[Review]

Women as Consumers: An Analysis on Their Consumption Culture

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aims to elucidate the status of women as consumers and observe their consumption trends in relation to culture.

Research design, data, and methodology - Past studies of women as consumers were observed and their consumer behaviors were noted. The stigma of women in society and how it has impacted the market industries were examined. Additionally, the role of culture in consumerism for women were also reviewed and elucidated.

Results - The stereotypical roles that are placed in women in society are still prevalent for the marketing industry and is reflected in their businesses. Additionally, the role of culture plays a significant role in the consumer behaviors of women and thus businesses should understand its intricate differences between countries. Fashion industry is one that plays a prominent role in women's consumerism and the impact of culture has a prominent impact on women's consumer habits as well.

Conclusions - Additional studies should be conducted to understand the consumerisms of women in the marketing industry. Businesses should also be aware of the vastly different cultural norms of various countries and tailor to their preferences. Only through a thorough examination and understanding of the consumer behavior in women will markets be able to flourish and gain solid ground in global businesses.

Keywords: Women, Consumer Behavior, Culture.

JEL classification: M1, M31.

1. Introduction

With the increase of globalization, the world is becoming more interconnected than ever. As mentioned by Waters (2001), globalization itself can be categorized by a consequence of the expansion of the Western culture to different countries through the expansion of the markets and colonization. The fast increase of international products in a vastly competitive global market will push businesses and countries alike to push policies for worldwide standards on product services, quality and design.

In light of these advances in the modern world for international products and global markets, the consumption of these products has also been an important issue for businesses alike. As such, the field of consumer behavior entails a deeper concentration of the scholars on focusing on not only on one aspect of business, but a myriad of different methods and fields, such as from the disciplines of psychology, economics, and sociology (Hunt, 1991).

An important realization from these contexts on consumer behavior in the globalized world is the valuable differences between the consumer behaviors based on not only the demographics of the consumers and their ages, but their gender as well. There have been several studies in the past where researches focused on women and their consumer behavior on a specific area of business has been examined, but not one where a study attempted to observe the overall patterns of women and their consumer behaviors in different countries, across different areas of businesses.

Thus, this present study will aim to elucidate the behaviors of women consumers in a various range of businesses, from different countries across the world. Through this study, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the differences of women when it comes to shopping, as

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well as their values in spending based on different cultural factors, might be recognized and utilized for future businesses.

2. Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior is an important aspect in the field of business, as it is the art of understanding the humans and their needs which businesses work on improving to appeal their products to the general public. The definition of consumer behavior has been stated as the needs that people prioritize in allocating their resources in various situations and ultimately provide a view into the preferences of the consumers and their decisions in acquiring them (Griskevicius & Jenrick, 2013). Moreover, consumer behavior studies help businesses to understand the wants and needs of the consumers in the markets, as well as their expectations and wishes, to make for a more comprehensive product that will be able to convey their meaning for consumers (Cachon & Swinney, 2009).

Many analytical models have been proposed for the studies on consumer behavior and understanding them. These analytical models aim at portraying the real world at which the decision processes of the consumers on different products are available and its variables on them as well. Mainly, the potential preferences of consumers are organized into different analytical models of consumer purchasing behaviors. The main factor of the preferences of consumers can be attributed to the psychological factors (Straughan & Roberts, 1999). As such, these psychological factors are more complex and difficult to decipher than the demographic factors, since they take into consideration the interests, opinions, needs, and personality among others to the table in the process of consumer decision making for product buying (Eckman, Kotsiopulos, & Bickle, 1997).

Baltas (2003) has described that both psychological variables as well as demographic ones will be able to aid in understanding why purchases are made by the consumers. Additionally, businesses must be able to observe and identify the factors that aid in deciding a purchase for a product, and get into the mind of the consumer for deciding their target audience of a product. Thus, efforts must be made on part of the marketers to ensure that the products they put out into the markets are a reflection of the consumption patterns of the customers (Baltas & Argouslidis, 2007; White & Dahl, 2007).

3. Culture and Values

Culture is a pivotal part of our daily lives and a part of what makes us who we are. It is also important in the field of consumer behavior as culture has the capacity to shape our thoughts and actions, that reach down even to the daily choices we make on the products we purchase. Understandably, this will also impact on the purchasing behaviors, and culture can be an important component for the marketers to research on (Allen, 2006).

For market researches that are done in an international scale without the country and the culture of the consumers taken into consideration, then a difference occurs. As studies by Hofstede (1991) have demonstrated, people belonging to different cultural groups are bound to assign various attributions in different ways, and their behavior is not consistent through different countries. Moreover, culture is a learned aspect, and not an innate one, so it can be said that the experiences and the environment are the two critical factors in consumer behavior.

