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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTENTION TO BUY FASHIONABLE APPAREL VIA ONLINE PLATFORMS: AN EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM MALAYSIA

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iD **Siti Haslina Md Harizan**[1+]
Muhammad Hafizuddin Abdul Shukor[2]

[1,2]School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
[1]Email: sitihaslina@usm.my Tel: +6046534569
[2]Email: hafiz.abdulshukor@icloud.com Tel: +6046536197

(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

The Industrial Revolution 4.0 and the recent Covid-19 pandemic has further boosted e-commerce activities worldwide, including Malaysia. Past studies have been inconclusive in explaining the ideal factors which underlie the intention of buying fashionable apparel via online platform. Thus, this study investigates as to whether apparel characteristics, platform features, and promotion have a significant positive influence on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platforms. A total of 306 samples were collected among Malaysian adult consumers. The results of the analysis showed that apparel characteristics impose the strongest positive influence on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platforms, followed by platform features and promotion. The study enriches the body of knowledge by demonstrating the impact of the underlying factors in determining the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platforms based on the Theory of Planned Behavior. The practical implications reveal that marketers should enhance the characteristic of apparel available online, the features of the online platforms used and the promotional price of their online deals. Limitations and suggestions for future studies are also presented.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature of consumer behavior by focusing on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platforms. Apparel characteristics, platform features, and promotion were found to be important influencing factors. Findings of the study enable researchers to unravel other purchasing predictors underlying online consumer behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of technology has led to increased public reliance on the Internet in various matters of life. In the realm of Industrial Revolution 4.0, the Internet has brought great changes in all aspects especially in the development of the business and marketing world. With a dynamic economy and infrastructure developed for digital technology, Malaysia is an extremely attractive market for e-commerce. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission 2019 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2019) report found that Internet usage in Malaysia has increased rapidly from 24.5 million users in 2016 to 28.7 million users in 2018. This is attributable to the fact that Internet accessibility is more widespread and comprehensive throughout

Malaysia. The high use of the Internet in Malaysia creates extensive opportunities for the e-commerce market and online shopping platforms and websites which provide easy online access to purchases in Malaysia. Among them are *Lazada, 11street, Shopee, Auction, Carousell, Zalora, Qoo10, Ebay*, and *Fave*. This phenomenon has triggered the trend of online shopping which is generally well received by consumers in Malaysia. Online shopping allows consumers to locate a wide range of essential goods and services easily and quickly as it can be done by browsing online shopping websites via smartphones, laptops, and other electronic goods with Internet access.

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has further boosted e-commerce activities worldwide, including Malaysia. Following the orders of movement control order, social distancing and work from home, sales generated by e-commerce have increased (Bhatti et al., 2020). Consumers have switched to online shopping which is more conducive and safer. An increase of traffic to e-commerce websites for fashionable goods by 5% was recorded compared to before the pandemic (Adrienko, 2020). One of the most popular, fast-growing, and sustainable industries which run via online shopping during the Covid-19 pandemic is fashionable apparel.

The influx of various leading global fashion companies into the local market such as Zalora, ZARA, H&M, Forever 21, PUMA, Adidas, and Nike and the emergence of sales platforms such as Lazada and Shopee which dominate the e-commerce market in Malaysia (ASEAN UP, 2019) has further boost the online fashionable apparel industry in the country. Online fashionable apparel retail covers a large part of the online sales market in Malaysia. A large number of traditional retailers has realized the potential of the Internet as a robust marketing channel with steady market size growth (Liu, 2012). Although the purchase of fashionable products is often associated with impulsive purchasing behavior, this consumer's decision-making process is still not conclusive especially when it comes to online purchases (Ramya & Ali, 2016). The latest studies that specialize in online shopping trends, do not give much attention to the determining factors of the online fashionable apparel purchases (Kumar, Khan, & Kesharwani, 2019). Since the study of actual purchase behavior is less practical to do, then the intention of buying can be used as an indicator in predicting actual purchase behavior (Jiradilok, Malisuwan, Madan, & Sivaraks, 2014). Thus, the study should pay attention to the factors that influence the customers' intention to buy a particular product so that the actual buying opportunities may increase (Thamizhvanan & Xavier, 2013). To increase the competitiveness of online stores, an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence online shopping consumers should be given priority especially in terms of apparel characteristics, platform features, and prices offered.

