

# Conceptual Study on Malaysian Male Consumption Behaviour Towards Skin Care Products

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**Abstract:** The emergence of metrosexual trend in the recent decades, growing awareness and concerns of self-image or external appearance in male populations nowadays have not only created impetus for researchers to explore more in this new research segment, but attentions have also garnered over those companies which engaging themselves in the production of personal grooming, cosmetics and skin care products toward this blooming niche market. Hence, the primary purpose of this study is to implement a conceptual review in assessing the factors that predict Malaysian male consumption behaviour in purchasing skin care products. There are limited studies found in Malaysia context which focused in men's consumption behaviour towards skin care products thus far, therefore the findings able to deliver new knowledge and insights for fellow researchers and marketing practitioners as well. Besides, the prominent findings could also provide brand new views or angles for related companies to formulate their marketing strategies effectively and strategically to well serve this lucrative niche market.

**Keywords:** Self-image, attitudes, normative influences, purchase intention, purchase behaviour

**Paper type:** Conceptual paper

## 1. Introduction

The globalization era with rapid advancement of information technology, science, social science, economy and education has led people in this world to have better enjoyment in their livings and lifestyles. Along with the huge improvement of consumption power and market trend, people are more conscious on hygiene and beauty nowadays and subsequently this improvement has delivered opportunity and brand new market for beauty care industry (Souiden and Diagne, 2009). In former days, beauty care, cosmetics usage and skin care are all witnessed to be the "privileges" of women. Nevertheless, with the emergence of "Metrosexual" trend, it has drawn the huge attention for men to aware of their self-image, how to improve their external appearance and how to maintain their own handsomeness at all times. Men had started to pay close

attention towards the latest development of men's beauty care products, sensitive yet high receptivity towards product alternatives and deliberate thoroughly before making their purchasing decision (Moungkhem and Surakiatpinyo, 2010).

The men's beauty care or skin care market instead is a relatively new and emerging market, it is growing and it is very attractive to study on this niche market (Moungkhem and Surakiatpinyo, 2010). Skin care products have been understood as the kind of products which able to deliver the functions of cleansing, moisturising, maintaining and treating against hygienic problem of human's skin within the optimal conditions (Draelos and Thaman, 2006). According to McDougall (2011), various beauty care or skin care products' manufacturers started to diversify their focus and manufacture different products to well-serve on this fast-growing niche market. This emerging yet growing niche market is blooming and it can be a very high attractiveness industry with great potential to develop and keep expanding in future (Euromonitor, 2007). L'Oreal France had forecasted that the number of male user on beauty care cream and lotion will achieve 50% or one in every two men will be the user for the previous mentioned products during the year of 2060 (Moungkhem and Surakiatpinyo, 2010).

From the statistical point of view in observing this niche market worldwide, the overall global market value for male grooming products is approximately \$35 billion, for instance in India, men accounted for 44% of total skin care consumption while in United States, men also accounted for almost 33.4% of total consumption. Asia Pacific region has been recognised as one of the regional markets with highest growing rate for men's skin care products, whereby almost 60% of total men's skin care product sales for 2011 are generated from this regional market (Industry Report Store, 2014). In addition, the trend of metrosexual had spread along with the Japanese Pop and Korean Pop trends throughout every corners of this world lately, even the Malaysian market.

Due to a paucity of research in studying the skin care products' purchasing behaviour of male consumers in particularly the Southeast Asia region, plus there are lots of distinctiveness and differences existed in between men's and women's skin care products and markets, cosmetics and skin care manufacturing companies certainly need detailed yet comprehensive information about this new and blooming market segment, hence this study would like to commence within the national context, draw the research focus and context in Malaysia.

Pertaining to this study, the potential target respondent of Malaysian male consumers will be focused on the age group of 15 to 64. This is due to according to Worldbank (2015), this age group of individuals are those who could potentially be economically active, in other words, they are the group of individuals who may possess better earning capability and stronger consumption powers as compared to other age groups of 0 to 14 and 65 and above (refer Table 1). Besides they are also the potential group of consumers who would spend and consume on skin care products. Meanwhile, in relative to this study, skin care products will be referred to those products such as cleanser, facial foam, facial scrub, toner, moisturising cream, sun block cream, eye cream, shaving foam, anti aging and anti wrinkle products.