Further, culture is an important part of any individual, as it is the representation of the administration, economy, values, and symbols and behaviors of a social group (Dupuis, 2008). Culture is a starting point for people in forming bonds or social interactions, and the basic cultural values impose impacts on consumer behavior in the end (D'Iribarne, 1983; Torres & Allen, 2009; Halim & Zulkarnain, 2017; Kim et al., 2015). As not need to be further emphasized, consumer behavior has an explicit relationship with the cultures of the people, and the consumption patterns are maintained.

In line with the cultural aspects of consumer behavior, the values that are held by individuals also play a prominent role in their buying habits. It is reasonable to say that culture plays a significant role in how people rationalize about their behaviors and values that would have been unacceptable otherwise. Environmental factors can determine the priorities and the values placed on them that will change how people view and express their way of living (Rohan, 2000). Thus, this illuminates the importance of value on a person, as they vary from person to person, and also from countries and cultures alike.

A significant impact this places for the marketers are the fact that the values shared by the culture people come from will inevitably shape the products they choose. Small matters such as the placement of the products, or the advertisements, could have a significant effect on people in different countries based on what their cultural beliefs are (De Mooij, 2003). Thus, it is important that the products that are to be placed in new countries are done so with research about the countries and the values that are kept by the consumers in that area (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2006). A successful endorsement of the product will be one where the advertisement and placement are executed in a manner that is pleasing to the consumers, but also one that communicates the values that a country holds in an effective way.

4. Gender in Consumer Behavior

Gender is an important part of consumer behavior, but it has been overlooked on various accounts in the research (Schroeder, 2003). But, it is an important aspect on the psychology of the consumers and the products they purchase. Not only are the products men and women consumers purchase different, but also the psychological, cultural, and decision-making factors when male and females make choices vary as well. Women tend to be deliberate shoppers, taking care to weight the pros and cons of items they shop for, and engaging with the sales staff, asking about the products and comparing the prices (Shukre & Mishra, 2012).

In addition to these attributes, compared to men, women shop not only for themselves, but also for their families, so they are more pressured in some ways. Moreover, women tend to make more unintended purchases than men. But, it has been shown that both men and women conduct more impulsive buying at a time of a high inflow of money, for instance in times of receiving salary. Younger aged people were also shown to be more impulsive with purchasing products (Shukre & Mishra, 2012). Overall, the experience of shopping, emotional attachment with the products, and visibility of the product played significant roles in consumer behavior of women. For men, voice announcements in the shops and trying new products were some of the characteristics of their consumer behavior (Shukre & Mishra, 2012).

A key factor that has been given attention to in the recent years was the use of women as objects and in stereotypical roles for products in the markets. It is an often criticized matter for making the image of women to hold to impossible beauty standards for keeping them under patriarchal domination (Wolf, 2012; Faludi, 2006; McDonagh & Prothero, 1997). Thus, the view of the marketplace is one of the controlling creator and marketer, which is the man, and the controlled, passive female consumer as described by feminists (Bristor & Fisher, 1993). Other views have been offered by postmodern feminism vies that suggests that the choices for consumption made by women has to ability for them to escape the construction of feminity that society has posed upon them (Catterll et al., 2005).

5. Portrayals of Women in Marketing

The depictions of women in advertising for marketing purposes has long been criticized as holding women to idealized standards of beauty that is often unattainable (Bissell & Rusk, 2010). This has usually been a consequence of the gender stereotypic roles of women that has further ignited the industries' reinforcement of patriarchal views in this matter (McDonaugh & Prothero, 1997). In modern society, few studies have focused on the negative perspectives that women hold in these roles they are advertised in, although many studies have been conducted on the gender stereotypes of these areas.

The reason for the generation of indignation on the part of consumers for marketing and advertising ploys has been the fact of the gender stereotypical issues that have been central part of this industry. Gender stereotypes can be defined as a set of beliefs about the roles and behaviors, traits, and characteristics that differ between men and women (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Roles of women throughout the advertisement industry has been one where they are reflected as being overly concerned with their images and their objectification as sexual objects (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). The problem that has long arise was in the fact that this has been happening for a long time, even after the surge of the feminist movement. Even in the modern world, the advertisements that remain women to be decorative has not been much changed.

The traditional roles of women that has been portrayed through the marketing ploys has been one of the dependent housewife on the husband, and the non-traditional roles have been one where women are more engaged to activities that occur outside of the house zone (Zotos & Lysonski, 1994). Still, Christy (2006) has revealed that women still adheres to the belief that they are not portrayed in a realistic manner on the advertisements. The verdict on how women view these objectifications of themselves as fitting certain roles in society has been divided. Some studies have observed that females have shown more favorable views to the non-traditional roles portrayed in the advertisements, whereas some have also expressed less favorable views on the matter (Whipple & Courtney, 1985). Women have not responded well to the advertisements of those that show sexy female models, and adolescents have also criticized the traditional roles that are portrayed by the marketing industries (Jones et al., 1998; Rouner et al., 2003).

