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Online Impulse Buying Behaviour towards Organic Cosmetics among Malaysian Consumers: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract

Impulse buying has been a phenomenon, especially with the growth of e-commerce. Research has shown that 40% - 60% of purchases are among impulse buyers. This shows the importance of impulse buying among consumers and among sellers. Cosmetics brands are starting to have their own websites and promote their products online. As this industry is booming, with the rapid changes in technology, it is essential to see the factors that trigger impulse buying tendencies. However, there is still lacks of literature addressing the interaction between impulse buying tendency towards organic cosmetic among Malaysian consumers, especially during online purchase. Therefore, this paper is discussing the factors effecting impulse buying tendency for organic cosmetics. Factors that are discussed in this paper include website product display, promotional activities, impulsive traits, and consumer mood/feeling while buying.

Keywords: Organic Cosmetics, Impulse Buying Tendency, Online Purchase, Malaysian Consumers

Introduction

The growth of e-commerce makes impulse buying to be an emerging phenomenon that has been the focus of researchers from a variety of disciplines. Since the existence of e-commerce, customers have been exposed to the websites and other social media which lead to impulse buying as well. As an online shopper, customer could easily have all the information regarding the products and easily become impulse due to attractive website displays and heavy promotions.

According to Ismitz Matthew De Alwis, Kenanga Investors Bhd chief executive officer and Financial Planning Association of Malaysia (FPAM) president stated that online shopping had become a huge staple of the Malaysian lifestyle and would only grow stronger as more innovative online retailers emerge to cater to the growing trend. Previous study shows more than 50 % of online shopping has been classified as impulse buying (Liu et al., 2013; Zheng et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, the green trend is already part of the world economy. Demand for green products has been increased since consumers converting green as their lifestyle. According to Euromonitor, sustainable cosmetics and personal care products were headline news since 2016, and this trend shows no sign of slowing down in the year to come. Health is still a primary concern when it comes to ingredients and there are also increasing focus on the environmental and social credentials of beauty products in the future. Major cosmetics manufacturers and retailers actively using their official website or social media in order to sell their products and gain new customers.

Beauty retailers like Sephora carried popular organic brands such as Korres, Origins, Ren and Kora Organic in order to cater the demand for organic cosmetics user. These products are also heavily advertised in Sephora website. Besides, green cosmetics manufacturer such as The Bodyshop is also using their website to stay connected with their customers by updating recent product launching and promotions especially during festive seasons. The website itself could encourage impulse buying among the customers.

Through combining marketing and organic cosmetics wisdom, a number of new insights are offered which will enrich our understanding on the determinants of online impulse buying behaviour as well as on how a proper internal and external stimulus could alters consumer shopping experience to promote more online impulse purchase towards green cosmetics.

Problem Statement

With the rise of e-Commerce and big data phenomenon, most of the brick-and-mortar stores are now shifting their focus to online business or also known as virtual store. Impulse buyer are an important sales driver for both brick-and-mortar and e-commerce businesses. The online sales have made profit from \$236 billion in 2007 to \$521 billion in 2012 (Ben-Shabat et al., 2013). Researchers have paid more attention to the study of online impulsive buying behaviour nowadays due to the popularity of e-commerce. Some studies (Sirhindi, 2010; Madhavaram & Laverie, 2004) found that traditional shopping and online shopping have different characteristics, for instance, the situational factors of online impulsive shopping are easy access, opportunity to access promotions, use of credit card, and transportation of goods and low price of goods.

Previous research both in the academic and the professional fields has shown that impulse buying represents between 40 and 80 per cent of all purchases, depending on the type of product (Amos et al., 2014; Marketingdirecto, 2012).

According to a research report "Organic Cosmetics Market: ASEAN Industry Analysis and Opportunity Assessment 2014-2020", the organic cosmetics market in Malaysia is anticipated to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.7% during the forecast period 2014-2020 and reach a valuation of US\$ 533.3 Mn. The rise in disposable income in Malaysia has meant that people are spending more on quality products. Consumer awareness also is another key factor driving the demand for organic cosmetics in Malaysia. Awareness about the potential health risks of cosmetics with artificial ingredients has prompted many consumers to seek alternatives, and organic cosmetics have become the preferred choice. Malaysia is a Muslim majority country, and many consumers in the country are looking for those cosmetics that have Halal (permissible) and safe ingredients. On the other hand, the

sales of organic cosmetics through online retail is anticipated to witness a CAGR of 9.8% during the forecast period 2014-2020. It shows that Malaysian women are shifting their way of purchasing cosmetics from retail store to virtual store.

