Is Family Communication at Home Detrimental to the Development of Materialistic Values Among Young Adults? Differences between Muslim and Non-Muslim Consumers in Malaysia

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to identify the interpersonal communication differences between young Muslim and non-Muslim adult consumers. This study is also an attempt to identify the differences between the various types of family communication patterns that take place at home and materialism between young Muslim and non-Muslim adult consumers. This paper briefly conceptualizes the family communication processes based on existing literature to illustrate the association between family communication patterns and materialism. Next, a brief review of literature is made to illustrate the association between religiosity and materialism. This study takes place in Malaysia, a country in the Southeast Asia embracing a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. Preliminary statistical procedures were employed to examine possible significant group differences in family communication and materialism based on various major beliefs system endorsed by Malaysians. A one-way analysis of variance was utilised to determine the significant differences in terms of religion with respect to their responses on the various measures. When there were significant differences, Post Hoc Tests (Scheffe) were used to determine the particular groups which differed significantly within a significant overall one-way analysis of variance. The implications, significance and limitations of the study are discussed as a concluding remark.

Keywords: Religion, Family Communication, Materialism, Young Muslim and non-Muslim Adult Consumers

1.0. Introduction

At a time when many markets are reaching saturation point, Muslims are becoming much more concerned consumers, creating some of the fastest growing consumer segment in the world.
This represents a major growth opportunity for cosmetic and personal care companies. ‘Halal’ products and services are quickly entering the mainstream markets within Europe and the United States. In addition, the ‘Halal’ concept is becoming much more sophisticated in the Middle East and some Asian countries. Muslim consumer ‘Halal’ awareness has widened from being concerned with meat based products a decade ago to a wide range of products and services today (Hunter, 2012). Muslim consumers are seeking ‘Halal’ integrity of processed foods, beverages, pharmaceuticals, insurance, travel, leather products, and even entertainment. This has also spread to a growing awareness about cosmetics and personal care products, where recent research has cited that more than 20% of Muslim consumers are concerned about ‘Halal’ issues with the products and services they are using (Hunter, 2012).

In other words, as Muslim consumers have far greater knowledge and understanding about Islam, this knowledge is manifested in the way they make their purchasing decisions and consumptions. This is reflected in the increased awareness shown by multinational corporations in the way they formulate their marketing strategies to cater the needs of Muslim consumers in particular.

As reported by several studies on consumer socialization by Bindah and Othman (2012), most modern societies deals with at least eight major socialization agents (Reimer & Rosengren, 1990). Some examples are family, peer group, work group, places of worship, schools and others. Studies have found that people often interact with socialization agents and then take in consciously and unconsciously social norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, consumer skills (e.g., Kasser, 2002; Korten, 1999). Ultimately, their purchasing decisions and consumption patterns are influenced by these agents. Ward (1974) offered a classical definition of consumer socialization: “the processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace” (Ward, 1974, p. 2).

Family influences on consumer socialization seem to precede more through social interaction than purposive educational efforts by parents (Ward, 1974a). Given the more subtle nature of family influences, researchers have turned their attention to general patterns of family communication as a way to understand how the family influences the development of consumer skills, values (including materialism) and their purchasing decisions. It is important to note that there have been few studies examining the effects of family communication patterns on the development of various consumers’ skills and values. However, the extent to which religious beliefs on family interaction has remained remarkably unnoticed (Vangelisti, 2004). When researchers described families, religious traditions are not noted, but religious beliefs created a taken for granted subtext for the interaction patterns (Vangelisti, 2004), although it is understood that family communication patterns plays a significant role in consumer skills, values and their decision making.

As ‘Halal’ products and services are made available in the global marketplace and in abundance, no studies have yet compared the differences between Muslim versus non-Muslim consumers in terms of the type of family communication patterns that takes place at home, which according to research would ultimately indirectly lead to their consumption patterns and even
purchasing decision in the marketplace. When products and services are made available abundantly in the market place, an important research question which needs to be addressed is whether Muslim in comparison to non-Muslim consumers are more inclined towards materialistic values. Belk (1983) provided a summary of major criticism of possessiveness and acquisitiveness. He explained that the broadest and most sustained criticisms have arisen in religious philosophy. The more general of these criticisms have been aimed at the singular or excessive pursuit of material goods at the expense of "higher" pursuits. He explained that in organized religion, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity all condemn concentrating on building excessive material wealth.

