of compliance (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Bearden et al., 1989). An individual would be expected to comply with the preferences, or expectations, of another individual, or group, if: a) they perceive that they mediate significant rewards or punishments; b) they believe that their behaviour will be visible or known to these others; and, c) they are motivated to realise the reward or to avoid the punishment (Park & Lessig, 1977; Childers & Rao, 1992).

Value expressive influence relates to an individual's motive to enhance or support his self-concept (Park & Lessig, 1977). Value expressive influence operates through a process of identification in two ways. Firstly, an individual utilises reference groups to express themselves or bolster their ego. In this case, there should be a consistency between the desire to express one's self and the psychological image attached to the reference group. Secondly, an individual is influenced by a value expressive reference group because of his simple affect (liking) for that group. This does not require consistency between one's self image and the psychological image attached to the reference group. Thus, an individual responds (e.g. adopts the recommendations) to the reference group even though the content of their responses (e.g. acceptance of recommendations) is irrelevant to the group (Park & Lessig, 1977). In contrast to the process of compliance, the visibility of their performance would be unrelated to occurrence of identification. What is crucial here, however, is that the presentation provides information about the behaviours or expectations of others who are significant referents for the individual (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975).

Informational influence has been defined as an influence to accept information obtained from another as evidence about reality (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Bearden et al., 1989; Perfumi, Bagnoli, Caudek, & Guazzini, 2019). In consumer research informational influence was found to affect product evaluation and brand selection (e.g. Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Park & Lessig, 1977; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Omar, Che Wel, Abd Aziz, & Shah Alam, 2013). Consumers are motivated by informational social influence, rather than normative social influence, to seek information from other people. An influence is internalised if it is perceived as enhancing the individual's knowledge of their environment (such as purchasing a product) (Park & Lessig, 1977).

2.3 Measurement of susceptibility to interpersonal influence

Susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale developed by Bearden et al. (1989) has been used by many studies. A series of additional analysis have been designed to further examine the dimensionality and validity of the scale including correlating the measures with a number of consumer specific and general personality traits (Bearden et al., 1990; Schroeder, 1996). The measurement has also been validated using various samples such as age group (Bearden et al., 1990; Schroeder, 1996), country (Ebren, 2009), and cultural categories (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005; D'Rozario, 2001; Childers & Rao, 1992; Kongsompong, Gree, & Patterson, 2009). Despite

numerous studies conducted to validate the scale, very limited research that has been conducted involving Muslim consumers in order to compare relative levels of susceptibility to interpersonal influence that marketers can expect to face in their international operations. This study assesses similarities and differences between young adult Muslim living in a Muslim country (i.e. Malaysia) and non-Muslim country (i.e. Britain) in terms of their susceptibility to interpersonal influence using items adapted from Bearden et al. (1989).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The data collection process was conducted over a period of six weeks through web-based survey. The respondents were selected using a non-probability sampling. For British Muslim respondents, a combination of self-selection and snowballing were used making sure that the participants were Muslims and aged between 18 and 30 years old. Self-selection sampling was used by inviting individuals who met the requisite characteristics (i.e. Muslim in the UK, aged between 18 and 30 years old) to complete the questionnaire. These individuals were recruited from a social networking site (i.e. Facebook) and through researcher's personal contact. Then, these individuals were used as informants to identify others who qualified for inclusion in the sample. They were asked to complete the questionnaire and lead more persons who can be asked to complete the questionnaire and so on. For young adult Muslim living in Malaysia, survey questionnaires were distributed among students in a public university located in the South of Malaysia.

In total, 217 completed survey questionnaires collected from British Muslim while 175 completed survey questionnaires were received from Malaysian Muslim. 94 per cent of Malaysian Muslim respondents and 84 per cent of British Muslim respondents were female. Regarding British Muslim respondents' occupation, the largest group comprised of students (62.3%), followed by professional/senior management (14.5%), unemployed (5.8%), housewife/husband (5.8%), clerical staff (3.9%), self-employed (2.9%), technical staff (2.4%), and other (2.4%). Muslim respondents in Malaysia were comprised of university students. The measures pertaining to susceptibility to interpersonal influence were measured by asking respondents questions in the form of a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '7' (strongly agree) using 12-items adapted from Bearden et al. (1989).