Table 1. Overall Malaysian and Malaysian male populations as at the year 2014

Malaysian Population (2014)	Male Population (2014)	Male Population (15 to 64 years old) (2014)
29, 901, 997	14,801,488	Appx. 10,104,589

Source: Databank.Worldbank.org (latest database update: 31 December 2014)

Beauty care or skin care market in women has been long established and continuously growing throughout times. Most of the beauty care products are conveying an implicit yet personal message to their consumers to have well care over their hygiene, beauty and healthiness through utilising their products regardless of their gender (Moungkhem and Surakiatpinyo, 2010). In past perception, women will be the

only consumer who uses beauty care or skin care products. However in recent years, emergence of metrosexual trend and influences from Korean pop as well as Japanese pop cultures toward the world, men are more aware and conscious on their external appearance, their desires and demands for handsomeness, beautifulness, aesthetics, youthfulness, healthiness and fitness, had eventually introduced and opened up the new emerging market for men's grooming or beauty care market lately (Moungkhem and Surakiatpinyo, 2010).

In this contemporary era, men's grooming or beauty care industry has not only been termed as new emerging market but it has also been recognised as one of the core prospect products sector by Euromonitor (2007) due to its growth dynamism. According to Industry Report Store (2014), the global market value for male grooming products is approximately \$35 billion and the men's skin care market is growing at higher rate in Asia as compared to the more mature women's market. In Blanchin *et al.* (2007) study, they illustrated the fact that male populations nowadays are very concern on their self-appearance since younger age to old age; in their mindsets, they see youthful and charming appearance able to assist them in boosting their popularity in work place, during client meetings, social dating and in their daily lives and it was statistically discovered that 64.4% of men take extreme care towards their skin condition. But question arises, is the fact able to generalise the male populations' motivation in various countries of this world in applying skin care products? Brief review made on past researches, several countries for instance Japan, Canada and French have been targeted in the past studies of men's cosmetics consumption, while research study on herbal cosmetic products has also been implemented in Thailand. Furthermore, the more appealing studies related to men's skin care products' consumption are also evidenced only in Sweden and Thailand thus far. The studies are respectively from Moungkhem and Surakiatpinyo (2010) and Sukato and Elsey (2009). Moungkhem and Surakiatpinyo (2010) have also discussed in their study that male's skin care market is definitely a niche market in which skin care products manufacturers striving so hard and perform their best in research and development to well-serve this new and lucrative market segment whereby they have been identified as the underserved market segment by those mainstream providers who always serve the women's market.

Hence, this study will be aimed towards male consumers in Malaysia, in which there is no specific or related research study has been undertaken in Malaysia to investigate the their purchasing behaviour on skin care products thus far. Through this research, the investigation launched on those variables and prominent results would definitely benefited and delivered novel knowledge and pragmatic insights towards marketers in designing, producing, formulating and implementing feasible marketing strategies especially in the aspect of advertising and promotion; in addition, more choices, variants or functions of quality skin care products able to be manufactured to cater the needs of this high growth potential market. The emergence of this new niche market and great company initiative in servicing the men's market will also help in boosting Malaysia's economic development via high consumptions incurred by citizens.

The following research questions are posed to specify the scope of this study and will further assist in the implementation of the research:

- (1) Is there any relationship between self-image and attitudes toward applying skin care products?
- (2) Is there any relationship between self-image and normative influences toward applying skin care products?
- (3) To what extent attitudes and normative influences toward applying skin care products affect purchase intention?
- (4) Is there any relationship between purchase intention and purchase behaviour?

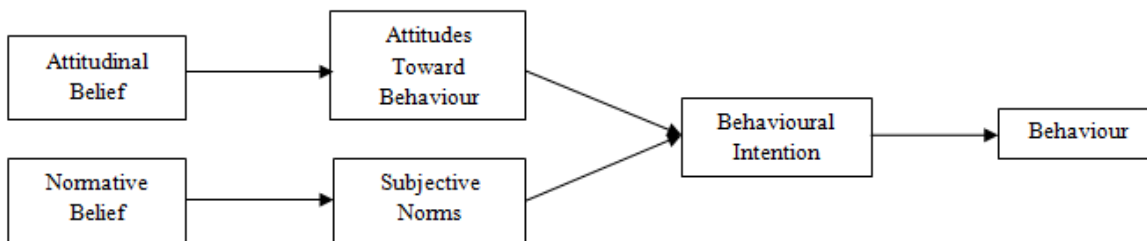
## 2. Literature Review

This section will review and explain on the relevant theory which will be employed in this research study, the relevant past studies which adopted the theory and the rationale of why this research study will leverage Theory of Reasoned Action as the main theoretical framework.