However, there is still a lack of research addressing the interactions between impulse buying tendency and other variables (Amos et al., 2014; Badgaiyan and Verma, 2014; Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Floh and Madlberger, 2013), especially in an online context (Sun and Wu, 2011).

This study therefore, has been developed in order to cater the theoretical gap and applied gaps. It will be focusing on online impulse buying behaviour towards organic cosmetics since being green and organic is a trend in cosmetic consumption in Malaysia. Besides, this study also focusing on four main independent variable that derived from previous literature; website product display, promotional activities, mood/feeling, and personality traits.

The proposed study investigates the theoretical consideration which is online impulse buying behaviour and related variables; website product display, promotional activities, mood and impulsive traits. This study will be focusing on online impulse buying behaviour where the respondents are the organic cosmetics online shopper. Since sustainability and green products has become a trend in recent customer's preferences, green cosmetics including makeup, skincare and hair care are the contextual focus of this study.

Donthu and Garcia (1999) found that Internet shoppers are more impulsive than those in conventional retailing, as online shopping is mediated by websites that expose shoppers to strong stimuli (e.g., excellent visual design). Impulse buying is influenced by various economic, personal, time, place and even cultural factors (Abedi, et al., 2014). Impulse buying behaviour is composed of sudden and unplanned purchases (Srivastava and Joshi, 2014). Ashtiani and Akbari (2013) evaluated the factors influencing impulse buying behaviour for cosmetics and showed that store environment, shopping pleasure and product involvement have a positive effect on impulse buying behaviour. Impulse buying behaviour is a stimulus-driven behaviour influenced by personal factors and depends on circumstances in which the consumer is (Javanmard and Hosseini, 2003). In fact, studies have shown that depending on product category, products bought on impulse can account for 40-80 per cent of purchases (Amos et al., 2014).

With the rapid growth of multi-channel shopping (i.e. using multiple channels, online and offline, during the purchase process), consumers are constantly exposed to marketing stimuli that can promote impulse buying (Dawson and Kim, 2009). The digital media connected to the internet and cell phones provide a high degree of accessibility for customers, as well as a cost-effective means for product promotion for retailers (Lin and Lin, 2013). Moreover, research suggests that the ease of searching and buying online, along with the lack of social pressures and absence of delivery efforts, could increase consumers' tendencies to act impulsively (Chanet al., 2017; Madhavaram and Laverie, 2004; Verhagen and van Dolen, 2011). Huanget al. (2015) also state that younger consumers, such as millennials who are highly engaged in multi-channel shopping, perceive online channels to be more genuine and efficient. Despite this, there seems to be a lack of effort in stimulating consumers' impulse buying, according to (Ozen and Engizek, 2014).

Literature Review

Online Impulse Buying

Based on Rook (1987); Sharma et al (2010, p. 277) define impulse buying as “a sudden, compelling, hedonically complex purchase behaviour in which the rapidity of the impulse purchase decision precludes any thoughtful, deliberate consideration of alternatives or future implications”. Studies have shown that depending on product category, products bought on impulse can account for 40-80 per cent of purchases (Amos et al., 2014). Within consumer behaviour’s studies, impulsive buying behaviour is always an interesting issue, and many researchers and marketers make efforts to try to figure it out (Sirhindi, 2010; Muruganatham & Bhakat, 2013).

Impulse buying are different from regular purchases since it happen with no pre-planning. Donthu and Garcia (1999) found that Internet shoppers are more impulsive than those in conventional retailing, as online shopping is mediated by websites that expose shoppers to strong stimuli (e.g., excellent visual design). With the rapid growth of multi-channel shopping (i.e. using multiple channels, online and offline, during the purchase process), consumers are constantly exposed to marketing stimuli that can promote impulse buying (Dawson and Kim, 2009).

Comparing to brick and mortar shopping, online shopping carries different perspective where rational choices are not always made, and impulsive buying also has room in this medium (Jeffrey and Hodge, 2007; Verhagen and Van Dolen, 2011). Internet indeed favours impulse buying (Gupta, 2011; Rodriguez, 2013) since it could generate higher profit to retailer and manufacturers. Hence, online retailer focusing on the components that empower impulse buying online, even a one per cent increase in deals from impulse buying would prompt an extra \$55 million in income, bringing about a huge effect to both the online retailer and the business (Kathiravan et al., 2019).