Apparel characteristics play an important role in influencing consumer purchasing behavior. Apparel characteristics are considered as key cues for consumers during the active evaluation process prior to the final purchase of a garment product (Eckman, Damhorst, & Kadolph, 1990; Rahman, Fung, Chen, Chang, & Gao, 2017). Although both extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics are considered important in the choice of apparel by consumers (Rahman et al., 2017) the influence of product characteristics such as sustainability, country of origin, comfort, fabric, manufacturing quality, and product durability are still underestimated .

Online platform features also play the important role in influencing users to shop online. Previous studies have shown that online shoppers who are frustrated with website design that are ineffective in conveying information will find it easier to leave the website without any purchase (Kim, Kim, & Lennon, 2006; Kim & Stoel, 2004; Ramya & Ali, 2016). Thus, the influence of platform features according to the context of fashionable apparel should be highlighted in predicting the intention of purchasing it online.

In addition, the variety of apparel options obtainable at attractive prices has convinced consumers to buy online. By comparing prices online, it is easier for consumers to evaluate product quality standards (Santos, 2003). However, studies have yet to analyze the significant influence of promotion on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform (Rahman et al., 2017). Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of apparel characteristics, platform features and promotion on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Intention to Buy Online

The intention of buying online refers to the result of the attitude or behavior of the willingness of consumers to buy from certain online retailers (Jiradilok et al., 2014). According to Im and Ha (2011) buying intention is considered as one of the most important variables in predicting future consumer behavior. Pavlou (2003) found that the appropriate measurement of online purchase intentions on a website can assess the behavior of online users. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that predict or influence the intention of buying fashionable apparel online.

2.2. Factors Affecting the Intention to Buy Fashionable Apparel via Online Platforms

Thamizhvanan and Xavier (2013) state that online retailers should give due consideration to the factors that influence consumer buying intentions to increase their actual buying opportunities. Past review studies have found that among the critical factors that make an online business successful are aspects of website design and delivery, marketing techniques used, and elements related to trust in purchasing (Fouskas, Pachni-Tsitiridou, & Chatziharistou, 2020). For online apparel purchases, review studies highlighted that apparel characteristics, technological and social factors as well as consumer characteristics are among the themes studied by past researchers (Kumar et al., 2019). However, not much attention has been given in determining the factors of buying fashionable apparel online other than the study conducted by Yu, Cho, and Johnson (2017) which covers the influence of brands on the purchase of fashionable apparel and Hwang, Chung, and Sanders (2016) focusing on solar-powered apparel. Therefore, an understanding of the factors that influence the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform should be given sufficient attention especially in terms of product and platform features, as well as promotional elements.

2.3. Apparel Characteristics

Product characteristics or cues play an important role in influencing the purchasing behavior of apparel products (Eckman et al., 1990; Rahman et al., 2017). According to Rahman et al. (2017) several evaluation cues often considered by consumers include extrinsic cues such as brand name, price, and country of origin and intrinsic cues covering style, color, suitability, comfort, fabric type, durability, care facilities, wardrobe coordination, and quality of workmanship. Some specific features of fashionable apparel much less detected in previous studies have been highlighted in this study namely sustainability, country of origin, comfort, fabric, manufacturing quality, and product durability.

Sustainability characteristics are the critical determinant when purchasing apparel (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014; Ritch, 2015; Welters, Hethorn, & Ulasewicz, 2008) Consumers who are sensitive to aspects pertaining to sustainability, also tend to examine sustainability-related labels on products (Ritch, 2015). Knowledgeable consumers are more willing to purchase organic cotton clothing at a higher price and have an optimistic behavior towards organic cotton clothing compared to consumers with less knowledge (Oh & Abraham, 2016). They are also found to be more concerned with the social and environmental ethics rather than price and quality in buying apparel (Ha & Kwon, 2016). In a study done by Hwang, Lee, and Diddi (2015) women of Y generation are said to possess a high responsibility and moral attitude towards buying clothing that are made of organic materials or recycled materials and those with fair trade label. Therefore, it is important to investigate the importance of features concerning sustainability in the selection of fashionable apparel.

