FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION IN KLANG VALLEY, MALAYSIA: A STUDY OF BUBBLE MILK TEA.

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ABSTRACT

There are several research studies that have been conducted to examine the factors that can influence consumers' purchase intention. However, there are very limited studies that are focusing on the factors that will influence consumers' purchase intention towards bubble milk tea in Klang Valley, Malaysia. In order to better address the gap clearly, this study was conducted to determine the factors influencing consumer purchasing intention in Klang Valley for bubble milk tea. This study included a sample size of 396 consumers that currently reside in Klang Valley and had purchased bubble milk tea. By distributing the designed questionnaire to the targeted number of participants online, a quantitative research method was used. Overall, 396 valid responses of 450 distributed survey questionnaire were collected and analysed by using SPSS to test the hypothesis. It is found that there is a positive significant influence of price consciousness and brand image towards consumers' purchase intention of bubble milk tea in Klang Valley. On the other side, electronic word-of-mouth has no statistically significant influence on the purchase intention of customers in Klang Valley for bubble milk tea. This implies that consumers in Klang Valley when comes to purchasing bubble milk tea, are more concern about brand image and price.

Keywords: Purchase intention, price consciousness, electronic word-of-mouth, brand image, bubble milk tea.

INTRODUCTION

The bubble milk tea chain is one of the favourite drinks and place to hang out among the youngsters. In 2019, with over 49 brands existing in Malaysia, these bubble milk tea chains are springing up like mushrooms after the rain (Bubbleteamalaysia.com, 2019). This can be seen by the phenomena of SS15 of Subang Jaya, Malaysia where the bubble milk tea chain has expanded from one unit to now eight units within a few months (Michael, 2019). With price range starting from RM 6.50 to RM 15.00 per cup, bubble milk tea is considered affordable and is becoming a daily drink for some consumers (Pang, 2019).

According to Ethnic Seattle (2019), Bubble Milk Tea, also called Boba Milk Tea, or Pearl Milk Tea is from Taiwan. The birth of Bubble Milk Tea was at a beverage store

called Chunshui Tang run by Xiuhui Liu back in the year 1984. She added tiny tapioca balls produced locally to the milk tea and advertised them to customers. The tapioca balls are called "bubble", "boba" or "pearl" later, which are cooked to make a round chewy ball that is then added to warm and cold drinks such as tea, coffee, smoothies, slushies and mixed drinks (Min, Green and Kim, 2016). Usually these drinks are consumed with a big straw that allows customers to slurp and chew the tapioca balls.

It was first served in the coffee shops where people discussed about business and gathered with friends. Then, people began selling bubble milk tea near to colleges, business centres or the night market. Gradually, bubble milk tea and its lovely name became popular worldwide. As the business grew, there came various flavours of milk tea. People would also love to add different types of "toppings" into their milk tea, such as "grass jelly", pudding, or red beans based on their preferences. Nowadays, we have always been able to see teenagers and young couples drinking on the street, or while doing some window-shopping.

The past study regarding bubble milk tea is related to human health (Pei et al., 2018) and analysis of nutritional facts of bubble milk tea (Min, Green and Kim, 2016) and there are very limited studies that are focusing on the factors that will influence consumers' purchase intention towards bubble milk tea in Klang Valley. However, due to the intense rising competition in the food and beverage industry, especially for bubble milk tea in Klang Valley, Malaysia, it is important for retailers to understand the consumers' purchase intention of their products. Competitors such as Koi Thé, The Alley and Tiger Sugar are very competitive in terms of pricing and quality of products. Hence, the purpose of this study is to discover the factors that will influence consumers' purchase intention towards bubble milk tea in general.