Materialism among today's youth has received strong interest among educators, parents, consumer activists and government regulators. However, the majority of researches on materialism were conducted mostly in the Western cultures, leaving room for speculations on the development of materialistic tendencies and inclination among young adult consumers in Eastern cultures, particularly in Muslim countries. On these bases, this study attempts to investigate if there are differences in the tendencies of young Muslim versus non-Muslim adults in terms of their materialistic inclinations and also the type of communication patterns that takes place at home, which ultimately will reflect on how they consume products and services in the market place. This leads us to the objectives of this study.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

a. To compare the differences between young Muslim versus non-Muslim adult consumers and their patterns of family communication at home in Malaysia.

b. To compare the differences between young Muslim versus non-Muslim adult consumers and their materialistic inclinations in Malaysia.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Materialism

This paper adapts the view of materialism as a value orientation, which is centred on three main components: acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success (Richins & Dawson, 1990). According to Richins and Dawson (1990), materialism viewed as a value, is described as an organizing central value that guides people’s choices and behaviour in everyday life. It is an enduring belief that acquisition and possessions are essential to happiness and success in one’s life. Broadly defined, materialism is any excessive reliance on consumer goods to achieve the end states of pleasure, self-esteem, good interpersonal relationship or high social status, any consumption-based orientation to happiness-seeking and a high importance of material issues in life (Ger& Belk, 1999).
2.2 Family Communication and Materialism

The degree of influence that a child has in purchasing is directly related to patterns of interaction and communication within the family (Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Carlson, Grossbart & Stuenkel, 1992; Rose, 1999). Research on family communication has linked the type or quality of communication to a variety of parental practices and consumer competencies in children. Family communication provides a foundation for children’s approach to interact with the marketplace is inextricably linked to parental approaches to child-rearing (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988; Rose, 1999), and influences the development of children’s consumer skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Moschis, 1985).

The domain of family communication includes the content, the frequency, and the nature of family member interactions (Palan & Wilkes, 1997). The origins of family communication research in marketing can be traced to a study conducted in political socialization which utilized two dimensions from Newcomb’s (1953) general model of affective communication (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). The first dimension socio-orientation captures vertical communication, which is indicative of hierarchical patterns of interaction and establishes deference among family members (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). This type of interaction has also resulted in controlling and monitoring children’s consumption related activities (Moschis, 1985). The second dimension concept-orientation actively solicits the child’s input in discussions, evaluates issues from different perspectives, and focuses on providing an environment that stimulates the child to develop his/her own views (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972). This type of communication results in earlier and increased experience and learning of different consumer skills and orientations among children (Moschis, 1985).

Bindah and Othman (2012) identified a third dimension associated with family communication pattern at home. Religiously-oriented family communication was found to have a significant association with the development of materialism. A study by Bindah and Othman (2012) in Malaysia hypothesized a significant relationship between young adult consumers and materialism and their results were significant.

In summary, studies have shown that the family communication environment affects the endorsement of materialistic values (e.g., Bindah & Othman, 2012; Bindah & Othman, 2011; Moschis & Moore, 1979b; Moore & Moschis, 1981; Flouri, 2000).

2.3 Religiosity and its Association with Materialism

Studies on religiosity and materialism have also been a great subject of interest for researchers. Early study by Belk (1984) reported the mean levels for three materialism traits (possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy). One of his findings indicated that the religious institute students were less materialistic.
Flouri (2000) attempted an integrated model of materialism from adolescents. The result showed that materialism in adolescents was related to decreased religiosity. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) examined the relationship between material values and other important life values. They proposed that the individual orientation of material values conflicts with collective-oriented values, such as family values and religious values. Their results found considerable support for this conflicting values perspective.

Kau, Kwon, Tan and Jochen (2000) conducted a study in Singapore to measure the effect of materialistic inclination on the degree of life satisfaction. Based on a large scale values and lifestyle survey of consumers of 15 and above, the results indicated that the level of materialistic inclination deferred significantly between respondents with different religious affiliation. In the study, respondents from different religious affiliation were represented, namely, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and respondents with no religion. Their result indicated that people with no religious affiliation appeared to be more materialistic in their outlook.