The country of origin can directly influence the intention to buy fashionable apparel (Garrett, Sungkyu, & Kyounghee, 2017; Tjandra, Omar, & Ensor, 2015). In addition to the country of manufacture or country of birth of a brand, the country of origin also refers to the country that designs apparel and incorporates its manufacturing technology (Ar & Kara, 2012; Garrett et al., 2017). Poor perception of the producer country can influence consumer

evaluation of a brand and product quality (Ar & Kara, 2012). In a study done by Rahman and Koszewska (2020) male consumers tend to evaluate apparel based on brand and country of origin compared to women. Consumers are also found to often choose products produced in developed countries (Tjandra et al., 2015) but this still requires further understanding of online fashionable apparel.

Comfort is often associated with the suitability of apparel i.e. visual and physical satisfaction of apparel as well as its function on the body (McKinney & Shin, 2013). The value of fashionable apparel lies in the appropriate aesthetic features (Cachon & Swinney, 2011) which have been utilized by various online fashionable apparel retailers such as H&M and Topshop which have offered virtual experimental technology whereby users can see the visualization of appropriate personal apparel (Zeekit, 2018). A research done by Rahman and Koszewska (2020) discovered that the Polish consumers would not purchase a sustainable 'green' clothing if it does not possess aesthetic value, functional and financial benefits to fulfil their needs and aspiration. Nevertheless, empirical evidence is still needed to understand the influence of apparel comfort in the purchase of fashionable apparel online.

Purchase intention is also influenced by the type of fabric used to produce the garment (Hyo, Yan, & Eckman, 2014). The type of fabric represents the price and quality of apparel (Rahman, 2012). Large fashion competitors often produce apparel from natural materials such as organic cotton and recycle textiles for apparel (H&M, 2018). The characteristics of fabrics used in manufacturing apparel enabled consumers to compare their perceptions with the performance of the actual products (Chen-Yu, Kim, & Lin, 2017). Therefore, the influence of fabric types on the purchase of fashionable apparel online requires further investigation.

Manufacturing quality or workmanship is also one of the important apparel characteristics in determining online consumer purchases. Consumers who actively seek and learn about the manufacturing process of a product are found to be more likely to check the quality and quality of the product (Hines & O'Neal, 1995). The quality of apparel acts as a clue in making a more accurate purchasing decision and as the basis of comparison between perception and the actual performance of the product (Chen-Yu et al., 2017). The level of industry quality and fast-made fashion standards produce low quality apparel and this contributes to the decline in understanding and evaluation of workmanship and manufacturing quality, a phenomenon increasingly accepted by customers (Cline, 2012; Tjandra et al., 2015). Thus, the influence of manufacturing quality on the purchase of fashionable apparel online has not yet been fully unraveled.

Apparel durability plays an important role in consumer evaluation of the quality of a garment (Kyu-Hye, 2006; Sneddon, Lee, & Soutar, 2012). Triemstra-Johnston (2013) outlines three main types of endurance in a garment, namely physical, emotional, and potential. Physical durability refers to the functional components of the apparel (Fletcher, 2012) such as the durability of apparel after purchase and washing by consumers (Triemstra-Johnston, 2013). Emotional resilience refers to the relationship between the consumer and the product that gives meaning to the wearer (Chapman, 2009). Aspects of potential resilience in apparel mean the ability of apparel for aesthetic change, maintenance and sharing of experiences with others (Triemstra-Johnston, 2013). For some consumers, popularity is more important than the physical durability of the apparel because a large number of fashionable items are worn only a few times before disposal (Fulton & Lee, 2010). Consumers in China are more concerned with the aspects of social and ethical resilience compared to environmental sustainability when purchasing apparel (Rahman, Fung, & Chen, 2020). In Poland, aesthetic, functional, and symbolic values are also important factors in choosing fashionable apparel (Rahman & Koszewska, 2020). Although disposable fashion causes fashionable apparel to lose quality and physical endurance, this is the opposite when it comes to emotional endurance (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Emotional aspects triggered by the websites such as excitedness and eagerness experienced by consumers could influence the online apparel purchasing positively (Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2020). Thus, studies need to be conducted to understand the influence of apparel durability in the purchase of fashionable apparel online. Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis exists:

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H1: Apparel characteristics have a significant positive influence on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform.