Organic Cosmetics

Past studies investigate factors that contribute towards reluctance among consumer to purchase organic cosmetics products; such as expensive price (“4 in 5 Consumers Think Eco-Friendly”, 2015), not realizing the potential to making a change through these products (Belova and Eilks, 2015), high product loyalty to current (synthetic) products (Annis, 2011; Isaacs, 2015), inadequacy of information and promotion through media campaigns (Annis, 2011), etc. It is vital to explore this matter, as consumer lifestyles, mindset, and actions give a significant amount of effect towards the environment.

In recent phenomenon, consumers willingly purchase organic cosmetics as conserving both their own health and the environment as an important factor (Amberg and Fogarassy, 2019). These green consumer behaviour has jumped into another stage, where the gree consumers thought and actions are linked (Akehurst, 2012). The cosmetics industry had transformed to be more concerned on eco-products due to the growth of consumer response on the trends for a healthier lifestyle and demand for products more naturally (Vesselina, 2009). According to Alice (2008), factors that contributed consumers to become involved with eco-conscious beauty was derived from the consumer’s passion on natural, environmentally responsible-ingredients and organic-food movement.

Cheah (2009) found that the demand for green products has increased in Malaysia. According to Ooi (2012), the determinants that affect the green purchase intention of consumers in

Malaysia was the government's initiative, followed by environmental knowledge, peer pressure and environmental attitude.

Website Product Display

Website navigation has been shown to be a strong determinant of the purchasing intention of online consumers (Pearson et al., 2007; Melian-Alzola & Padron-Robaina, 2006), and their satisfaction with e-services (Liljander et al., 2002). This phenomenon has so far received limited attention from researchers in the information systems (IS) field (Parboteeah et al., 2009), but there is some useful research on the influence of online store design on consumers' impulse buying behaviour (Shen & Khalifa, 2012; Verhagen & Dolen, 2011). Easily navigable websites can provide more hedonic benefits to consumers than those that are harder to navigate (Semeijn et al., 2005). Miao (2011) indicated that both process and situation (that is, website design) can induce positive emotions and the desire for impulsive buying, in addition to the product or service offered.

Website characteristics such as ease of use, product availability, and visual appeal could affect consumers' individual impulsiveness (Liu et al., 2013). This has been supported by a study conducted by Floh and Medlberger (2013), where e-store attributes (navigation, design, and content) could affect online impulse shopping through the mediation of impulsiveness and shopping enjoyment.

Promotional Activities

Promotional activities have been used by retailers and suppliers of products and services to stimulate consumers to buy more (Mathai and Haridas, 2014; Jalali, et al., 2014; Abbasi and Jafari, 2011). A variety of promotional information can be found in webs. This information then acts as stimuli to trigger impulse buying behaviour at any time and places. Thus, it is of great significance to reveal the influence of online impulse buying to practices. It helps businesses to better stimulate consumers' desire to buy through Internet. Also, it urges businesses to develop effective marketing strategies to increase their impulse buying behaviour (Lee et al., 1989). According to relevant research, when consumers are confronted with prompting messages (e.g. promotion, advertising), they will resort to impulsive buying (Dholakia, 2000; Rook, 1987). Meanwhile, Hadjali (2012) and other researchers have also proved that promotions and price falls will also arouse their buying desire. Some scholars have found that music plays a small effect on impulse buying, while promotional activities (such as price fall) would have a larger degree of influence (Karbasivar and Yarahmadi, 2011).

Impulsive Traits

Rook and Fisher (1995) describe buyers with high IBT are more likely to be relatively unreflective in their thinking, receptive to sudden, unexpected buying ideas and absorbed by the promise of immediate gratification, which leads to quick and affirmative responses to their buying impulses. While the act of impulse buying refers to spontaneous purchase decisions during shopping, and not a permanent disposition, Impulsive buying traits is considered to be a chronic personal trait, which involves urges to spontaneously and suddenly make a purchase, as well as tendencies to act on those urges (Amos et al., 2014; Beatty and Ferrell, 1998). In general, three important factors, dynamics incentives, impulsiveness of consumer and situational factors such as different occasions and tendency to enjoy shopping

and not the product itself can be effective in shaping impulse buying behaviour (Mathai and Haridas, 2014).

Mood/Feeling

Harmancioglu et al (2014) studied cognitive processes and incentives related to impulse buying of new products. The results showed that new product knowledge and consumer characteristics (emotions and self-esteem) improve impulse buying behaviour and buying intention.