The purchase intention of consumers towards bubble milk tea, focusing on the consumers in Klang Valley is an interesting topic to be discussed and discover because of the rise of these bubble milk tea chain has become one of the trends in the food and beverage industry. A better understanding of the consumers' purchase intention will give retailers some understanding and insights in order to come up with correct strategies to stand up from the intense market competition and benefits the retailers to gain sustainable profit in long run. There are a total of 450 participants invited as a sample for this survey. As this study limits its coverage to the consumers in Klang Valley, the results may not apply to other location or countries. In order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results, all participants are given the same online questionnaires to answer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Price Consciousness

Price plays an important role in affecting customer behaviour and has been studied widely in marketing literature. Price consciousness is a degree that demonstrates how much customers focus on paying cheaper prices and seeking cheaper prices is one of the behaviours prevailing to earn a profit (Rahpeima et al., 2014). The willingness of customers with a high price consciousness to seek more discounts or cheaper prices than others is anticipated (Rahpeima et al., 2014).

Lee (2008) consider consumers who are price-conscious will not be willing to pay a higher price for a product or the consumer will only look for low price products. This price difference is the most noticeable advantage for customers. Price can bring a different perception to different consumers. Norfarah, Koo, and Siti-Nabiha (2018) mentioned that high-priced products give the price-conscious consumer an adverse perception. It plays both positive and negative roles in affecting consumer's behaviour. High price consciousness customers concentrate more on low-priced products compared to those consumers with low price consciousness (Thanasuta, 2015).

Furthermore, price-conscious consumers focus less on product quality when looking for products with the lowest prices (Norfarah, Koo and Siti-Nabiha, 2018). Price-conscious customers are therefore willing to switch to another brand or try a new brand when they are offered the lowest price by that brand.

Based on findings from Rahpeima et al. (2014), the findings showed that price consciousness has the biggest impact among other factors on attitudes towards counterfeit goods. Indeed, consumer sensitivity of the prices of real commodities and their significant difference in prices of counterfeit goods leads to increased motivation for the purchase of counterfeit goods. Price sensitivity in their research has a positive and significant impact on the intention of customers to purchase.

Lee (2008) in his study of purchase intention towards store brand, has proved that price consciousness has a direct effect on consumers' purchase intention. People who are price conscious will pinch pennies, do not pay attention to functional and social risks and are immediately drawn to store-branded merchandise prices. Besides, Norfarah, Koo and Siti-Nabiha (2018) in their study of purchasing intention towards private label brand showed that consumer's price consciousness impacted consumer purchasing intention of private label brand food.

Konuk (2015) in his research of the impacts of price consciousness on purchasing intention towards expiry date-based perishable products, it was demonstrated that price consciousness has a significant impact on the purchasing intention of customers. Price-conscious consumers are more likely to purchase expiration date-based priced perishable foods than non-price conscious consumers.

H_1: *Price consciousness has a positive influence on consumers' purchase intention towards bubble milk tea.*

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) defined electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as any positive or negative statement made accessible via the web to a number of individuals and organizations by prospective, current or former customers about a product or business. As social networking sites become increasingly popular and as interactive technologies evolve, eWOM should not only be limited to specific customer statements but should also include articles from distributors or other published sources shared or reposted by prospective, current or former customers about a product or brand (Hu et al., 2014). Brand fan pages are crucial internet bases for brands to engage their customers and strengthen their retention. However, followers play more significant roles — collecting prospective customers —

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because their ' likes ' and reviews on brand pages posts are automatically displayed in their news feeds, which become eWOM immediately.

By publishing their own reviews and thoughts about products and services, customers have various motivations to search for internet data or generate eWOM (Matute, Polo-Redondo and Utrillas, 2016). This current type of online interaction is comparable to traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) and some researchers consider eWOM as a virtual environment expansion of traditional WOM (Yeap, Ignatius and Ramayah, 2014). Online consumer reviews are accessible for a long time and accessible to a large number of customers (Matute, Polo-Redondo and Utrillas, 2016). Thus, maintaining non-simultaneous communication between senders and receivers (King, Racherla and Bush, 2014).