This has also brought to light the question on the reason for the objectification of women in stereotypical roles in society that has permeated throughout the advertisements as well. This can in part be explained by the positive men's responses to the decorative roles of women in advertisements, such as the portrayal of youthfulness and physical attractiveness (Saad, 2004). Moreover, even in marketing areas where the primary target is women has also portrayed such forms as the decorative roles and traditional roles of women as well. Interesting studies conducted on the manner has brought to light on the evolutionary focus of Intrasexual competition. This is the subtle competition of sexes for their access to desirable mates in the opposite gender (Fink et al., 2014). There are many forms that this can take in terms of one sex appealing to the other. They include methods such as the form of self-promotion, which is the appearance of

themselves attaining the qualities deemed attractive to the opposite sex, or competitor derogation, where the value of another of their same gender is lowered for rival reasons (Cox & Fisher, 2008).

Thus, it would be logical to assume that the women would want to acquire the traits that are garnered to be favorable to men's standards, such as those of youthfulness or attractiveness, which are norms portrayed in the marketing industries. This can also be seen in the tactics that women use when attracting the male gender, which is one of those that are preferred by the males. Thus, the preference of the females to use the attractiveness factor in attracting men has been in part because of the focus of males on their favor to desire physically attractive women (Campbell, 2004).

But the intentions for buying a product from a consumer's views has also been positive when there was an attractive model on the cover of the product, regardless of the criticisms of women on the roles of society this entailed (Trampe et al., 2010). This can be observed as a transference effect, which is closely related to the physical attractiveness stereotype, where attractive people are viewed more in a positive light than negative people. This can be because of the perception that attractive people ate viewed as more self-confident and sociable than their unattractive counterparts (Feingold, 1992). Thus, with the endorsement of a product from an attractive model, it is likely to elicit more positive responses and show an increase in purchases from the consumers.

6. Expression of Women through Consumption across Different Cultures

It has been a well-known fact that consumers express themselves through the brands they purchase and associate themselves with. Brands are an important part of a consumer's choices in deciding what to buy and what brand to buy it in (Aaker et al., 2001). As mentioned by Belk (1988), the expression of self can be shown through the possessions we keep that help us to remind ourselves of the person we wish to be, or our sense of self. We identify with the brands that we bond with, and that bond is also produced when the brands have a strong correlation with the image that is similar to our own (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

This also has strong correlations with the countries that the consumers come from. Self-expression can differ greatly between consumers of different countries as the culture of each country is unique to itself and the people are inevitably affected by it through their consumption patterns as well (Aaker et al., 2001). People associate themselves with a brand that is reminiscent of their sense of self, and brands are frequently used to confirm, expression, and ascertain

their sense of being through the products (Aaker et al., 2001; Belk, 1988).

This is evident in brand loyalty that is seen in consumers, as strong brand connections can lead to preferences that will be hard for other competitive brands to break through (Xue, 2008; Cho, 2014; Kim et al., 2011). As such, culture plays a pivotal role in this mass consumption of goods, as it is closely affiliated to lifestyle of the consumers. As mentioned by Quester et al. (2000), culture has a significant impact on the evaluation of goods from different brands and the perception of needs consumer have as well. It has been interesting to note that studies have been conducted where the cultures for individualistic and collectivism has shown different preferences. According to Aaker et al. (2001), cultures with individualistic societies tended to utilize the brands and consumptions for expressing their differences, whereas the societies with collectivist cultures has used brands for assimilation purposes. An intriguing research conducted by Wallstrom et al. (2010) has found that India, Philippines, and China considered brands to be an important tool for self-expression, while consumers from Japan and Australia placed considerably less emphasis.

7. Fashion Consumerism for Women

The fashion industry is one of the most prolific businesses in the world, and is both viewed as an object and as behavioral processes that can alter the image of individuals to their tastes (Vieira, 2009; Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012). Clothing that are in fashion has meanings of symbolism, especially status, in the social world and as a means to the image portrayals of the consumers (Khare et al., 2011).

In the case of women, fashion is especially important, as it is a means to self-define themselves and communicate those identities with the general public (Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009). Women are more conscious about their physical appearance, and fashion offers a gateway for women to express themselves through the multiple roles they play in daily lives (Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008). More specifically, women's attire in the professional setting is based largely on their personal values, but also in their own perspectives of what is deemed appropriate in certain situations (Soloman & Rabolt, 2009; Hong, 2013). They are also conscious about not just the attire that matches the setting of the situation, but also the clothing that is a reflection of who they are as well, whether at work or elsewhere.

