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Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences

Editor's Note: Welcoming remarks

On behalf of Faculty of Business, Multimedia University and MMU University Press, I am delighted to present to you the inaugural issue of the journal Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences (IPBSS). IPBSS is an open-access online journal that welcomes and recognises empirical and theoretical original research papers, review papers, conceptual framework, analytical and simulation models, case studies, empirical research, technical notes, and book reviews from researchers, academicians, professional, practitioners and students from all over the world. IPBSS aims to critique, discuss, and find solutions to business and social science issues while providing an avenue for researchers and practitioners to share their experiences and findings, so as to extend and enhance knowledge. The journal advocates new and differing perspectives in business and social sciences, interdisciplinary studies and gives higher priority to fresh thinking and views that are new, differing and thought provoking.

This inaugural issue owes much to many individuals. Appreciations are due first to Multimedia University for the various supports that have led to the publication of IPBSS. A special thank you to Associate Professor Dr. Gerald Goh Guan Gan, whose idea has led to the germination of IPBSS and the vision it carries. Appreciations are also due to Dr. Madhubala Bava Harji who has headed the committee that drew up the initial groundworks and shaped the important facets of the journal. As peer review is vital in the assessment of submitted papers, I am duly grateful to the reviewers who have graciously provided their comments and recommendations. I also thank the associate editors who has worked hard to ensure the production of this inaugural issue. Finally, I thank all submitting authors, who have strived in the production of their work, and have chosen IPBSS as the journal they would like to publish in.

Zauwiyah Ahmad

Editor-in-Chief

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Brand loyalty in online brand communities in Malaysia: A Uses and Gratifications perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the online communities' gratifications of social media usage and to understand how their perceived values within an online brand page environment can affect brand loyalty. In addition to the content-oriented and relationship-oriented aspects of uses and gratifications of online brand communities, this study also includes economic value to the existing model considering online promotions and rewards may encourage consumer brand engagement and subsequently lead to brand loyalty. The data collected via snowball sampling method consisted of the responses of 150 respondents who are in one or more online brand communities of different brands in Malaysia. The result shows that functional value and hedonic value are the most important motivators to drive brand loyalty in online brand communities. The result implies that the brand loyalty in online brand communities in Malaysia depends on the functionality and pleasant sensations experienced from the brand fan page. The result suggests that brand page should deliver informative, rich and customised information contents to fulfil the satisfaction of online communities. This study provides insight on social media users' perceived values that drive their satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand via the fan page, which in turn helps brand marketing practitioners in Malaysia to understand on how these perceived values may influence the brand loyalty of online communities, particularly from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory.

Keywords:

Functional value;
Hedonic value;
Social value;
Brand interaction;
Economic value.

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1. Introduction

Brand loyalty cannot be taken for granted as this issue has become a great challenge for many businesses and brand marketers nowadays. Brand loyalty has been well accepted as one of the main determinants of business success (Percy, 2017). Not only the increasing competition makes it difficult for firms to develop brand loyalty, but also the high connectivity and increasing exposure to a myriad of different things and new experiences have provided consumers with more choices than ever before. Consumers who are digitally-savvy from a very young age are tempted to try new things as they become more affluent. They are not only demanding but also easily discontented, thus, it is difficult to keep these consumers committed to brands and make repeat purchase from the same brand (Nielsen, 2019a).

A global consumer study conducted by Nielsen (2019a) highlights that disloyalty levels are increasing worldwide, with just merely 8% of global consumers committed loyalty to their

favourite brands. They also report that: "Asia Pacific consumers have the highest brand-switching propensity, with 47% willing to switch brands or try different products. This is closely followed by Africa and the Middle East (45%) and Latin America (42%). Consumers in North America and Europe are somewhat less likely to switch brands (36% and 33% respectively)". In Malaysia, the consumers are willing to switch brand as well, with only a small group of consumers (9%) that consider themselves loyal to their favourite brand. Nielsen (2019b) shows that majority of consumers would rather move away to new brands and products (44%) or sometimes try fresh experience if there are attractive and good reasons (47%).