Furthermore, because eWOM is disseminated through the virtual environment, data is disseminated at high speed and the reviews are circulated between more people (King, Racherla and Bush, 2014). eWOM is exchanged between unknown senders and recipients so that the Internet's anonymity may have a negative impact on the credibility of the information (Luo et al., 2013). eWOM has often been seen as a reference to the willingness of customers to revisit websites to buy products or services (Matute, Polo-Redondo and Utrillas, 2016). Indeed, some prior researchers claim that the different characteristics of eWOM communications influence the evaluations of customers on the website, thus determining their attitudes towards the seller (Matute, Polo-Redondo and Utrillas, 2016).

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) plays an important role which helps the consumer make an optimal and reasonable purchase decision. Results of previous studies are inconsistent: while the majority of prior research showed that negative eWOM had a stronger influence on purchase intention than positive eWOM, there was some evidence showing the reverse results (Abd-Elaziz et al., 2015; Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017; Mohamad Ridza and Migin, 2018). Further, studies have found that consumers were more likely to be persuaded by information with high credibility (Li and Chen, 2016).

Abd-Elaziz et al. (2015) in his study of hotel customers' purchase decision has claimed that eWOM has a significant influence on a person's purchasing decision. He said that if one has no understanding of a specific sector but someone else does, one will certainly see him as an expert. If he says to do it one way or another, one will probably do so.

Astuti and Putri (2018) in their research of Instagram's impact on consumer purchasing intention, they indicated that eWOM has an important, positive impact on consumer confidence when shopping online; that consumer confidence has a significant, positive impact on the intention of purchasing and perceived usefulness ; that perceived usefulness has a considerable, positive impact on purchasing intention.

Shahrinaz et al. (2016) in their study of the impact of eWOM towards purchase intention of smartphone stated that eWOM has no direct effect on purchase intention. On the results of their outcomes, eWOM and purchasing intentions have a negative and insignificant connection with students in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia. In addition, Kala and Chaubey (2018) in their research on eWOM communication on purchasing intention for lifestyle goods in India, it is shown that eWOM has no direct effect on the purchasing intention of customers. Their findings show that eWOM is not helpful in stimulating purchasing intention for lifestyle products. This also indicates that internet reviews and information do not directly motivate customers to buy the products.

H₂: Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a positive influence on consumers' purchase intention towards bubble milk tea

Brand Image

Nurhasanah and Hariyani (2018) stated that the brand image consists of experience and thoughts about different brands of non-consumer products and their characteristics. Brand image is a social symbolism associated with the brand by the customer, which includes all descriptive and evaluative brand information. Safitri (2018) describe a brand image as a series of memories of a brand in the minds of customers, whether positive or negative. A brand's memories may consist of the product qualities and perceived consumer benefits (Tajdar et al., 2015). Consumers typically have no time to acquire complete understanding of a product while making a choice; therefore, customers often depend on the brand image as an extrinsic tool to make a purchase decision (Akkucuk dan Esmaeili, 2016). According to Safitri (2018), majority of customers prefer to purchase branded products or services as a measure of quality. Further, Djatmiko and Pradana (2015) proved that a brand affects buying decisions considerably.

According to Riaz (2015), "a successful brand image allows consumers to recognize the needs that the brand satisfies and to distinguish the brand from its competitors and increases the probability that consumers will purchase the brand". Product or services of a company can obtain a stronger market position, sustain a competitive advantage and boost market share. Jalilvand, Ebrahimabadi, and Samiei (2011) also mentioned that brand image is an important factor that determines various consumer attitudes of the consumers.

In the study of Nurhasanah and Hariyani (2018), they demonstrated a positive impact of the brand image on perceived quality. Their outcome proves that halal food products with brands that have been commonly acknowledged and perceived as a very powerful factor after purchase represent the brand's image. The stronger the brand image of a halal food item, the stronger the perception of product quality by the consumer. They also tested that the brand image influences the perceived value positively. It is progressively convincing that in the eyes of customers, the stronger the brand image of halal food products increases the perception of the value of a good product. Therefore, improve the likelihood of encouraging the purchasing intention of the consumer.