2.4. Platform Features

Previous studies have shown that platform features are considered important predictors in online purchases (Kim & Eom, 2002; Lee & Lin, 2005; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). Poor website design quality such as difficulty accessing the website, too many options offered, slow access to the website, lack of context and organizational information can potentially cause problems for users (Honey, 2002). Elements such as organizational structure, website filter categories, photos and product information in the online retail space can influence consumer decisions in purchasing various types of products, investigating product types and forming attitudes towards products (Kahn, 2017).

Lee, Podlaseck, Schonberg, Hoch, and Gomory (2000) outlined several key categories of online retail cues namely product diversity, shopping metaphors, and website design features to address the ineffectiveness of websites on the purchase of online goods. The variety of product types can appeal to online consumers (Lee et al., 2000). This is important because the size of the gadget screen is smaller than the physical store environment for browsing (Kahn, 2017) and consumers often make quick purchase decisions (Milosavljevic, Navalpakkam, Koch, & Rangel, 2012) including in the selection of fashionable apparel sold online. The variety of apparels is also influenced by the convenience experienced by consumers while browsing the websites (Chitra, Faraday, & Bennet, 2017). Through these findings, it is important to examine the impact of product variety on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform.

Shopping metaphors can be associated with information retrieval methods and website browsing by buyers (Lee et al., 2000). Product reviews and recommendations are very useful to consumers in making purchasing decisions (Chen, Lu, Wang, & Pan, 2019; Husnain, Rehman, Syed, & Akhtar, 2019; Xia, Pan, Zhou, & Zhang, 2020). Other online hedonic features also increase product value and produce a positive purchasing experience among consumers (Fiore, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Ha & Stoel, 2012; Wu, Lee, Fu, & Wang, 2014). Besides the easiness in obtaining information on the websites, the efficiency of the brand or company in solving customer's problem is significant in online apparel purchasing (Acquila-Natale & Iglesias-Pradas, 2021) including the simplified process and procedures for delivering and returning of goods. Thus, the shopping metaphor should be considered as part of the website element that influences the intention of buying fashionable apparel online.

Website or platform design is a multi-application infrastructure that combines layout, graphics, information, interactive or communication features as well as includes order processing, personalization and product selection (Ha & Stoel, 2012; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003). The design of a website or platform should emphasize the attractiveness of the interface (interface) and features of user-friendliness to the users who browse it Kim and Eom (2002); Kim and Stoel (2004) because the features of the interface and the website can influence the purchase intention (Prashar, Sai Vijay, & Parsad, 2017; Ranganathan, 2012). Graphics are also an important element especially in the selection of apparel based on sensory assessment through visual presentation techniques (Kim & Lennon, 2008). Consumers are also like to shop on websites that display a lot of information, are easily accessible and well organized (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001) because they can easily compare products and make good choices (Blanco, Sarasa, & Sanclemente, 2010; Eduard, Flaviβn, & Guinalíu, 2007). The quality of service provided is closely related to the relevancy of information displayed on the portal or websites whereby this can attract customers to revisit the portal or websites in the future (Kautish & Rai, 2019). Other than the information on apparel, the aspect of privacy or security during payment is another important criterion in purchasing apparel through personal websites (Saricam & Erdumlu, 2017). Therefore, it is important to study the impact of website or platform design on the intention of buying fashionable apparel via online platform.

The feature of virtual fitting of apparel was found to increase customer's loyalty by limiting their set of options and reducing their uncertainties by recommending appropriate measurement size (Gallino & Moreno, 2018). It is also discovered that augmented reality technology used in a website can help buyers to choose the correct clothing size, to understand visual attributes such as style, and increases their purchasing intention (Baytar, Chung, & Shin, 2020). Website functionality features such as the availability of product categorization and filters increase the positive purchasing opportunities for consumers (Fiore et al., 2005; Ha & Stoel, 2012; Wu et al., 2014). Though, the extent to which virtual fitting influences the intention to purchase fashionable apparel has yet to be determined. Based on the argument, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H2: Platform features have a significant positive influence on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform.

