PERCEIVED PURCHASE INTENTION OF UNDERGRADUATES TOWARDS LUXURY BRANDS: CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

From ancient to contemporary era, luxury products or services have been appealed in myriad forms and natures after the commencement of civilisation and undergoing the assault of globalisation. Procurement of luxury brands has portrayed a critical role not only in the ancient western and eastern empires or dynasties; it has also occupied a significant role within our current modern ambience. In order to exploit more about the purchase intention of luxury brands within our concurrent social community context, this research study would like to concentrate in examining what potential antecedents are able to influence those undergraduates who are currently pursuing their tertiary educations in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Perak Campus, to perceive their purchase intentions on luxury brands in future. According to those past and present literature reviews, a proposed conceptual framework has been developed, along with several unproven assumptions which formulated for the research study purpose. A quantitative research study will be established towards the target population group of undergraduate students in UTAR Perak Campus with the adoption of probability sampling method and proportional stratified sampling technique. Self-administered survey questionnaire will be employed in the data collection process. Inferential statistic analysis such as Multiple Linear Regression will be conducted to test on those hypotheses. Findings have ascertained that number of antecedents are significantly related and contributed impacts toward the perceived purchase intention of luxury brands amongst undergraduates in UTAR Perak Campus for their forthcoming future. The research study had closed its veil with several practical implications to relevant parties and some constructive suggestions for future researches.

Keywords: Luxury Brands, Undergraduates, Perceived Purchase Intention

1.0 Introduction

The proliferation of luxury brand across Asian countries, especially with the development of new luxury boutiques, is on the rise recently. In the past, luxury brand often associated with only certain elite groups. However, luxury brands no longer belong to elite groups nowadays as they ingratiate themselves with a wider customer market, thanks to modernization. Luxury brands are switching their focus on newly emerged market, namely Generation Y (Gen Y). They are appealing to marketers as they highly appreciate for the emotional and social values carried by the luxury brand instead of its functional values. Therefore, Nueno and Quelch (1998) suggested that luxury brands always associate with “indulgence of the senses, regardless of price” and are categorized as non-necessities to an individual. The number of consumers who are spending on these non-necessities is on the rise, especially among the Gen Y.

Besides that, the booming and emergence of societal fads on luxury products consumptions among the Gen Y who possess high purchasing power have been manifestly observed in current community context, as these trends have also been evidenced by Nowak et al. (2006). Martin and Turley (2004)
empirically ascertained that youths aged 19 to 25 constitute the wealthiest group in the Gen Y. Due to the availability of product alternatives and the strong influence of online media nowadays, youths have greater exposures towards luxury branded product as compared to the past.

As depicted by the data of International Data Base of U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the Gen Y population in Malaysia will hit 13.6 million out of the approximately estimated population of 30 million in 2013. Therefore, marketers always hunger for this potential market segment. On the other hand, the report from Yuwa (2007) signified that young premium consumers who are part of Gen Y across Asia-pacific such as Malaysia have an appetite for luxury brand products due to their lifestyle and spending power. The desire to speak out their identity and the increasing proportion of their discretionary spending power are expected to have contributed to the rise of demand for luxuries among young premium consumers in Malaysia from $0.6 billion in 2006 to an estimate of $1.5 billion in 2016.

In addition, marketers of luxury brand are competing in interacting with this marketing-savvy generation. Thus, the marketers urge to amplify their brands to youth market. To stand above the noise of marketing message, celebrity endorsements have become liberator. Dotson and Hyatt (2005) reassured the young generation is deeply affected by celebrity endorsements made by the stars who pitch for well known brand name products. Owing to the fact that the Gen Y population who possesses higher purchasing power for status-protruding luxury good is increasing, and the significant influence of celebrity on daily life among Gen Y (Martin, 1996; Till & Busler, 1998).

Teenager is one of the most important yet resistance target markets for marketers today as they have been classified as part of Gen Y – those individual who born between 1977 and 1994 (Bush, Martin & Bush (2004). As mentioned by So (2011), there is lack of research on how to market the luxury products on the younger segments. Therefore, more researches are needed to analyze and determine the relationship between the luxury brand market and the Gen Y’s purchase behaviours.