The establishment of online brand communities is becoming increasingly popular due to the increase in the access of two commonly major social network websites which are Facebook and Instagram, which enable companies to connect individuals and groups through online networks (Son & Damhorst, 2016). According to Statista (2020), there are 3.96 billion social media users as of July 2020. The use of both platforms has been growing sharply during the pandemic. Likewise, in Malaysia, there are 26 million social media users, representing 81% of social media penetration (Statista, 2020). The most active social media platforms among Malaysian users are Facebook (85.3%), Facebook Messenger (65.9%), Instagram (38.3%), and LinkedIn (17%) as of July 2020 (NapoleonCat, 2020). These users spent more than 2 hours and 14 minutes on average on social media each day, which is almost equal to one-third of the time spent using internet each day (Kemp, 2020). As the users spend more time on social network, this indicates more engaging activities when browsing and more likely to be interested in the brand's content (Chen & Tsai, 2020). As such, many brands and businesses have set up their own official brand/business page on social networking sites and utilise them as a platform connecting with potential and existing consumers (Jayasingh & Venkatesh, 2015; Fang, Li, & Bhatti, 2020).

Many brands have successfully transformed stakeholders, customers and potential customers into their online brand communities by setting up brand page, therefore, enabling brands and customers to use new ways to connect with each other. The online brand community has been a trend and has become part of brand management strategies (Gummerus et al., 2012). With strong online community as foundation, the brands are able to use this huge group of consumers to improve their market position (Kelley & Alden, 2016). Furthermore, the brand pages could be used as a bridge between consumers and the brand to interact with potential and existing customers as well as gain access to customers' feedback, thus fan pages are useful in enhancing the relationships between firms and their customers (Thongmak, 2017; Huang et al., 2018). Moreover, the brand page offers brands the opportunities to create values for customers, influence brand communities' perception regarding the brand, encourage customers to give new ideas and contribute their experiences and opinions (Machado et al., 2019; Ceyhan, 2019). By participating on fan page, the online brand communities are forming meaningful connection with a specific brand and increasing their loyalty towards the brand.

While product market competition becomes more intense, it is even harder to hold onto customers, and businesses need to strive hard to plan all types of creative marketing strategies to retain customers. As such, in order to venture into a new target market segment, marketers everywhere have begun to direct their focus on building, managing, and maintaining brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Hur, Ahn, & Kim, 2011). The critical issue for a marketer in managing an online brand community effectively is to know what factors affect their needs and wants in order to create loyalty to the brand through the brand page (Wirtz et al., 2013). Therefore, to manage long-term customer relationships, it is helpful for brands and businesses to identify customers' needs and motivation so that the marketers are able to develop branding and marketing strategies more effectively and practically. Previous study highlights that only when the consumers feel the values perceived are worthwhile, they are more likely to be active on a brand page and stay loyal to the brand (Ismail, 2017). Additionally, they suggest that consumer gratifications obtained should be consistent to drive for not only active participation in brand community, but also brand commitment and loyalty (e.g., Lischka, 2015).

Wirtz et al. (2013) has pointed out that due to the: “dramatic technology-lead changes that continue to take place in the marketplace, researchers and practitioners alike are keen to understand the emergence and implications of online brand communities”. Several studies have examined different value dimensions of online communities and determined the effects of these values on different aspects of brand loyalty and brand page usage. The most discussed values among previous studies are functional value, hedonic value, social value, brand interaction value and economic value, but the findings are mixed and their direct effects on the brand loyalty of online brand communities remain untested in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aims to understand the factors, that influence brand loyalty within the context of online brand communities, particularly from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory. Specifically, this study examines the relationship between the aforementioned gratifications values of the online brand communities and brand loyalty in a social media context. This study focuses on Malaysian social media users who are following brand pages and actively participating in the on-going activities on brand pages, likes, comments, sharing, etc. The result of this study shows that both the functional and hedonic values on the brand page are the most important motivators to drive brand loyalty among online communities in Malaysia. The online brand communities mostly seek for more functional and hedonic values derived from their brand page usage, whereas, the social, brand interaction and economic values have no significant influence to brand loyalty of online communities in Malaysia.

The significance of this study is threefold. Interestingly, the finding reveals that social and brand interaction values are not that relatively important to retain customers on the brand page and loyalty, and these results are different from the findings of many other researches. Past studies emphasize on the interactivity among the consumers and between brand and consumers (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Seo & Park, 2018) as to suit the characteristic of social media which is able to enhance the interactive capabilities. Even though past research highlighted the importance of customer-brand relationship, but it may not have a direct effect on brand loyalty. As such, brand loyalty of online community is not affected by social and brand interaction values, even though they are active users. They may be influenced more by functional value and hedonic value or the other perceived values such as self-concept value (Jahn & Kunz, 2012), co-creation and brand strength (De Vries & Carlson, 2014), self-presentation (Hsu et al., 2015), self-brand image and value congruity (Islam, Rahman, & Hollebeek, 2017) and others factors. Second, the finding can assist the businesses in developing more proactive marketing and branding strategies in engaging with their customers via social media, to enhance their loyalty towards the brand. The brand managers could apply different marketing and branding strategies on social media based on different characteristics of consumers because the gratifications gained on engaging brand page among the online community are varied.