### A. Theory of reasoned action (TRA)

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was jointly coined by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen during the year of 1975 (Sukato and Elsey, 2009). This is one of the most prevailing and strongly underpinned consumer behaviour theories (refer Figure 1). Meanwhile it is also an effective causal model which developed to well-elaborate influences towards behaviours that involves cognitive processes or conscious yet rational decision making processes (Greene, 2009). This theory drawn its concentration on all voluntary behaviours which phased-out any behaviours that are routine in basis, scripted and impulsive in nature (Greene, 2009). According to Abou-Shouk (2012), TRA is a theory that explains a person's behaviour or action is determined and ascertained by their behavioural intention, or in other words it is also a theory that predict a person's behaviour based upon the person's behavioural intention. Nevertheless, TRA's core structure is formed by several constructs, namely attitudes, subjective norms, behavioural intention and behaviour or action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Sukato and Elsey (2009) described that a person's behaviour can be influenced by his or her personal attitudes over the behaviour (attitudes), how the person feels others think or view about him or her (subjective norms) and with the existence of this two critical constructs, they helped to build-up the person's behavioural intention which subsequently transform into real action or behaviour.

Figure 1. Theory of reasoned action (TRA)



However, there are several critiques have been pointed out by fellow scholars toward the comprehensiveness of TRA. In accordance to Greene (2009), she mentioned that there were questions challenged by past researchers over TRA. Firstly, incertitude arises over the adequacy of attitudes and subjective norms to predict behavioural intention and behaviour, some researchers proposed to assert previous behaviours or prior behaviours to join along with attitudes and subjective norms to explain the intention and action; second, researchers also questioned on to what degree of variation in behavioural intention and behaviour can be explained well by these constructs; last but not least, due to limited scopes of behaviours in which TRA can be applied, this critiques have drawn the attention and efforts from Fishbein and Ajzen to develop and extend TRA into its next theory called Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Besides, Bohner and Wanke (2002) expressed that TRA has missed their focuses from other determinants such as personality traits and demographic antecedents which might deliver indirect impacts toward intention and behaviour.

### *B. Rationale in adopting TRA*

Pertaining to this study, researcher will adopt and apply Theory of Reasoned Action as the theoretical framework which serves as the foundation that rooting or underpinning entire study. Subsequently, researcher will also propose and incorporate other variables in this framework which eventually the conceptual framework for this research. The main rationale in adopting TRA is due to this theory has been widely examined and one of the most prevailing consumer behaviour theory that has applied in myriad research studies for instance communication, marketing, public health and social psychology (Greene, 2009). As supported by Fagerstrom (2005), Manstead (2004) and Olson and Zanna (1993), he agreed that TRA is one of the most appropriate theories which could be employed to well predict and explain consumer behaviours. In recent decade, TRA has been applied in various research studies which covered different industries, business contexts and even across national boundaries, such as online commerce, telecommunication service, commercial bank industry, food consumption and studies in diverse cultural settings like behavioural research undertaken in Australia, Hong Kong, Norway, Taiwan, United States and etc (Sukato and Elsey, 2009).

Apart from rationale above, several justifications of why researcher would like to adopt and apply TRA in this research study. Firstly, consumers who involve in skin care products consumption are under their rational choice and volitional control; and second, consumption on skin care products is a very specific and narrow research context which is very suitable and appropriate to be studied and predict for specific consumption behaviour (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Greene (2009) has also emphasised that TRA able to deliver very detailed information in aiding the planning of marketing strategies and programmes which uniquely targeted on a specific population for instance Malaysian male who purchase skin care products in this study. Hence, TRA is the most appropriate theory to be referred and adopted in predicting Malaysian male consumption on skin care products.

### *C. Self-image and attitudes*

Although paucity of research has been undertaken to explore the consumption behaviour on skin care products, nevertheless in the past, consumer behaviour studies have extended its coverages into various contexts, for instance garment or clothing industry, personal care products, grooming products, cosmetics, and etc. In one of the studies conducted by Beaudoin *et al.* (1998) in which they revealed the finding that attitudes toward clothes purchasing are strongly associated with self-image and self-identity. As they concluded that every favourable consumptions made by an individual will definitely bring satisfaction towards the person's needs.