In a study by Safitri (2018), results show that brand image has a positive impact on consumer purchase decisions to purchase well-known replicas either partially or simultaneously. The findings also indicate that the brand image variable is an important purchase decision mediating variable as a well-respected brand image can have a positive impact on customers and persuade them to purchase the item offered.

Results from the research of Shakeel (2014) regarding the impact of brand image on consumer purchasing decisions on tomato ketchup found that brand image plays a major role in affecting consumer decision-making and product purchase emphasis.

H₃: Brand image has a positive influence on consumers' purchase intention towards bubble milk tea.

Purchase Intention

Intention to purchase is described as a plan for the future acquisition of a certain good or service (Phan and Mai, 2016). In another definition, purchasing intention is the implied promise to buy the item again when the next visit is made (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017). Knowing the intention to purchase a brand is of utmost importance as it demonstrates the feeling of retention of the consumer. Brand attitude, brand image, quality, brand knowledge, traits and brand loyalty are some of the brand's aspects that tend to lead purchase intention (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017). These features have a powerful impact on customers ' purchasing intention.

Purchase intention is obtained from ways of learning and thinking that shapes a perception (Astuti and Putri, 2018). The purchase intention stimulates motivation that is always recorded in the mind and becomes a powerful desire, and ultimately the customers who have to meet their needs will realize what is in their minds (Astuti and Putri, 2018).

Purchase intention is the probability that a customer will purchase a specific item (Wang and Tsai, 2014). Greater desire to purchase a product implies a higher likelihood of buying it, but not necessarily buying it. A reduced desire, on the contrary, does not imply complete impossibility of buying. Nurhasanah and Hariyani (2018) explained that the intention to purchase is a customer's subjective attitude towards certain products or services influenced by internal and external factors (such as product selection, brands, distributors, time and amount); and consumers make purchasing decisions based on their individual traits, characteristics and decision-making processes which can be an important predictor of consumer behaviour.

Purchase intention is basically what customers believe they are going to buy (Wee et al., 2014). According to Wee et al. (2014), a customer who intends to buy a certain product will have higher actual purchase intention than those customers who demonstrate that they do not intend to buy it. The intention of consumers to buy bubble milk tea is the first step in the development of demand for bubble milk tea.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Quantitative research is used to determine the factors influencing the intention of customers to buy bubble milk tea. Quantitative research is used to quantify a problem by generating numerical data or information that can be transformed into usable statistics. It is used to quantify attitudes, thoughts, behaviours and another variable that defined findings from a bigger population of samples. The quantitative data were gathered from survey questionnaires and analysed using computer programmes to convert them into helpful information.

Sampling

In this study, non-probability was used by the researcher as the sampling technique. Under non-probability sampling, convenience sampling, which the researcher has selected any readily available individuals as participants. By using convenient sampling, the researcher can effortlessly access and acquire a study sample. The target population - residents of Klang Valley is estimated at approximately 7.4 million in year 2019 (Worldpopulationreview.com., 2019). The sample population in this research is consumers that have purchased bubble milk tea in Klang Valley and 384 respondents are needed to answer the questionnaire.

Instrumentation

Data for the study were obtained by distributing the set of questionnaires to the target sample group. Self-administered online questionnaire were used to conduct the study. The first section asked the respondents whether they are currently residing in Klang Valley. The second section asked the respondents whether they purchase bubble milk tea before. The remaining sections of the questionnaire consist of 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree) items. The first section of the questionnaire consists of 5 items related to purchase intention. The second section of the questionnaire consists of 5 items used to measure price consciousness. Third section of the questionnaire refers to the 11 items used to measure electronic word-of-mouth. The fourth section of the questionnaire consists of 8 items used to measure brand image. The fifth section of the questionnaire refers to the 4 items used to obtain the demographic information and general information from the respondents.