An interesting subset of this huge industry are the different reasons women state in wanting to be fashionable. This differs across various cultures, as culture is a unique attribute that plays a significant role in the consumption and thought processes of humans. For instance, it was observed

that for female consumers in China, the most important thing about the branded apparel was its fashion leadership status, whereas in South Korea, the social image in relations with performance quality assurance was the most influential (Jai-Ok et al., 2002). Moreover, in India, a prominence was placed in the design, price, and quality among other things for fashion, whereas in the UK, women consumers considered the clothing that is in line with their self-expression to be the most important (Jin et al., 2010; Rocha et al., 2005).

8. Discussion

The cultural values of consumers have always been an important factor in the marketing world. The choices they make throughout their daily lives are in part influenced by how they were raised in the differing environments across countries. This also has significant implications for the marketing industry, and in aiding them to understand the heart of consumer behaviors. Consumption will always be a way of life to humans and it is only the priories and the purchases that are made that will differ as variables. People utilize the culturally learned values to aid them throughout life and rationalize their decisions through such mechanisms socially (Rokeach, 1973).

The decisions made by a consumer when purchasing items are never an isolated incident: it is influenced by the country effect of that person, namely the culture of the consumer (Hofstede, 1980). A significant variable in itself, with the addition of women consumers into play, the playing field of the marketing industry is thrust into vastly uncharted waters that will need to be examined more closely and deeply in time. That is not to say that research regarding this field has been negligent; on the contrary, scholars have long held interest in the minds of women consumers and how they behave, especially in fields that are highly relevant to females such as fashion industries.

As such, societies have placed women to hold traditional roles and as objects of desire, with often unattainable physical goals for the rest of the population through advertisements. Non-traditional roles of women have been utilized as well in the modern world, but the former is still prevalent. This could be in part because of the sales that are generated when an attractive female is the one advertising a brand, where the consumers were willing to pay a price for such products. Attractiveness has long been associated as positive attributes, and offers the product a sense of those emotions as well that captivate the consumer into buying them (Reinhard et al., 2006).

Women and men differ greatly in their consumption patterns. Men are more logical and analytical in information processing, whereas the women are more intuitive and subjective. This can be utilized as offering additional product information to the women consumers, while specific characteristics of a product should be used in the case of male consumers (Putrevu, 2001). This is reinforced in the fashion industry, which is one of the largest markets in the world. Among professional women, there are known to be four determinants of fashionable clothing decisions, which consist of fashion consciousness, conformity, clothing concerns, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Baker et al., 2014; Reed, 2002).

With the increasing amount of studies conducted in the areas of women consumers, it is more imperative than ever to take into consideration the evolving roles of women in the modern world. It is not the role of women anymore to only be housewives and mostly be subjugate to the wishes of the husband; it is now an era where the percentage of working women are increasing, and the household is reared by both male and female incomes. Thus, it is only reasonable to suggest that the norms of women roles in advertisements are improved to reflect on the ever-changing roles of women in the current era. With the improvement of the marketing tactics to target women in a modern, relatable fashion, will the marketing industries be able to thrive and prosper in the volatile 21st century.

9. Conclusion

9.1. Summary

The current study has observed the role of women as consumers and how culture plays a role in their decisions. It has been observed that a prominent part of consumerism is derived from the intrinsic aspects of culture, and shapes the decisions people make when purchasing goods. Not only that, the introduction of a product into different countries should be thought with careful precision, as what is accepted in one culture might be offensive to another. Thus, it is not appropriate to utilize one method of marketing to apply on a global scale, but few factors must be improved depending on the cultures. Likewise, as culture is intrinsically different, the consumer habits and behaviors of men and women vary on many areas. Only through an understanding of these factors will marketing industries be able to successfully appeal their products to the consumers.

In industries where women show a high interest, such as the fashion industry, it is important to consider the roles that women play in society, and how they perceive fashion to be. Mostly, fashion is a tool for women to express themselves into society, but also within the acceptable boundaries of society norms and rules that are unspoken. It can be an outlet for women to express themselves in the different roles they play throughout society, such as a professional career women, or at times, a mother and a wife. This also divulges in its significance and acceptance of

styles based on the different countries and cultures women are immersed in. Thus, the concept of consumer behavior and culture will always have an influence on each other.

9.2. Limitations and future studies

The current study came across some limitations. As this study was based on a broad outlook of the role of women as consumers and how culture shaped their psychology, a more specified research could not be conducted. In the future, it is suggested that studies that are concentrated on one area of the marketing industry, such as the fashion industry for women consumers, can be elaborated at great lengths with significant implications for the future. Moreover, a comparison of male and female consumers from one or several countries on their spending habits can be utilized to observe the role of gender and culture in consumer behavior.

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