Emotion may be the most important motivating factor affecting people's buying (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). It is said that positive emotion (such as excitement, passion) will stimulate people's immediate needs and desires for shopping. Likewise, negative emotion (such as frustration) will also motivate people's impulse buying, because such behaviour makes them feel comfortable. Verplanken and Herabadi (2005) proposed that negative emotion would spur impulse buying behaviour, through which consumers can get away from their negative mental state. Verplanken and Sato (2011) also predicted that positive emotion would lead to impulse buying. But negative emotion would also generate similar behaviours. Individuals in a negative emotional state will try to escape from negative emotions through impulse buying activities (Elliott, 1994).

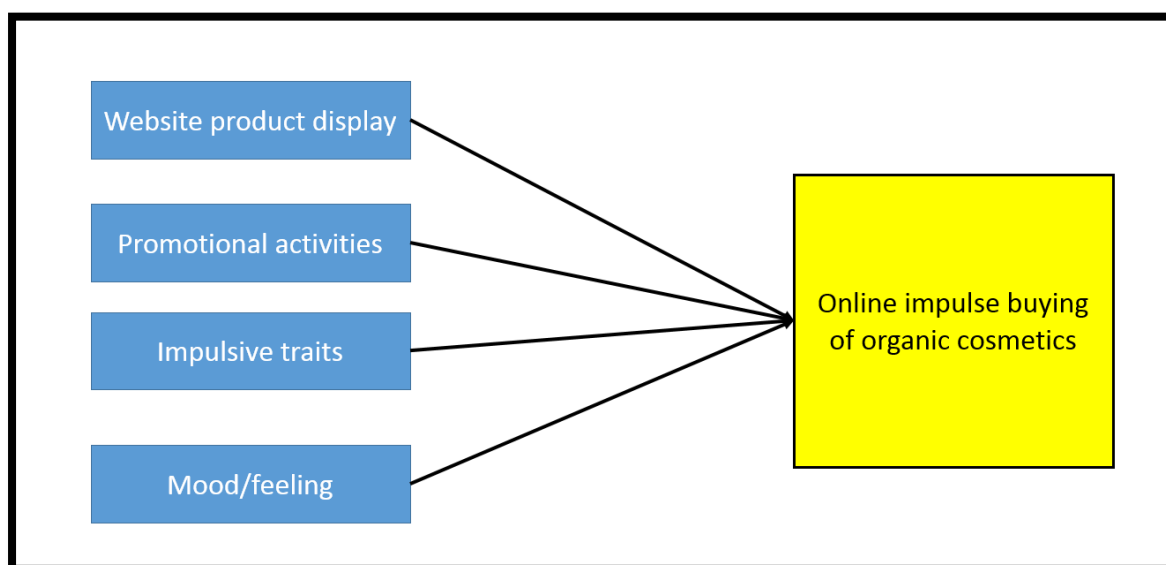


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Figure 1 shows the proposed online impulse buying framework. Four independent variables that contribute to online impulse buying on organic cosmetics; website product display, promotional activities, impulsive traits and mood and feeling.

From Figure 1 the proposed hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H1: website product display is positively associated with online impulse buying of organic cosmetics

H2: promotional activities are positively associated with online impulse buying of organic cosmetics

H3: impulsive traits are positively associated with online impulse buying of organic cosmetics

H4: mood/feeling is positively associated with online impulse buying of organic cosmetics

Discussion and Conclusion

The online shopping platforms indicate a uniqueness for customers to interact different communication channels as doing online shopping, such as social media and mobile device. Online shopping has a strong linkage to online impulse buying, where it is more particular and complex shopping process. Since impulse buyer are an important sales driver for e-commerce businesses, online campaign and viral marketing is the best way to gain attention and spread the significance of this situation among the customers (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003; Monica & Balas, 2014).

There are a lot of assumptions among sellers that consumers are always paying a greater attention towards their purchasing. However, impulse buying has become one of the main factors of purchasing, especially when it comes to online shopping experience. It can be concluded that there are four factors that contribute to online impulse buying of organic cosmetics namely: website product display, promotional activities, impulsive traits, and mood and feeling. Organic cosmetics can be considered as new in Malaysia, therefore the experience of scrolling through the websites and promotions play important roles in determining the intention to buy. This is enhanced by the consumers current feeling and their own compulsive traits. It can be concluded that these four factors support each other in determining online impulse buying experience among consumers. Limitations in this paper are that the validity and reliability are not yet tested. Therefore, future research will need to focus on collecting data and validating the proposed model. This paper is hoped to create awareness among product and brand sellers on how to increase their sales. It is hoped to create a positive experience to the consumers.

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