Overall Cronbach's Alpha value for all the variables is 0.977. The Cronbach's alpha values among the independent variables are Price Consciousness (0.975), Electronic Word-of-Mouth (0.963) and Brand Image (0.930). In addition to that the dependant variable – Purchase Intention has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.957. Hence, all the variables are reliable and acceptable in this study.

Assumptions of Parametric

Before choosing a statistical test to apply to the data collected, the researcher addressed the issue of whether the data are parametric or not. Statistical tests are used to analyse some aspect of a sample.

Statistical Analysis

All data must go through a series of preparation processes after gathering all survey questionnaires. Data processing involved questionnaire checking, data editing, data coding, data transcribing and data cleaning. These processes are essential because the main purpose is to enhance the quality of the results and to provide the study with a more precise result by making a lesser error.

The data was checked and cleaned of any errors or missing values and then be coded for analysis. The survey questions were hosted on Google Form. All analysis was calculated and conducted using the International Business Machine (IBM) Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS), including the Cronbach Alpha reliability test, normality test, descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analysis was used to analyse the targeted respondents' demographic information using frequency and percentage. The basic information of respondents was highly important because it helped us to know who were the ones contributing value to the research. The general information included: gender, age, occupation and frequency of purchasing bubble milk tea. There are total of 163 male participants, and 223 female participants, which accumulate a total of 396 respondents. A fair distribution of questionnaire across respondents of different age range has been achieved with the highest percentage of respondents in the 18 – 22 (29.9%) group, followed by 28 – 32 (22%) and 23 - 27 (20.5%). Students has the highest percentage of respondents (34.3%), followed closely by employed respondents (30.8%) and self-employed respondents (21%). 41.4% of the respondents are also found to purchase bubble milk tea 1 – 3 times per month.

The Relationship between Tenant Mix, Access Convenience, Ambience and Consumer Choice of Shopping Mall.

Table 1: Correlation between the Three Variables

Variable	PC	EWOM	BI	PI
Price Consciousness (PC)	-			
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM)	0.774^{**}	-		
Brand Image (BI)	0.716^{**}	0.836^{**}	-	
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.589^{**}	0.640^{**}	0.694^{**}	-

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between price consciousness, electronic word-of-mouth, brand image and purchase intention. The data in Table 1 showed no violation of normality and linearity. There is significant relationship between price consciousness, electronic word-of-mouth, brand image and purchase intention.

Regression Analysis

Table 2: Regression Analysis: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.709[a]	0.502	0.499	0.53288

The R^2 value as shown in Table 2 is 0.502. With this, it can be deduce that 50.2 percent of the variance in the dependent variable – purchase intention, can be explained by the variance of the independent variables, which are price consciousness, electronic word-of-mouth, brand image.

Table 3: Regression Analysis: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	112.378	3	37.459	131.918	0.000[b]
1	Residual	111.312	392	0.284		
	Total	223.691	395			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention
b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Image, Price Consciousness, Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The F-ratio in Table 3 indicates F-test result was 131.918 with significance ('Sig.') of 0.05. The table shows that the independent variables (price consciousness, electronic word-of-mouth and brand image) significantly predict the dependent variable (purchase intention), F (3,392) = 131.918, p<0.05. The research framework developed in the earlier paper is therefore well applied in this study, as the significant value is below 0.05.

Table 4: Regression Analysis: Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.861	0.140		6.133	.000
Price Consciousness (PC)	0.114	0.044	0.147	2.568	.011
Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM)	0.114	0.074	0.112	1.532	.126
Brand Image (BI)	0.553	0.074	0.495	7.466	.0000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

As shown in Table 4, there is influence between the two independent variables (to the dependent variable.

Price consciousness has a positive influence on purchase intention ($\beta=0.147$, n=396, $p<0.05$). Thus, H_1 is not rejected. The finding of this research is supported by Rahpeima et al. (2014), Norfarah, Koo and Siti-Nabiha (2018), and Konuk (2015) where in their results of research, price consciousness has a positive influence towards consumers' purchase intention.

