



## Personal values and mall shopping behavior: The mediating role of attitude and intention among Chinese and Thai consumers

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Available online 13 November 2011

#### Keywords:

Personal values  
Mall attitude  
Mall attributes  
Shopping intention  
Mall shopping behavior  
Retailing

### ABSTRACT

Personal values are important determinants of consumer behavior. While previous research has identified values (i.e., openness to change and self-enhancement) which guide consumers' mall shopping behavior, they have been set in a Western cultural context. By adopting a value–attitude–behavior (VAB) model, this study examines what and how personal values influence consumers' mall shopping behavior in two non-Western countries, namely China and Thailand. The results confirm the existence of the causal flow of VAB. Chinese are guided by self-transcendence and self-enhancement values, whereas Thais are guided by openness to change values. Shopping intention is found to mediate the attitude–behavior link in the Chinese sample and improves the predictive power of values towards behavior. Although a relatively weaker mediating effect is found in the Thai sample, shopping intention does not lead to stronger predictive power of values.

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### 1. Introduction

Over the decades, it has widely been acknowledged that personal values can serve as grounds for behavioral decisions in consumption behavior (Costa et al., 2004; Tai, 2008; Koo et al., 2008; Doran, 2009; Durvasula et al., 2011). Consumption behaviors are viewed as a means to achieving desired end-states or values (Michon and Chebat, 2004; Wagner, 2007). However, the major criticism of examining a simple relationship between values and behavior is that values are relatively abstract, thus are viewed as distal determinants of behavior that can only affect behavior through a number of less abstract or more proximal determinants, like attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Homer and Kahle, 1988; McCarty and Shrum, 1994; Thøgersen and Grunert, 1997; Shim and Eastlick, 1998; Shim and Maggs, 2005; Hartman et al., 2006). Accordingly, a value–attitude–behavior (VAB) hierarchy was developed and has been validated in healthy food consumption (Homer and Kahle, 1988; Grunert and Juhl, 1995), environmental behavior (McCarty and Shrum, 1993; Thøgersen and Grunert, 1997), and more recently, e-shopping behavior (Jayawardhena, 2004).

However, the testing of the model in a mall setting is relatively new and has been limited (Shim and Eastlick, 1998). Although several researchers have identified *what* underlying values may determine consumers' mall shopping behavior (Roy, 1994; Shim and

Eastlick, 1998; Swinyard, 1998; Thompson and Chen, 1998; Erdem et al., 1999; Stoel et al., 2004), few have systematically articulated *how* these values influence mall shopping behavior with theoretical support. Additionally, as the findings of these studies are mainly derived from a Western context, it is unclear whether similar values and patterns in which values influence behavior will be found in a non-Western context. It is also unclear whether similar findings will be found across two nations that share similar cultural backgrounds. In their study, Shim and Eastlick (1998) replicate Homer and Kahle's (1988) work, and find that compared with the previous study, the link between attitude and behavior is weaker in a mall setting, which implies the existence of *additional factors* which may influence this relationship, given the contextual nature of mall shopping behavior. Therefore, in an attempt to bridge these gaps, this study tests the previously developed VAB model to examine what and how personal values influence consumers' mall shopping behavior in China and Thailand. This study seeks to improve the VAB model by exploring the mediating effect of shopping intention and attitudes.

This study contributes to the existing mall shopping literature at the theoretical and practical levels in the following ways. First, this study tests the theory developed in the West in two non-Western countries (i.e., China and Thailand). Second, although previous studies have examined the attitude–intention (Bagozzi et al., 2000; Ajzen, 2008) and attitude–behavior/intention relations (Teng et al., 2007; Kim and Chung, 2011), to the best knowledge of the authors, no study has put personal values, attitude, intention and behavior into the same model in a mall setting. Third, no study has investigated differences in mall shopping behavior among

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consumers in China and Thailand, two countries which share a similar cultural background. Fourth, the findings of this study can help mall managers to craft effective competitive marketing strategies by meeting consumers' wants and needs at a deeper level. Bachrach (1995) proposes that understanding the underlying personal values that guide consumers' mall shopping behavior will enable mall managers to win their shoppers emotionally and gain their trust relatively more easily.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

A previous study in a Western context suggests that personal values are determinants of consumers' mall shopping behavior, however, values only influence behavior indirectly through the mediating effect of attitude (Shim and Eastlick, 1998). Values are culturally determined (Rokeach, 1973), thus it is proposed that although a similar causal flow will be found in a non-Western context, values that predict mall shopping behavior of Western shoppers may be different from the ones that predict Chinese and Thai shoppers' behavior, given their sharp differences in cultural backgrounds. It is argued that in addition to attitude, other factors may also exist to influence the value–behavior relationship, as mall shopping is a contextual-driven behavior (Shim and Eastlick, 1998). Extant literature suggests that compared with attitude, shopping intention is a closer cognitive antecedent of behavior (e.g., Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Fisher and Fisher, 1992; Gollwitzer, 1993). Therefore, it is argued that the VAB model may be improved by considering the mediating effect of shopping intention. Accordingly, a hypothesized model is developed. As shown in Fig. 1, the model outlines the indirect relationship between personal values and mall shopping behavior through the mediating effect of attitude and shopping intention. In the following section, the relationship between each pair of constructs and relevant hypotheses will be discussed.