2.5. Promotion

Price is often used as a marketing tactic to increase buying intentions and drive product sales (Floh & Madlberger, 2013; Ranganathan, 2012; Shreenivasan, Vaijayanthi, & Rakavi, 2017). Prices include promotions, limited time offers, and special offers (Floh & Madlberger, 2013). Product sales can be stimulated using the "loss avoidance" tactic i.e. consumers tend to avoid the risk of loss when the purchase reward is offered as a profit for themselves and this is used to influence the purchase intention (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). Empirical studies show that promotion have a positive influence on impulsive purchasing decisions (Arifianti, 2013) general purchasing intentions (Chang & Wildt, 1994; Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991), online products (Anandya, Dudi, & Citra, 2017) and underwear sold online (Kim & Stoel, 2004; Ngwe, Ferreira, & Teixeira, 2019; Xia et al., 2020). Fernández and González (2020) found that kids are motivated by the low price and promotions in online shopping. Although consumers considered themselves as loyal, e-coupons that are offered to them could change their habits in online apparel purchasing (Smith, Shock, & Beaves, 2019). Buyers who are sensitive to price tend to bear the costs of searching products voluntarily just to seek for discounted products (Ngwe et al., 2019). The high level of uncertainty is not a barrier in online apparel purchasing if the prices are low regardless of the customer's experience (Kim & Krishnan, 2015). The proportion of discounts is regarded as one of the important criteria in purchasing apparel via personal websites (Saricam & Erdumlu, 2017). There was a positive response towards online promotions and coupons among consumers in Indonesia (Himawan & Abduh, 2015). Discounts were also found to influence consumers' perception on online apparel purchasing (Lee & Chen-Yu, 2018). Based on this argument, the following hypothesis is stated as:

H3: Promotion has a significant positive influence on the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform.

2.6. The Underlying Theory

This study model is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior which explains that the intention to perform a behavior can be predicted from the attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Product and platform features describe the user's attitude towards the use of technology-based systems (i.e., the Internet) or given procedures that determine the likelihood of using such a fashionable apparel website or online platform in the end. Subjective norms that reveal an individual's perception of another individual's influence on a behavior can be translated through other individuals 'opinions and reviews of online purchases. Perceived behavioral control is represented by promotion that explain the financial ability of consumers in the probability of buying fashionable apparel online. The model of the study is presented as in Figure 1.
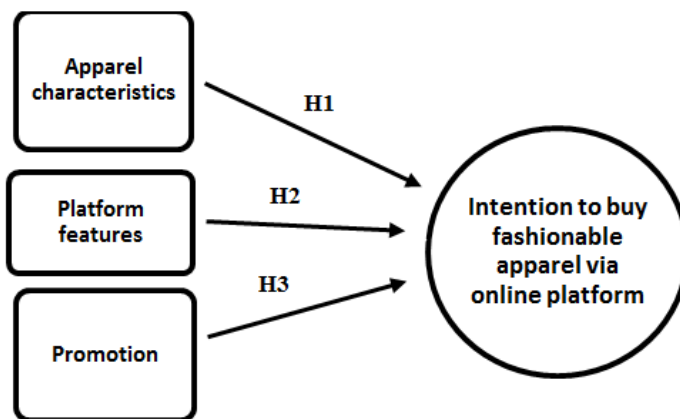
Figure-1. The model of the study.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was used in designing this study. The independent variables included apparel characteristics, platform features and promotion while dependent variable was the intention of purchasing fashionable apparel via online platform. The study's population involved adults aged between 15 and 40 years, had experience of making online apparel purchases, and lived in Penang, Malaysia. The selection of respondents at this location is justified by the density of internet users and the extensive internet access network, which allows easy access to Internet usage and online purchasing activities. In addition, other aspects such as educational level, socio-economic level and exposure to the internet were also considered. Online questionnaire forms were provided through the Google Form platform. The instruments used in the questionnaire were adapted from past studies and included eleven items assessing product characteristics (Rahman & Kharb, 2018) seven items gauging platform features (Floh & Madlberger, 2013) four items measuring promotion (Kim, Xu, & Gupta, 2012) and five items evaluating the intention of purchasing fashionable apparel online (Moshrefjavadi, Rezaie, Nourbakhsh, Poursaeedi, & Asadollahi, 2012). All measurement instruments used a 5-points Likert scale (1 = "Very unimportant" to 5 = "Very important"). Prior to the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted on ten participants to identify and review questions to avoid ambiguity. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS software.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A total of 306 samples were successfully collected and they formed a 76.5% response rate. Most respondents were men (51.3%), aged between 31 and 35 years (27.8%), Malays (56.2%), working in the private sector (44.8%), have a monthly income between RM2001.00 to 3,000.00, possess a Diploma as the highest education (41.2%), and had more than 10 years of experience in Internet use (46.1%). Reliability analysis found that all variables reached an optimum level of more than 0.70 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2014). For descriptive analysis, the mean for purchase intention was 4.08, apparel characteristics, 3.85, platform features, 4.06, and promotion, 4.24 while standard deviations were 0.45, 0.59, 0.57, and 0.62, respectively. Pearson correlation analysis (see Table 1) shows that product characteristics (r = .51, p = .00) have the strongest positive relationship with purchase intent, followed by website characteristics (r = .46, p = .00), and promotion (r = .30, p = .00).