Third and lastly, previous studies have shown that active users in brand page or engaged consumer in the online community increase brand loyalty (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Jayasingh, 2019). However, most of the studies have focused on the mediating roles of brand page engagement or participation between the motivators of perceived values and brand loyalty, but studies on their direct relationships are limited. This study fills this gap by investigating factors that have a direct effect on brand loyalty of online community, and contributes to the increasing literature on brand loyalty by providing insights of motivation that drive consumers’ loyalty to the brand in the context of business page on social media platform in Malaysia. The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review, followed by the methodology in Section 3. Section 4 presents the results and discussion, and lastly, Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is one of the most vital success measurements for businesses. It not only reflects a company’s performance (Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017), but also drives companies for additional financial profits. Company needs six fold of costs and efforts to attract a new customer

against retaining an existing one (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1984). The customers who have strong positive feelings towards a brand are dedicated to repurchase the product/service from the same brand consistently and not easily influenced by competitors' greater appeals (Oliver, 1999). Hence, loyal customers can be considered as significant strategic assets which enables the company to achieve sustainable competitive advantage over competitors and to stand out in a competitive marketplace (Jiang & Zhang, 2016; Sharif & Sulaiman, 2019). Brand loyalty is mostly reflected from customers' attitude and behaviour (Oliver, 1999; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). The attitudinal loyalty emphasizes on the psychological attachment of consumers to a brand, such as commitment and their beliefs that the brand is unique (Kujur & Singh, 2020). The sense of commitment in brand loyalty indicates the strong feeling of identification and affiliation with the brand. According to Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), customers who have high brand commitment are dedicated to maintain a good relationship with the brand, and willing to exert effort in maintaining the goals on behalf of the brand (Kim et al., 2008).

Alternatively, the behavioural loyalty emphasizes on repurchasing the same brand due to habitual or convenience regardless of their liking and without much thought (Kang, 2015). The behavioural loyalty is not limited to repurchasing from the favourite brand, but make further recommendations to others by word-of-mouth. The positive or negative image of a particular brand can flow from one customer to another customer, and the spread can be very fast especially in today's digital world through electronic-word-of-mouth. The loyal customers would voice out their thoughts and experience of purchasing the product or service of the brand not limited to only family and friends, but also to the public openly (Abu-Alhaija et al., 2019). The previous studies highlighted that a satisfied customer with the brand may recommend the brand to others regularly and pay the brand compliments (Nikhashemi, Paim, & Khatibi, 2015). Those who are not happy with the brand will also share their not-so-pleasant experiences through social networking sites (Hur et al., 2011).

2.2 Online brand communities

The online communities which follow or participate in a brand page are those sharing common values, beliefs and thoughts which evolve through the brand community (Sharif & Sulaiman, 2019). The online brand communities can be established voluntarily by community consumers themselves or built by the company with ownership of the brand (Jang et al., 2008). The roles of the brand page are not only limited to explicit communication and interaction channels for a company but also to establish a bond with consumers via an online community mechanism. The online brand communities will serve as the basis of relationship marketing which allows companies to attract, maintain and enhance long-term customer relationships (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Scholars have been explaining the concept of a long-term relationships with customers by extending the relationship models, from the traditional consumer-brand model to the consumer-brand-consumer model (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Brand communities not only interact with brands only, but also interact with each other by exchanging valuable information and experiences of the brand (Andersen, 2005; Laroche, Habibi, & Richard, 2013). The consumer-brand-consumer or customer-centric model (McAlexander et al., 2002) expands the brand community into customer-brand, customer-company, customer-product, and customer-customers. The study of Laroche et al. (2013) found that a social media-based brand community has a strong effect on all four types of relationships which further enhance the brand community's loyalty to the brand.