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Exploratory factor analysis

Malaysian Muslim

The exploratory factor analysis of the twelve-item scale for the susceptibility to interpersonal influence revealed a two-factor solution subsequent to deletion of three items because of low loading (< 0.6). The two factors account for 58.9% of the total variance explained and reflects two facets-normative and informational influence, with Eigen values of 3.6 and 1.7, respectively. Factor loadings shows acceptable figures ranging from 0.671 to 0.816.

British Muslim

The exploratory factor analysis of the twelve-item scale for the susceptibility to interpersonal influence revealed a two-factor solution. The two factors account for 80.5% of the total variance explained and reflects two facets-normative and informational influence, with Eigen values of 8.2 and 1.5, respectively. Factor loadings shows acceptable figures ranging from 0.787 to 0.880.

4.2 Reliability

Malaysian Muslim

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach Alpha value for the normative (5-items) and informative (4-items) influence were 0.826 and 0.721 respectively, thus, demonstrated the acceptable internal consistency reliability (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).

British Muslim

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach Alpha value for the normative (8-items) and informative (4-items) influence were 0.826 and 0.721 respectively, thus, demonstrated the acceptable internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 1: Reliability and EFA results

Malaysian Muslim respondents

Items	Cronbach's alpha	Factor loadings
Normative influence	0.826	
If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.		
When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.		0.758
I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.		0.779
I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.		0.778
I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.		
I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them.		0.702
If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.		
It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.		
Informational influence	0.721	
I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.		0.671
If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.		0.777
I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.		0.714
To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.		0.761

British Muslim respondents

Items	Cronbach's alpha	Factor loadings
Normative influence	0.965	
If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.		0.885
When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.		0.880
I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.		0.866
I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.		0.845
I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.		0.835
I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them.		0.839
If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.		0.806
It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.		0.795
Informational influence	0.914	
I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.		0.878
If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.		0.864
I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.		0.803
To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.		0.787

4.3 Independent samples t-test

In order to examine differences in normative and informative influence scores between Malaysian Muslim and British Muslim groups, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2. Results from an independent samples t-test indicate that Malaysian Muslim (M=3.90, SD=1.29) scored much higher on normative influence scores than British Muslim (M=2.99, SD=1.91) at $p < 0.001$ level of significance ($t=5.42$, $df=390$, $p < 0.001$). Similar findings were found for informative influence scores. Results from an independent samples t-test indicate that Malaysian Muslim (M=5.50, SD=0.93) scored much higher scores than British Muslim (M=4.47, SD=1.78) at $p < 0.001$ level of significance ($t=6.93$, $df=390$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2: Outcomes of independent T-Test

	Malaysian Muslim		British Muslim		Levene's Test Equality of Variances	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	df
Normative Influence	3.90	1.29	2.99	1.91	5.42***	390
Informative Influence	5.50	0.93	4.47	1.78	6.93***	390

*** $p < 0.001$

5.0 DISCUSSION

This study assesses similarities and differences between young adult Muslim living in a Muslim country (i.e. Malaysia) and non-Muslim country (i.e. Britain) in terms of their susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The present study suggests similarities and differences between the two groups. Irrespective of group, there were two-factor dimensions underlying an individual's susceptibility to interpersonal influence; namely normative and informational influence. The similarity of the factor structure to the scale developed by Bearden et al. (1989) study provides evidence of the stability of the two-factor solution.