On the basis of these previous research findings, the following hypotheses are developed for this study:

**H1:** There are differences between young Muslim and non-Muslim adult consumers over the type of family communication patterns adopted at home.

**H2:** There are differences between young Muslim and non-Muslim adult consumers with regards to their level of materialistic values.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample and Procedures

Materialism and family communication amongst young Muslim and non-Muslim adult consumers were examined through a survey conducted in the Klang Valley in Malaysia between January to March 2011. The target population were college students in public and private institution of higher learning. College students were chosen because generally they represent the future of a country as with a good education, they will become middle-class professionals.

The questionnaire was given to 1,200 randomly selected university and college students. Of which, 956 completed questionnaires were usable for the data analysis.

#### 3.2 Measures

All of the constructs were measured by multiple items. Generally, the respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale the extent to which they agreed with the statements (1=Strongly Disagree, to 5= Strongly Agree).
Materialism. The key constructs were assessed using previously published, multi-item measures from Richins and Dawson (1992). A 15-item interrogative format was adapted from Wong, Rindfleisch and Burroughs (2003) to measure materialism. The inter-item reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) was 0.69. The mean formed the measure of materialism, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of materialistic values.

Family communication. It was operationally defined as overt interaction between the parents and child concerning the goods and services (Churchill and Moschis, 1979). Socio-oriented family communication structure was measured with a 7-item measure, and was in line with previous research (Moschis and Moore, 1979a). The items measured the degree to which parents requested the children to conform to parental standards of consumption. Concept-oriented family communication structure was measured in line with previous research conducted by Moschis and Moore (1984) and Moschis and Moore (1979a). It consisted of a 5-item measure. The inter-item reliability scores for socially-oriented and concept-oriented family communication were 0.70 and 0.67 respectively. Religiously-oriented family communication structure was measured with six items adapted from Bindah and Othman (2012), in which parents sometimes say or do in their family conversations while their children were growing up. The inter-item reliability score for religiously-oriented family communication was 0.728.

Religion variable was measured by asking the respondents which religious beliefs they endorsed. As Malaysia embraces a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, four main categories of beliefs systems were identified, which were commonly practiced in the society. Respondents were asked to choose between “Islam”, “Buddhism”, “Hinduism”, “Christianity”, and “Others”.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Respondent Characteristics

In this section, a general profile of the respondents is discussed. Table 1.1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Basically, of the 956 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 39.9% were males and 60.1% were females. In terms of age distribution, 63.6% of the samples were between the age of 20-29 years old, followed by age range of 19 years old and below (25.4%) and the remaining of the respondents 11% were 30 years old and above. The high percentage (63.6%) of respondents in the age range of 20-29 years old was explained by the fact that the subjects for this study were young adult consumers, and was therefore the main target for response.

In terms of ethnic group, the majority of the sample consisted of Malay respondents (52.2%), followed by Chinese respondents (28.2%) and Indians (10.7%) and other ethnic groups formed (9.0%) of the sample. The respondent characteristics in terms of ethnicity were generally consistent with the Malaysian Population Census (Department of Statistics and Economic Planning Unit, 2008). Consistent with the race composition of Malaysia, in terms of religious
faith, the majority of the respondents endorsed Islam (58.2%), followed by Buddhism, (20.4%), Christianity (10.2%), Hinduism (9.4%) and others (2.0%).

It was observed that more than two third of the responding sample were single (87.8%), while (11.3 %) were married. In terms of education, the majority of the respondent in the sample group possessed a professional qualification (56.9%), and (32.2%) possessed a college diploma while 10.6% have obtained their SPM certificate. The main reason for the high proportion of university degree holders in the sample was probably due to the characteristics of the urban population.

Table1.1: Respondent Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 19</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>above 30</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow/Widower/Divorsee</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School or Less</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMR/SRP/LCE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPM/SPVM/MCE</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Diploma</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional qualification/University degree.</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>56.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: "PMR/SRP/LCE is equivalent to nine years of formal elementary and middle school education."
4.2 Religion differences between all the constructs of the Study

This section reports the investigation of religion differences in family communication and materialism construct. Preliminary statistical procedures were employed to examine the possible significant group differences in all constructs based on religion. A one-way analysis of variance was utilized to determine the significant differences in terms of religion with respect to their responses on various measures. When there were significant differences, Post Hoc Test (Scheffe) were used to determine the particular groups which differed significantly within a significant overall one-way analysis of variance.