### 2.1. Value, attitude and behavior

A value is defined as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (Rokeach, 1973, p.5). Consistent with the notion that “all shopping centers are to some degree leisure centers” (Howard, 2007, p.668), Western consumers' mall shopping behavior has been found more likely to be motivated by social and/or recreational needs (Sit et al., 2003; Ruiz et al., 2004; De Nisco and Napolitano, 2006; Maronick, 2007; Lotz et al., 2010). Driven by these needs, Roy (1994) proposes that affiliation, power, or stimulation are specific values that are positively correlated with mall shopping

behavior. In a more systematic study, Shim and Eastlick (1998) find consumers who exhibit stronger social affiliation (i.e., fun and enjoyment and friendly relationship) and self-actualizing values (i.e., self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment and self-respect) are more likely to stay longer and spend more money in the mall. Similarly, Swinyard (1998) argues that frequent mall shoppers tend to place more importance on both self-actualizing and social affiliation values (i.e., ‘sense of belonging’, ‘warm relationships’, ‘security’ and ‘excitement’ values). More recently, Michon and Chebat (2004) find French-speaking and English-speaking Canadian mall shoppers are guided by hedonic values. Other researchers propose a positive effect of hedonic values on perceived mall image (Thompson and Chen, 1998; Erdem et al., 1999) and shopping intention (Stoel et al., 2004). In terms of Schwartz's (1992) value scale, the social affiliation dimension of values (fun and enjoyment and friendly relationship) are similar to the openness to change dimension (self-direction, stimulation and hedonism); while the self-actualizing dimension (self-fulfillment, sense of accomplishment and self-respect) are similar to the self-enhancement dimension of values (power and achievement). In terms of Schwartz's (1992) value scale, Western consumers' mall shopping behavior is more likely to be influenced by openness to change and self-enhancement values.

Western countries tend to share individualistic cultural values (Hofstede, 1980). Several scholars propose that consumers from individualistic cultures are more hedonic than individuals from collectivistic cultures (Schwartz, 1992; Triandis, 1993; Kacen and Lee, 2002). Given that values are culturally determined (Rokeach, 1973), as a collectivist country, it is reasonable to assume that the openness to change and self-enhancement values may not be used to determine Chinese consumers' mall shopping behavior. Schwartz (1992, 1994) and Triandis (1993) suggest that members of collectivistic societies tend to place the highest value on self-transcendence and conservation values (the two dimensions that are conflicting with the self-enhancement and openness to change dimensions of values respectively). Roth (1995) argues that markets with low individualism value products to fulfill social or functional needs to reinforce group membership and affiliation or reduce the risk of not being accepted. Chinese mall shoppers are more likely to shop for a singular utilitarian reason rather than hedonic or social reasons (Tse et al., 1989; Tse, 1996; Li et al., 2004). Thus, Chinese shoppers may view shopping at the mall as a utilitarian task, rather than a place for leisure activities. Therefore, Chinese shoppers will be more likely to be guided by self-transcendence and conservation values, the two values that are more likely to guide the utilitarian-oriented shopping behavior.

Similarly, as a collectivistic oriented country, Thai consumers' mall shopping behavior should also be guided by self-transcendence and conservation values. However, based on an ethnographic study, Phillips (1966) proposes that *mai pen rai* and *sanuk*, as two important Thai values, have made Thais more individualistic than they are widely assumed. This is supported by Punyapiroje (2002), who finds individualism exists within Thai culture. The value of *mai pen rai* (literally, something doesn't matter) suggests that adverse outcomes will get better eventually, so one should not worry about them (Warner, 2003). The value of *sanuk* (literally, fun and joy) reflects that Thais tend to view life as full of fun and joy and not to be taken too seriously, even in the context of work (Warner, 2003). In addition, influenced by Buddhist teachings, Thais exhibit a strong *present orientation*. Several scholars have noted their tendency to seek present or immediate gratification (Skinner, 1962; Slagter and Kerbo, 2000). Chetthamrongchai and Davies (2000) propose that hedonic shoppers score relatively high on present orientation, indicating that they are more concerned with what is happening now than in the past or in the future. Taken together, it is suggested that while Thailand is also a

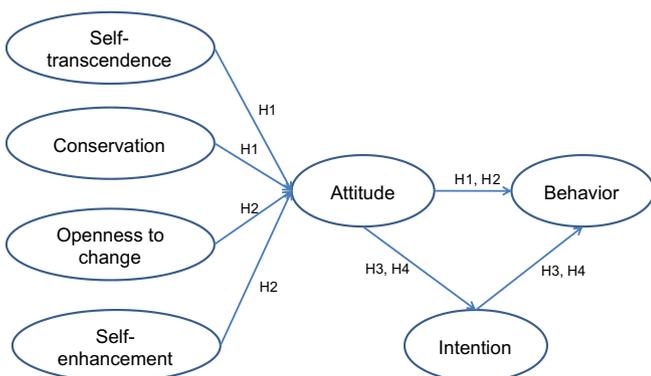


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

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