Attitudes is an internal feeling, belief or favourableness an individual may hoard throughout his or her life towards performing a specific behaviour. Thus, an individual will engage themselves in consuming the product or service if they believe such product or service will be useful, functional or even bring changes to their existing life, merely based upon their attitudes toward that particular product or service. As Belk (1978) mentioned that customer will have proper attitudes in purchasing cosmetics mainly due to they have the internal belief that cosmetics able to bring influences or changes over their external appearance. Emphasis has been given by Souiden and Diagne (2009) in their research study, they posited that self-concept which includes of self-image can be influenced significantly by an individual's attitudes and beliefs.

Self-image has been tested to have significant association with the attitudes towards applying skin care products in Sukato and Elsey's (2009) study. In Coulter *et al.* (2002) study, they found out that self-image has influence towards the attitudes of applying and buying cosmetic products for women in Hungary. Meanwhile, in accordance to Souiden and Diagne's (2009) study, they had indicated that grooming

products not only able to improve a man's external appearance instead it may enhance on his psychological image via the improvement of his confidence level about his self-image, hence because of their good self-image, they tend to have favourable attitudes towards applying skin care products. Moreover, the men's favourable attitude towards applying skin care products has been significant associated with the creation, development and maintenance of their self-image (Sturrock and Pioch, 1998). Reviews above has led to the following proposition.

- *Proposition 1:* Self-image is significantly related to attitudes toward applying skin care products.

#### *D. Self-image and normative influences*

As mentioned by Childers and Rao (1992), every individual will perform their behaviour in particular manner with reference to the social group that they identified and joined. They also further decomposed that normative influences could be from various social groups or reference groups, namely family-based and non-family based which comprised of friends, buddies, colleagues and etc. Similar explanation witnessed in Sukato and Elsey's (2009) study, they had included spouse or partners, friends, family and colleagues as the potential group of normative influences.

There is evidence proven the significant relationship between self-image and normative influences in Bangkok's male consumers (Sukato and Elsey, 2009). Souiden and Diagne (2009) have concluded in their research study that opinions and feedbacks from family and friends able to influence Canadian and French men in consuming cosmetic products and provide them the positive words in maintaining their external appearances. An individual will act in a certain way for instance make purchases which complied with influences from others whereby they may have the belief that adoption or application of a product able to enhance their individual's self-concept or self-image (Hu and Jasper, 2006). Besides, research result from Webster's (2000) study has also ascertained that normative influence from husband to wife's consumption behaviour. Thus, the following proposition is based upon discussions above.

- *Proposition 2:* Self-image is significantly related to normative influences toward applying skin care products.

#### *E. The relationship between attitudes and normative influences toward applying skin care products upon purchase intention*

Fishbein and Ajzen (2012) discussed that TRA has the capability in predicting individuals' intentions to perform a specific behaviour or even involve themselves in certain behaviour. They also stated given that all measures on attitudes and normative influences are highly compatible with behavioural intention, those measures will certainly able to predict precisely the behavioural intention. TRA possessed the capabilities to make behavioural intention salient enough to be noticed and predict accurately on ultimate behaviour of an individual based on attitudes and normative influences these two constructs (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2012).

Nevertheless, some research studies in the past have held differ opinions or arguments on whether attitudes are more predictive towards behavioural intention or subjective norms (normative influences) are better in prediction. For instance, research launched by Ryan and Bonfield (1980) in pertaining to credit unions influence towards customers' behavioural intention, both of them revealed that attitude construct is more predictive than normative influences. Identical finding is also witnessed in Chung and Pysarchik (2000) study which concentrated in Korean customers' intention to purchase branded consumer goods. In contrary, another study implemented by Bonfield (1974) to test customers' buying intentions toward branded products has showcased the result of normative influences are more predictive than attitudes construct. Although different opinions held by fellow researchers as illustrated earlier, Choo *et al.* (2004)

still supported that attitudes and normative influences are both significant constructs which are able to accurately predict behavioural intention.

Attitudes and normative influences from friends, colleagues and family are significantly influenced the behavioural intention of consumers in adopting Internet banking in Taiwan, as demonstrated in Shih and Fang's (2004) study. In a research study that examined on business travellers' intention to revisit the previously stayed hotel in their next business trip in Seoul, South Korea, ultimate finding of this study has concluded attitudes and normative influences have significantly related to such behavioural intention (Buttle and Bok, 1996). In connecting back to this study context, the research study undertaken by Sukato and Elsey (2009), they revealed that the association among attitudes towards applying skin care products and normative influences are positively and significantly affected the Bangkok's male consumers' purchase intention. Consumers with more favourable attitudes towards a particular product, they may have higher intention to purchase it as compared to those with less favourable attitudes. The similar finding has been found in McNally's (2002) study as well. Based on the reviews above, the following propositions have been developed.