Hence, the purpose for this study is to examining the effect of social status and celebrity endorsements towards perceived purchase intention of luxury product among Gen Y. This study will specifically focus on the university students pursuing their studies in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Kampar Campus as they are part of Gen Y. Due to the limited research related to this field in Malaysia, the study is expected to be contributing towards marketing management of luxury brand. Thus, identifying the factors influencing the perceived purchase intention is crucial for marketing management purpose.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Perceived Purchase Intention

Scholarly research on the significance of purchase intention in terms of brand consumption have been established, namely Yoo and Lee (2009) and Dubois and Patenault (1995). According to Ajzen and Driver (1992), intention has a broad implication and apt to have a significant relationship on individual’s actions. Intention is usually sourced from Theory on Planned Behaviour (TPB). Based on TPB, purchase intention can be determined by the consumption behaviour of individual and in turn determined by his/her attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Therefore, an individual who has the behaviour to own a luxury brand in showcasing their social identity is more likely to have greater intention in consumption of luxury brand (Nia & Zaichkowsky, 2000).

Ajzen (2005) proposed that an individual is inclined to form an intention to engage in certain behaviour, and the intention will remain as disposition until an appropriate time, opportunity and
attempt have been conducted to transform the intention into an action. As mentioned by Laroche, Kim and Zhou (2006), variables such as consideration of a brand to purchase and expectation to purchase a brand in the future can be used to measure perceived purchase intention.

Generation Y mainly university students who aged between 18-24 (Li et al., 2009; Komarraju et al., 2009; Penman & McNeill, 2007) are more likely to transform their intentions of buying a luxury brand into an action. It is due to they perceived luxury brand to able depict their social identities and express their posh personalities (Dee K. Knight & Eun Young Kim, 2007). In the study of Ahmed, Ghingold and Zainurin (2007), they justified that Malaysian young consumers’ consumption behaviour were mostly financed by scholarship, study loan, their parents, self sponsored and other financial assistances.

Zollo's (1995) publication denoted that some rationale enable a brand to become prominent among youths, such as “if cool friends or peers using it” and “if a cool celebrity promoted/advertised it”. Empirical study from Dotson and Hyatt (2005) signified that young consumers are remarkably affected by celebrity endorsements. They also agreed that celebrity endorsements could make a product socially conspicuous and delineate the individuality of the owner.

2.2 Social Status

Living in the concurrent materialistic society, people constantly purchased luxury brands to symbolise their social status. Nia and Zaichkowsky (2000) posited that people who tend to purchase luxury brands are likely to present their status to others through the symbolic value of the products which they have. Nueno and Quelch (1998) signified that the ownership of luxury brands is able to delineate some information to reflect the owner’s social status. Meanwhile, it is also able to communicate the image of accomplishment and prestigious of the owner through their ownership over those luxury brands and this served as a determinant of purchasing luxury brands.

Wilcox et al. (2009) indicated that consumers purchase luxury brands primarily due to the symbolic reason in order to reflect their individual or social goals. Researchers such as Nueno and Quelch (1998) and Vigneron and Johnson (2004) also revealed the same research outcome whereby consumers in both Western and Eastern cultures seek to purchase luxury brands to portray their individuality and/or social standing. Moreover, many consumers are willing to spend large proportion of their disposable incomes for status related goods. This phenomenon seems to be growing both in the US and other countries (Nunes, Johnson, & Breene 2004; Singh 2002).

Han et al. (2010) agreed that consumers are regularly relying on material possessions to communicate social status among their groups. Premium price is an effective social label especially when associated with symbolic meanings (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003). Due to the essentiality in measuring an individual’s performance and achievement in current society, many consumers are motivated to consume luxury goods in order to gain respect from others, as well as to communicate their social status.

Historically, luxury brands often associated to certain elite groups. However, a new market segment for these branded products emerged recently. Twitchell (2002) indicated that luxury products have been introduced and targeted on the young consumers segment as this segment is considered highly profitable. Radha Chada and Paul Husband (2006) have evidenced that luxury brands have triggered the interest of many youngster, especially young female consumers aged between 20 and 30 to attempt the ‘cool’ look. This circumstance had acted as a motivation for them to purchase luxury brands. Besides, both researchers pointed out luxury handbags which are famous for its ‘logofication’ may be viewed by the consumers as an avenue to classify themselves into a certain social
class in the society.