The relationships between religion variable and all main constructs of this study were investigated by testing the significance of the mean differences between the four different religious groups. Due to a low sample size, the “Other” group for religion was dropped in the analysis.

The results in Table 1.2 showed that the mean differences between religious groups were significant for all the measures with the exception for materialism and socio-oriented family communication.

With regards to the study constructs where the mean differences were significant, subjects who practiced “Hinduism” tended to score higher on the concept-oriented family communication at home than subjects who practiced “Buddhism.” No empirical studies have thus far examined religious differences with concept-oriented family communication constructs. Hence, comparison of the present findings to past research could not be done.

Table 1.2: Religion Differences Between All the Constructs of the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Religious Group (Mean)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig b</th>
<th>Group Comparison (Scheffe)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Oriented Family Communication</td>
<td>G1 3.28 G2 3.18 G3 3.28 G4 3.18</td>
<td>1.321</td>
<td>.266</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept-Oriented Family Communication</td>
<td>G1 3.35 G2 3.34 G3 3.63 G4 3.40</td>
<td>4.699</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td>G3&gt;G2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiously-Oriented Family Communication</td>
<td>G1 3.96 G2 2.77 G3 3.57 G4 3.45</td>
<td>107.942</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>G1&gt;G2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialism</td>
<td>G1 3.54 G2 3.48 G3 3.63 G4 3.53</td>
<td>.868</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note1: a. higher scores represented greater agreement with the attributes; b. Level of significance using one-way ANOVA;
Note2: the “other” group was excluded due to too small the sample size (N=19) for one-way ANOVA analysis

Note3: Islam (G1); Buddhism (G2); Hinduism (G3); Christianity (G4)
* The mean difference was significant at p < .05

Interestingly, it was found that subjects who practiced “Islam” tended to practice and emphasize on religion in the family communication that takes place at home compared to subjects who practiced “Buddhism”, “Hinduism”, and “Christianity”. There were no empirical studies which has thus far examined the religious group differences and religiously-oriented family communication measures in the existing literature. However, past research has identified significant relationship between young adult consumers from religiously-oriented family communication patterns that takes place at home and materialism (Bindah & Othman, 2012). An interpretation of the present result could be that ‘Halal’ awareness among young Muslim consumers for products and services preferences and purchasing decisions could be due to the greater emphasized place on the type of family communication that takes place at home. This, in turn, influences the purchasing decisions of Muslim consumers, particularly young adults.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to identify differences between young Muslim and non-Muslim adult consumers in terms of the type of family communication that takes place at home, and its possible implications on materialism. It has briefly conceptualized the family communication processes and reviews the literature to illustrate the association between family communication patterns and materialism. Also the relationship between religiosity and its inverse implication on materialism was discussed.

The study was conducted in Malaysia, a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, where four main religious beliefs systems were commonly endorsed and practiced. Materialism, socio-oriented, concept-oriented and religiously-oriented family communication measures were assessed using previously published multi-item measures and the inter-reliability scores ranged from 0.67 to 0.70.

Although the result of this study did not support the hypothesized relationship between the various beliefs system endorsed and practiced by young Muslim adults and non-Muslim adult consumers and materialism, one interesting finding was found.

First, in comparison to non-Muslim young adult consumers, young Muslim adult consumers tended to emphasised on religion in the family communication that takes place at home. A possible implication for the finding could be that Muslim consumers who are concerned about “Halal” products and services in the market place is due to the communication patterns that takes place between the family at home. As Muslim consumer’s places more emphasis on religion in the family communication, it could be that the communication patterns that takes
place at home affects the purchase decisions in the marketplace, particularly in terms of “Halal” preferences when products and services are purchased.

In terms of limitations, this study has employed a scale to measure materialism but it has not been widely tested cross-culturally. Perhaps more established measurement scale which has been tested cross-culturally could be employed in similar studies in future research. As a concluding remark, this present study is an attempt to provide information which could be meaningful to help marketers to get a better understanding of their target consumers, particularly young Muslim adult consumers, their values and consumption patterns.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