Table-1. Pearson correlation analysis results between variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Apparel characteristics	-			
2. Platform features	0.54**	-		
3. Promotion	0.27**	0.40**	-	
4. Intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform	0.51**	0.46**	0.30**	-

Note: ** Correlation is significant at p<.00 (one-tailed).

To test the research hypothesis, multiple regression analysis (see Table 2) was carried out and it was found that 31.8% variance in purchase intention was explained by apparel characteristics, platform features, and price and the model was significant (F = 46.96, p =. 00). The Durbin-Watson test showed a turnover of 1.96 and was in the range of 1.5 to 2.5 which meant there was no auto-correlation error. The histogram of the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform shows the normal distribution of data while the linearity of the data can be summarized through residual plots between the independent variables and the dependent variable which indicates the absence of significant heteroscedasticity problem. The tolerance value for all predictors is greater than 0.10 while the VIF value is less than 10, indicating the absence of multi-collinearity error. Thus, the model is found to be fit.

Table-2. Results of multiple regression analysis in the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables.

	Standardized Beta
Apparel characteristics	0.359**
Platform features	0.221**
Promotion	0.114*
Intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform	
R2	0.318
Adjusted R2	0.311
F value	46.964**
Durbin-Watson	1.962

Note:
** Correlation is significant at p<.00
* Correlation is significant at p<.05
Dependent variable: Intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform.

Based on the results of multiple regression analysis, apparel characteristics had the strongest positive effect on purchase intention (β = 0.36, p = 0.00), followed by platform features (β = 0.22, p = .00), and promotion (β = 0.11, p <.05). H1, H2 and H3 have been fully supported. In short, the relationship between all independent variables and intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform can be explained in the following equations:

Intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform = 1.76 + 0.36 (apparel characteristics) + 0.22 (platform features) + 0.11 (promotion).

5. DISCUSSION

Although the online fashionable apparel industry covers a large part of the online sales market in Malaysia, the process of making online purchasing decisions by consumers is not conclusive (Ramya & Ali, 2016). Gaps still exist in past studies that require a broader understanding in order to explain the intention of buying fashionable apparel online (Kumar et al., 2019). This involves the influence of more comprehensive and dominant fashionable apparel features in purchasing, platform features that follow the context of the product, and the promotion offered. The study found that all the factors studied had a significant positive influence on the intention of buying fashionable apparel online.