According to Roll (2006), Asians are more concerned on the connection and acceptance among individuals to their social circles. In order to fit themselves into the social circles, it becomes a phenomenon for Asian younger consumers to own at least one luxury product by the age of 21. The primary motivation for their ownership is to gain respect and acknowledgement from the people around them.

In Lim et al. (2012) study, a qualitative research of in-depth interview approach has been established. One of the interviewees indicated he is willing to pay for a LV ‘logo’ as his main reason to purchase an expensive product. He felt pointless if he is unable to show the brand to others since he had spent substantial cost on it. Furthermore, he also mentioned that he would choose a luxury product because it able to portray social status, while the design and price are only the secondary concerns for his purchase consideration. Meanwhile, few interviewees also stated that in order for them to fit into the current social circles, it is a compulsory need for them to own at least one luxury product, otherwise it would affect their social status in the social circles.

As an effort to receive acknowledgement from social circles, an individual (even younger consumer) will have the intention to purchase luxury brand product, whereby it is able to enhance the social status of the owner and gain more respect from others without the cost consideration. Thus, the first hypothesis is formulated as below:

Proposed Hypothesis 1:
Social status is significantly related to perceived purchase intention of luxury brands.

2.3 Celebrity Endorsements

Under the influence of current entertainment industry and popular fads of celebrity, massive numbers of brands have engaged their collaborations with fellow celebrities to endorse their organisations’ products or services and portraying the role of brand ambassador.

McCracken (1989) and Schlecht (2003) explained that, celebrity endorser as parties who receive the public acknowledgement, subsequently well-utilised the acknowledgement and associate it with the promotional initiatives, such as advertisement. Friedman and Friedman (1979) stated that celebrity endorser is an individual who is publicly known for his/her achievements besides from the product class which they endorsing. Classic forms of celebrities comprised of models (e.g. Naomi Campbell and Tyra Banks), actors (e.g. Bruce Willis and Tom Cruise), sport athletes (e.g. Maria Sharapova and David Beckham), pop singers (e.g. Justin Bieber and Rihanna), politicians (e.g. President Barack Obama and his beloved Michelle Obama) and entrepreneurs (e.g. Mark Zuckerberg and Donald Trump) as referred to Okonkwo (2006).

Several research studies have been established to examine the correspondence between celebrity endorsements and consumers’ purchase intention (Martin, 1996; Till & Busler, 1998; Till & Shimp, 1998). Therefore, celebrity endorsements marketing strategy has been ascertained to have positive impact towards the consumers’ brand attitudes and purchase intentions, due to his/her great influences towards public (Schlecht, 2003). According to Tom et al. (1992), celebrity endorsements has become one of the most widely adopted marketing promotion mechanisms, for example Chanel approached Nicole Kidman to endorse their perfume Chanel 5 in 2004/2005. In addition, an article from Korea Economic Daily (2006) also highlighted on ‘star marketing’ where the celebrity will stimulate consumers’ desires toward the celebrity sponsored brand and the endorsements aid in the successful selling of luxury products (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000).
Furthermore, The Korea Economic Daily (2006) revealed the popularity, affinity, and image of celebrities have a great impact on consumers which will lead to purchase behaviour. Through an empirical study from Martin and Bush (2000), the result illustrated a positive correlation between the celebrity endorsers and youngers' purchase intention. In line with the result, Chang and Park (2003) also posited younger consumers or Gen Y have a propensity to imitate celebrities.

On the other hand, according to the study from Park and Yang (2010), they affirmed that celebrity conformity had a significant effect on the purchase intention of celebrity sponsorship brand. The result was enhanced by Chiou et al. (2005). In their study, they argued the more the Gen Y admired the celebrity, the greater the purchase intention of the celebrity’s sponsored brand. Besides, Gardner and Shuman’s (1986) study revealed that 53 percent of the respondents made a purchase on luxury products as a result of celebrity endorsements. Hence, the second hypothesis is formulated as below:

**Proposed Hypothesis 2:**
Celebrity endorsements are significantly related to perceived purchase intention of luxury brands.