Next, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has no influence towards purchase intention ($\beta=0.112$, n=396, $p>0.05$). Thus, H_2 is rejected. Contradicting past studies, the result of this research is different from the findings of Astuti and Putri (2018), Abd-Elaziz et al. (2015) and Li and Chen (2016) whose research states that eWOM has a significant influence on purchase intention. This result finding is however consistent to the studies of Shahrinaz et al. (2016) and Kala and Chaubey (2018) where in their research's results, eWOM no influence on consumers' purchase intention.

Lastly, brand image has a positive influence towards purchase intention ($\beta=0.495$, n=396, $p<0.05$). Thus, H_3 is not rejected. The finding of this research is supported by Nurhasanah and Hariyani (2018); Safitri (2018) and Shakeel (2014) where in their research's results shows that brand image has a positive influence towards consumers' purchase intention.

By comparing the β-value obtained from the regression analysis, the variable that has the highest degree of influence toward purchase intention is brand image.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the factors that influence the consumer's purchase intention through three factors namely; price consciousness, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand image. In order to make profitable market investments, marketers, retailers, and corporate decision-makers must have an understanding of factors influencing the purchasing intention of customers. This is important in order to assist retailers in developing the right business strategies in order to sustain in the intense market of bubble milk tea.

In conclusion, this research has two objectives. The first objective is to identify the factors that will influence the consumers' purchase intention towards bubble milk tea. Based on the results, the hypothesis 1 (H_1) was failed to be rejected and the regression analysis shows that there is a positive influence of price consciousness towards consumers' purchase intention. But, hypothesis 2 (H_2) was rejected as the regression analysis shows that electronic word-of-mouth has no influence towards consumers' purchase intention. On the other hand, hypothesis 3 (H_3) was failed to be rejected and the regression analysis shows that there is a positive influence of brand image towards consumer's purchase intention.

The second objective is to assess the most influencing factors that influence the consumers' purchase intention of bubble milk tea. Based on the regression analysis, it is shown that the most influencing factor that influences the consumers' purchase intention of bubble milk tea is brand image.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the results of this study can provide valuable insights for bubble milk tea operators or retailers to make improvement in order to hold and maintain the high profitability relationship with the consumers. There were several recommendations that can be considered based on the findings of this research.

Firstly, brand image is found to have high positive influence on purchasing intention of consumers. This highlights the importance of generating and maintaining a positive and attractive brand image among bubble milk tea operators. Future studies can focus on areas such as antecedents of brand image and also to investigate further into the various factors that form a positive brand image among consumers.

Besides that, in this research, it is concluded that electronic word-of-mouth does not have a significant influence towards purchasing intention. The results however should not be used to dismiss the relationship between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and the purchasing intention of bubble milk tea. As eWOM may consist of different aspects and multiple degrees of variances, future research can focus on analysing the various aspect of electrical word-of-mouth to further investigate which of the aspects may have an influence on the various consumption behaviours of the consumers.

Based on this research, there were several recommendations for the future researchers to make improvement of the limitations of this study. First, future researchers are encouraged to design questionnaires in multilingual besides the English language in order to target respondents that are not familiar with the English language. This may overcome the limitations of potential respondents being unable to participate in this research due to limited proficiency of the English language.

In order to gain different insights about the same area of research, future researchers are encouraged to duplicate this study into another region or country besides Klang Valley. This is a good opportunity for researchers to understand the consumers' buying behaviour aside from consumers from the Klang Valley area.

Lastly, the R Square value of this study is 0.502. This conceptual model can only explained the 50.2% of the dependent variable, purchase intention, by the two independent variables which is price consciousness and brand image. There are definitely other areas, such as service experience, marketing communication, and health consciousness, to be covered, and therefore, the future researchers have to look into it and to test the other variables in this research problem. Future researchers are encouraged to use different a set of variables to study this area of research can gain different results and understand the target populations' buying behaviours in a different angle.

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