5.1. Apparel Characteristics

The influence of product characteristics that are still rather obscure in previous studies namely sustainability, country of origin, comfort, fabric, manufacturing quality, and durability have been tested in this study. Based on the results of the study, the characteristics of the product were found to contribute the most dominant influence on the intention of buying fashionable apparel online. Sustainability features contribute significantly to the intention to buy fashionable apparel via online platform. This discovery further expands the results of the previous study (Ha & Kwon, 2016; Hwang et al., 2015; Rahman & Koszewska, 2020; Ritch, 2015). Consumers in Malaysia, especially in the state of Penang are beginning to realize the importance of preserving environmental sustainability through online purchasing practices. Apart from educational institutions and the media, awareness regarding sustainability

is also triggered by the efforts of certain parties, especially state governments and non-governmental organizations which emphasize the practice of sustainability in the daily lives of the people in Penang through various policies, campaigns and programs implemented from time to time.

In addition to sustainability characteristics, the study also adds to the understanding of the influence of the country of origin of the product on the purchase intentions previously studied (Garrett et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2020; Tjandra et al., 2015). Just like consumers in other countries, those in Penang demand that the quality of apparel purchased based on the country of origin is excellent especially those produced by developed countries. The use of environmentally friendly raw materials in producing apparel is considered important.

The results of the study have also supported that the comfort features of apparel can have an impact on the intention of buying fashionable apparel online. This is in tandem with the findings of Zeekit (2018) which emphasize that the aesthetic characteristics of apparel can be translated through the advantages of online channels that allow the personalization of apparel. This in turn increase the wearer's self-comfort in terms of aesthetics or acceptable social norms and adds to the functionality and performance of apparel in the eyes of the public. The purchasing of apparel should also provide adequate aesthetic value in fulfilling the needs and aspiration of consumers as suggested by Rahman and Koszewska (2020).

The intention of buying fashionable apparel online was also found to be influenced by the type of fabric used to produce it as discovered by Chen-Yu et al. (2017) and Hyo et al. (2014). This is because consumers rationally associate the type of fabric with the quality of apparel. In addition, personal and direct benefits derived from the type of fabric worn such as prestige and suitability associated with the local weather especially in Penang which experiences a hot and humid Equatorial climate throughout the year, are extremely important.

The quality of fashion-making apparel is also found to be one of the important features influencing the purchasing intentions of online consumers which is agreed by Chen-Yu et al. (2017). Consumers are concerned about the quality of making fashionable apparel even though the level of the quality of the industry and fashion-made standards are fast becoming obsolete; this is contrary to the views expressed in the study conducted by Cline (2012) and Tjandra et al. (2015). The findings of this study also illustrate that consumers actively seek and learn about the manufacturing process while examining product quality as proposed in the study carried out by Hines and O'Neal (1995).

The results of this study also revealed that product durability features play an important role in strengthening the intention of buying fashionable apparel online. The findings of this study have built on the discoveries of studies by Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010); Kyu-Hye (2006); Rahman. and Koszewska (2020); Rahman et al. (2020); Sneddon et al. (2012) by applying them in the context of adult consumers in Penang. Consumers care about the physical, emotional, and potential aspects of fashionable apparel purchased online. The physical durability of the garment increases the satisfaction of the buyer with the value of the price paid while the emotional endurance guarantees lasting satisfaction to the wearer and becomes a source of inspiration for other consumers to buy it.

5.2. Platform Features

Platform features are the second most important factor influencing the intention of buying fashionable apparel via online platform in this study. The findings of this study are in line with the discoveries of studies conducted by Kim and Lee (2002); Lee and Lin (2005); Prashar et al. (2017) and Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001). This study has tested the influence of platform features that are still rather obscure, in comparison to previous studies. The variety of product types on the website is found to be significant in influencing the intention of buying fashionable apparel. Consumers are also interested in getting the latest fashionable apparel on the website.

In addition to product diversity, respondents consider that product reviews and recommendations are also among the important features of the website in triggering online apparel purchase intentions. The results of this study are in line with the findings of Chen et al. (2019); Husnain et al. (2019) and Xia et al. (2020). In addition, this

study has discovered that product reviews or recommendations are usually obtained from the retailer itself, past buyer testimonials, and public conversations about the product on social media.

Website or platform design have also been found to influence the intention of buying fashionable apparel online. Product information and images as well as close-knit, high-resolution, and structured apparel visualization techniques enable virtual fitting and interactive apparel testing, as agreed by Baytar et al. (2020); Gallino and Moreno (2018). The function of website filters is also important in tailoring information and products to consumer preferences when shopping online as suggested by Fiore et al. (2005); Kahn (2017) and Wu et al. (2014).