### 2.4 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Based on the preceding discussion, a conceptual framework is constructed and proposed in Figure 1. Referring to the proposed conceptual framework, the objective for this paper is to examine the relationship between social status and celebrity endorsements towards perceived purchase intention of among university students. Figure 1 displayed that independent variable (social status and celebrity endorsements) influence over the perceived purchase intention among university students.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

In accordance to the literature review, two hypotheses are proposed.

**Hypothesis 1:**
Social status is significantly related to perceived purchase intention of luxury brands.

**Hypothesis 2:**
Celebrity endorsements are significantly related to perceived purchase intention of luxury brands.

### 3.0 Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Questionnaire Design

Generally, this study’s self-administered survey questionnaire consists of three different sections. The first section is known as filtered questions section by knowing the respondents’ experiences on luxury brands. The second section of questionnaire was prepared to assess respondents’ perceived
purchase intention towards luxury brands. Respondents were asked to choose their most favourable answer for each item on a 5-likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Items used to measure perceived purchase intention were developed and adopted from Dodds, Monrea, and Grewel (1991), and will be assessed with the adoption of five-likert scale. The third section included demographic profile of the respondents’ which included gender, age and race.

3.2 Sampling Design

The target population of this research is university students who are pursuing their undergraduate study in the Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR), Kampar Campus. The size of targeted population is known and is approximately 15,000. Therefore, a stratified random sampling technique was adopted in order to select proper respondents to avoid any bias. A targeted sample size was 375. According to Roscue (1975), sample sizes should be larger than 30 and not more than 500 for most of the researches. In addition, the sample sizes should be at least ten times more than the number of variables.

3.3 Data Collection

Approximately 450 questionnaires were administered via personal distribution, online survey and email. Eventually a total of 425 respondents have participated in the survey. However, 40 of answered questionnaires were incomplete and discarded. As a result, 385 usable questionnaires that yielding an actual response rate of 85.6%. Hence, the response rate had attained the minimum acceptance of response rate (30%), which is adequate for most of the researches (Sekaran, 2003).

4.0 Data Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Respondents Profile
There were 187 (48.6%) male respondents and 198 (51.4%) female respondents have participated in the survey. One hundred and eighty nine (49.1%) respondents were in the 21-23 years age group. This was followed by 24 -26 years (161, 41.8%), 18-20 years (30, 7.8%) and 27 years and above (5, 1.3%).

4.2 Normality Test

Normality test is conducted to ensure the data is normally distributed. According to Hair et al. (2007, p. 320), data skewness values must be within +1 and -1 and kurtosis values must be in the range of +3 and -3. When there is no violation in both conditions, then the data can be considered as normally distributed (Hair et al., 2007, p. 320). Table 1 revealed the kurtosis and skewness test value for all the variables were fall within the acceptable range. Therefore, the data were accepted and considered normally distributed.

Table 1: Normality Test Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Skewnes</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived purchase intention</td>
<td>-0.613</td>
<td>0.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social status</td>
<td>-0.373</td>
<td>0.654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity endorsements</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>0.200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Reliability Analysis
Cronbach’s alpha was applied to test for internal consistency and reliability of all the variables measurements. Hair et al. (2007) stated that the minimum acceptable level of reliability coefficient value is 0.7. Table 2 demonstrated that the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient values for perceived purchase intention (0.851), social status (0.893) and celebrity endorsements (0.861) were above 0.8. Therefore, it is considerable very good reliability.

**Table 2: Reliability Test Value for Independent and Dependent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived purchase intention</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social status</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity endorsements</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.861</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.4 Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient**

Pearson correlation tests were adopted to examine the multi-collinearity of the variables. Table 3 indicates that social status is found to be significantly positive correlated with celebrity endorsements (p=0.01). The pearson correlation coefficient for this relationship is 0.439. Bryman and Cramer (1997) suggested that the pearson coefficient between independent variables should not higher than 0.8. If the pearson coefficient is more than 0.8, it may be suspected of multi-collinearity. So the pearson coefficient for the relationship between social status and celebrity endorsements is 0.439 which is less than 0.8. Therefore, there is no multi-collinearity problem exists in this set of data.

Moreover, it is also found that perceived purchased intention is significantly correlated with celebrity endorsements (p=0.01 and r=0.276) and social status (p=0.01 and r=0.479). Both relationships are showing positive correlation. This means that when celebrity endorsements or social status will definitely increase students perceived purchased intention. Additionally, the result also indicates that the strength of correlation between social status and perceived purchased intention (moderate positive correlation) is stronger than the correlation between celebrity endorsements and perceived purchased intention (weak positive correlation).