Nevertheless, there are several differences found between the groups. Firstly, for Malaysian Muslim, three normative influence items were deleted due to low loadings, leading to a five-item normative influence. For British Muslim, no item was deleted for normative and informational influence. Secondly, in terms of Cronbach Alpha values for both groups, British Muslim sample showed a higher Cronbach Alpha for both dimensions; normative (0.965) and

informational (0.914) while Malaysian Muslim showed a lower Cronbach values but acceptable value as recommended: normative (0.826) and informational (0.721).

Thirdly, when the two groups' means were compared, Malaysian Muslim showed a higher score in terms of normative and informational influence. For instance, Malaysian Muslim reported the strongest agreement with these items; "When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of" and "I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase". These statements demonstrate that Malaysian Muslim have a higher tendency to purchase product or brands that meet others expectation. In addition, there are more likely to incorporate others in their decision making. This might be due to Malay culture that taught younger individuals to seek advice from others especially parents and their extended family. Priporas, Stylos, and Fotiadis (2017) suggested that certain group (social networks and influential) able to influence young generation in Malaysia and change their culture, behavior and purchase intention. It also suggested that family recommendation has a significant influence on two of the dimensions of brand equity i.e. perceived quality and brand loyalty (Mulyani, Thomas, & Widiyanto, 2018; Yasin & Zahari, 2011). People with a high level of conformity value tend to make decisions that conform to the expectations of their close social environment, while those with a low level of conformity value are likely to focus more on their own personal needs and care less about others' expectations (Bearden et al., 1989). It appears in this study that social influence is prevalent among those with a collectivist orientation, regardless of religious background. Hence, Muslim consumers cannot be treated as homogenous markets.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This research sought to provide evidence that Muslim consumers are supposed to be treated differently even though they have same faith. This study reveals that Muslim consumer from Malaysia and Britain demonstrate differences in terms of their susceptibility to interpersonal influence which consequently will affect marketing practitioners around the world on how to serve their relatively young Muslim consumers from different countries.

This study found that Malaysian Muslims showed a higher score than British Muslims normative influence. Thus, marketing communications targeting these two markets may be relatively different. Malaysian Muslims rely heavily on others when making product and brand decisions; specifically, they have a higher tendency to comply with expectations others and

therefore managers who are targeting marketing at Malaysian Muslim consumers can make use of promotional themes that focus on interpersonal influence and encourage word-of-mouth communications. Conversely, managers would do better to build campaigns that have little reference to interpersonal influences in targeting British Muslim consumers.

The fact that Malaysian Muslims were more susceptible to normative influence may suggest the importance of group approval in their decision-making. Retailers can encourage these consumers to shop with their family and friends given that they are keen on group interaction. For example, a special event that promotes the idea of 'shopping with your friends' not only brings short-term gains but may create long term positive sentiments toward these stores (Mangleburg et al., 2004). The presence of others will allow the consumer to gain the approval of the group. Furthermore, marketers may explore the use of social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram or Myspace) or chat rooms that allows them to interact with similar others and discuss on the latest product and styles.

In addition, advertisement targeting Malaysian Muslim who are highly susceptible to interpersonal influence may emphasize certain aspect of group membership. For example, advertisement that focuses on the importance of group affiliations to personal identity might be effective in persuading this group. At the retail stores, salespeople can play their role to advise and persuade the consumers to make decision. This study suggests that Malaysian Muslim have a higher tendency to seek advice from others, hence, salespeople need to be competent in advising their consumers.

7.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings reported in this article should be considered in light of the study's limitations. First, weakness of this study is the demographic profile of the respondents. Most of the respondents were young adult Muslims living in a Muslim country (i.e. Malaysia) and non-Muslim country (i.e. Britain). Further research should be carry out to investigate the similarities and differences in terms of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal with sample from other countries such Turkey, Australia, Indonesia and etc. It is also worth to extend this research among generations such as generation X, Y and Z since these generations have different preference and buying behaviour. Finally, this study is based on cross-sectional data from a snowball sampling method. Thus, the

nature and the relationships among the constructs examined in this study can be better comprehended using a longitudinal research design and probability sampling method.

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