5.3. Promotion

The findings of this study indicate that promotion is the third important factor which influences online fashionable purchase intention, which supported previous findings by Floh and Madlberger (2013); Ranganathan (2012) and Shreenivasan et al. (2017). Based on the effects of consistent exposure through advertisements offering discounts and promotions, consumers tend to make judgments on the advertised apparel (Fernández & González, 2020; Lee & Chen-Yu, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). This has successfully built a positive relationship between customers and selected products as found by previous studies (Anandya et al., 2017; Arifianti, 2013; Chang & Wildt, 1994; Dodds et al., 1991; Floh & Madlberger, 2013; Kim & Stoel, 2004; Ngwe et al., 2019; Xia et al., 2020). Certainty in dealing with the retailer further increases the desire to reap the rewards of profit from transactions made in the form of perceived lower prices (Dodds et al., 1991). Online apparel purchasing which is driven by discounts are indeed supported (Saricam & Erdumlu, 2017). With this, it is fair to say that consumers are always expecting promotional deals from retailers in increasing their purchasing intentions towards fashionable apparel sold online.

5.4. Implications of the Study

The implications of the study can be explained from theoretical and practical points of view. From a theoretical point of view, this study further strengthens the understanding of the factors that determine the intention of purchase behavior based on the Theory of Planned Behavior by expanding the applicability of the theory in the context of buying fashionable apparel online. This phenomenon can be predicted by the characteristics of products and websites that represent attitudes towards fashionable apparel, opinions and reviews on websites that explain subjective norms through past buyers' opinions and reviews, and promotion that explains perceived behavioral control.

From a practical standpoint, this study suggests several implications for online fashionable apparel marketers. First, online apparel marketers should improve their marketing strategy by highlighting the features of apparel sold such as sustainability, country of origin, comfort, type of fabric, manufacturing quality, and durability as these features have a strong impact in triggering consumer buying intentions.

Second, the features of websites that offer fashionable apparel can influence online shopping intentions, especially among the members of the younger generation who are skilled in the use of technology. This generation is more sensitive to the changes and development of the features of a website that is frequently visited. Therefore, marketers need to ensure that the design of the website is always easy to read and browse, has a neat layout, and looks attractive so that users can locate information easily and clearly.

Third, fashionable apparel retailers should be wise in formulating the price of such clothing sold online. Online fashionable apparel marketers need to ensure that the promotion offered can meet customer expectations and encourage repeat purchases.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study was conducted when the world faced the Covid-19 virus pandemic. Researchers faced constraints in obtaining information from scientific sources such as in university libraries and other reference sources. The distribution of questionnaires to respondents could not be done physically following the compliance with the standard operating procedures that were set in place. Thus, data had to be collected online through the Google Form questionnaire. In addition, samples obtained may not have been representative of the population of online apparel buyers in general because many respondents in this study consisted of ethnic Malays compared to other ethnic groups. The study focused only on the online fashionable apparel industry and thus, the generalization of the findings to other industries or product categories still needs further studies. Future studies need to incorporate other predictive factors that are expected to increase the intention of buying fashionable apparel via online platform and add mediating or moderating variables in explaining the existing relationships between the variables.

7. CONCLUSION

Online fashionable apparel retailing is a popular and fast-growing industry in Malaysia. Apart from forming a large market, the industry is also proven to be sustainable when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the country. Increased purchasing power and consumer innovation have made the Internet a solid marketing channel for retailers. With the steady growth of market size, the Internet provides an ideal platform for retailers to offer fashionable apparel to consumers through website technology and social media. The results show that apparel characteristics are the most important factor in influencing consumers' purchasing intentions towards online fashionable apparel. In addition, platform features, and promotion are no exception in giving a significant impact on purchase intentions. Therefore, it is appropriate for marketers to focus on these factors in formulating effective and sustainable marketing strategies. To develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, it is necessary to conduct studies that can unravel other purchasing predictors in the future in a broader context.

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