- *Proposition 3:* Attitudes toward applying skin care products is significantly related to purchase intention.
- *Proposition 4:* Normative influences toward applying skin care products is significantly related to purchase intention.

#### *F. Purchase intention and purchase behaviour*

Myriad empirical supports in the past have demonstrated the relationship between behavioural intention and behaviour, for instance in Hrubes *et al.* (2001) study, they would like to predict hunting intentions and the behaviour itself, the results shown a significant relationship between these two constructs; another studies performed by Conner and McMillan (1999) in the intention to use marijuana and the usage behaviour as well as study made by Giles and Cairns (1995) for intention to perform blood donation and the behaviour of blood donation have all shown significant correlations between these two constructs. In Lee *et al.* (2007) study on the impact of Korean travellers' personal innovativeness towards online travel shopping behaviour, the research findings revealed that intention to search for information and intention to purchase are significantly related to the behaviour of information searches and purchases.

Purchase intention has been associated and significantly related to actual purchase behaviour in the research study which conducted by Sukato and Elsey (2009). The similar finding has been underpinned by Choo *et al.* (2004). In Choo *et al.*'s (2004) study, they had concluded that purchase intention is possible to predict the actual purchase behaviour of consumers. Within the context of Sukato and Elsey's (2009) study, purchase intention has been acted as mediator amongst beliefs in product attributes, self-image, the attitudes towards applying skin care products and normative influences to predict actual purchase behaviour of consumers in Bangkok. All four variables have ascertained the mediation impact from purchase intention which may eventually affect on the actual purchasing behaviour on skin care products. Therefore, the following proposition has been proposed for this study.

- *Proposition 5:* Purchase intention is significantly related to purchase behaviour.

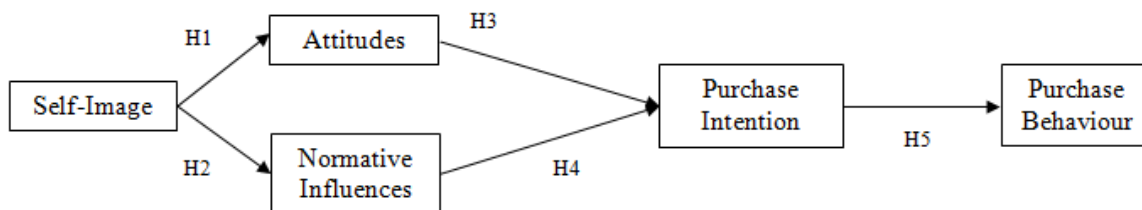
#### *G. Proposed conceptual framework*

The chief purpose of this research study is to explore and investigate comprehensively on Malaysian male's consumer behaviour in purchasing skin care products. As such, the Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action has been referred and leveraged as the main theoretical framework along with assertion made by

incorporating the self-image construct which has been proven in Sukato and Elsey's research study in the year of 2009 that it could deliver positive impact towards the attitudes and normative influences which affect the consumers' purchase intention and actual purchasing behaviour.

Past studies have indicated that self-image able to deliver influence to the consumers' attitudes towards applying skin care products, meanwhile it is also significantly associated with normative influences. Besides, the association of attitudes and normative influences towards applying skin care products will jointly influence or affect consumers' purchase intention on skin care products as well. In Ryan and Bonfield's (1975) study, they had mentioned that one of the major merits of reasoned action model was this model able to well-explain and well-predict the consumption behaviour by leveraging purchase intention as mediator in research study. Hence, the proposed conceptual framework for this research study is presented as follow (refer Figure 2).

Figure 2. Proposed conceptual framework



### 3. Conclusion

The primary purpose of this conceptual study is to assess the factors which predict the Malaysian male consumers in their consumption pattern toward skin care products. All the above conceptual reviews and arguments are leveraged to develop proposed research hypotheses in which these proposed assumptions able to attain the research study's objectives. Throughout the rigorous review on past literatures, it enable researcher to understand more and gain better insight towards the relationships between self-image, attitudes, normative influences, purchase intention and purchase behaviour, simultaneously the applicability in Malaysia national context could be examined as well. An extended empirical research paper will be developed to well-assess the propositions formed in this study and several theoretical and practical implications would be provided based on the prominent findings in future.

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