**Table 3: Correlation between Celebrity Endorsements, Social Status and Perceived Purchased Intention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>PPIA</th>
<th>CEA</th>
<th>SSCA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>354</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.276 **</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.479 **</td>
<td>.439 **</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
4.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4 indicates the results of the multiple linear regressions. Based on the table 4, the significant value for the proposed model is 0.01 and F value is 78.51. Therefore, there is at least one independent variable significantly predicted the dependent variable, namely: perceived purchased intention. Besides that, the R-Square of the model is indicated 0.309 or 30.9%. This shows that 30.9% of the variance for perceived purchase intention model can be explained by social status and celebrity endorsements. However, another 69.1% of the variances maybe can be explained by other potential factors. The result also speculated that social status (p=0.000 and t=5.908) and celebrity endorsements (p=0.000 and t=6.346) are significantly predicted perceived purchase intention among undergraduate students. Based on the Beta value, it can determine that celebrity endorsements (B=0.330) is the most significant variable that will affect perceived purchase intention. This is followed by social status (B=0.307). This prominent result has provide some valuable insight to Business Practitioners to have better understanding on Generation Y or undergraduate students perception on buying luxury products.

Table 4: Result of Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summary b</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.556 a</td>
<td>.309</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>.60020</td>
<td>2.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Predictors: (Constant), CEA, SSCA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Dependent Variable: PPIA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Collinearity Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.445</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>9.258</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSCA</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>5.908</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEA</td>
<td>.333</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>6.346</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.0 Discussion

The result indicated that, social status is significantly related to perceived purchase intention of luxury brands. Thus, proposed hypothesis 1 is supported. Several studies investigating this relationship have similar result (Nueno & Quelch (1998); Vigneron & Johnson (2004); Wilcox et al. (2009); Han et al. (2010). Chada and Husband (2006) claimed that luxury branded products have triggered the interest of many youngster attempt the ‘cool’ look and this circumstance had acted as a motivation for them to purchase luxury branded products (Radha Chada and Paul Husband, 2006). Another study done by Lim et al. (2012) indicated that consumers choose a luxury product because it portrays their social status, allowing them to fit into the current social circles. The design and price, on the other hand, are the secondary concerns for purchase consideration.

The second hypothesis is also supported; celebrity endorsements are empirically examined to be significantly related to perceived purchase intention of luxury brand. The result of this study is in line with the study of Schlecht (2003) and Daneshvary & Schwer (2000). A study conducted by Chiou et al. (2005) confirmed that celebrity endorsements had a significant effect on the purchase intention on
luxury product among Gen Y.

5.1 Implications

Up to date, there were no past studies that jointly examine social status and celebrity endorsements with perceived purchase intention of luxury brands among generation Y in Malaysia. In addition, there were also limited researches tested on this relationship especially in Malaysia private university sector. Therefore, the findings of this study have delivered some contributions towards theoretical perspective.

From the theoretical perspective, the findings do provide some insights and feedback for luxury-goods companies and luxury brands marketers in planning various strategies and methods of promoting luxury brand among the youngsters in Malaysia. In addition, luxury-goods companies and luxury brands marketers can also develop some creative marketing strategies for luxury brands, in order to capture this new, potential and attractive customer base.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

In this study, several limitations have been acknowledged. First, this study is focused on undergraduate students from private universities in Malaysia. Hence, the results generated might not relevant to other colleges, university colleges as well as public universities in Malaysia. Future researches can be conducted on undergraduate students from public universities and colleges. Comparative study to examine differences between undergraduates in private universities and public universities can also be performed to discover the perceived purchase intention on luxury brands. Second, majority of respondents in this study were Chinese, while only small group of respondents are Malays and Indians. Hence, this might affect the results’ generalisability. Therefore, in future researches, researchers are suggested to adopt proportionate stratified sampling technique which focuses based on gender.

5.3 Conclusion

In a nutshell, all research objectives and hypotheses for this study are underpinned. Social status and celebrity endorsements have been empirically tested to have significant relationships with perceived purchase intention of luxury brands among university students.

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