There are many past researchers who have examined brand loyalty of social media brand communities. A study showed that customers who had become a fan on a restaurant's brand page had heightened brand loyalty which was proven from the increase of visitation frequency, despite the total amount spent is lesser during the visits (Dholakia & Durham, 2010). In another study of a fan page from a South Korea luxury brand community, it was concluded that attitude has a positive influence on brand loyalty and purchase pattern and intention (Kim & Lee, 2019). The sharing of information from the online brand communities influences the purchase and

repurchase intention significantly (Adjei, Noble, & Noble, 2010; Jahn & Kunz, 2012). A study by Kim et al. (2008) also revealed the importance of online brand communities to the brand as they possess higher brand commitment than other consumers. Researchers also found that the more time and frequency consumers spent on engaging with the brands, the more the willingness to purchase products (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Study also shows that brand community engagement on brand page increases word of mouth intention, brand promotion and brand loyalty (Karjaluoto, Munnukka, & Tikkanen, 2014).

2.3 The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory has been widely used for understanding consumer behaviours on social media. This renowned communication theory adapted the principles of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and was developed to explain why individuals possess different consumption patterns of certain mass communication media (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Traditionally, most studies apply the Uses and Gratifications Theory to demonstrate why individuals have different media usage patterns. Along with the emergence of new media in recent decades, the Uses and Gratifications Theory has been extensively used to understand consumers' motivation on different media platforms, including social networking sites and virtual community environments etc. (Ruggiero, 2000; Wang et al., 2019).

According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory, media users are active and goal-oriented. Individuals have different reasons to choose which media they want to use. The selection of media usage is based on the needs and goals they want to achieve. Various types of media will satisfy their various needs specifically, hence the gratifications they receive from a certain media shall determine an individual's media usage (Katz et al., 1974). In the virtual environment, the online communities are viewed as active participants of social media as well, and they do expect needs and goals to be achieved when they access certain brand page (West & Turner, 2018). The gratifications through media has been developed according to social and psychological aspects. McQuail and Van Cuilenburg (1983) developed four types of common needs for media use, which are seeking information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. Along with the new technology development on social network sites, the characteristics and users' motivation of media usage are different from the traditional media.

In previous studies, researchers have identified three main types of needs that social media users and online brand communities are looking for: informational, social, and/or hedonic needs (Lee & Jeong, 2014; Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019; Islam et al., 2017). On top of these that gratify social media users, research by Dolan et al. (2016) added rewarding components that matters to social media users. The Uses and Gratifications Theory could also relate the online community of a brand page to loyalty and satisfaction by identifying factors that motivate consumers' participation in brand page and how these factors influence consumers' brand loyalty. In other words, when the brand page satisfies particular needs of the online brand communities, this satisfaction should lead to a higher brand loyalty. A study on users of a hotel's Facebook page confirmed that there is positive relationship between user satisfaction and the intention to stay at that hotel (Choi et al., 2016). To what extent consumers use and participate on brand page depends on the satisfaction they gained through a range of activities that they carry out online (Gummerus et al., 2012). The gratifications they get to quench their needs determines their attitude towards the brand page, which will in turn affect an individual's choice to select and participate in a community or a brand page, and the behavioural outcome, and to visit it repeatedly or even the continuance of usage of the media and its content (Kujur & Singh, 2020).

Previous studies suggested that consumers can establish strong relationships with a brand because of the emotional and tangible gratifications it offers when the need arises. The degree of online community's loyalty to a brand depends on sought and obtained gratifications from the brand page use. The theoretical framework conceptualises the distinct motives of online community that invoke loyalty towards the brand on the brand page. What motivates consumers

to adopt and use a wider range of brand page can be explained by using the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Participation or engagement on brand page has become the centre of research topic, especially the factors and its consequences. Customers with strong engagement on brand page facilitate the strong emotional bonds that render increased consumer loyalty to particular online brand communities (Islam et al., 2017). Many studies confirmed that increased participation and engagement on brand page can lead to brand loyalty (Kang, Tang & Fiore, 2014; Jayasingh, 2019). Also, other factors such as brand love, consumer and brand engagement, brand identification, and group characteristics were also found to influence brand loyalty (Kumar & Nayak, 2019; Le, 2021; Liao et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, there have been several studies that explained the factors affecting online community engagement behaviour and brand loyalty in terms of perceived values, satisfaction and trust (Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017). Value judgments based on cognitive and affective evaluation have been shown to lead directly to satisfaction and customer loyalty. Jahn and Kunz (2012) categorised the gratifications of online community derived from brand fan page into three main aspects: content-oriented (i.e., functional value and hedonic value), relationship-oriented (i.e., social interaction value and brand interaction value), and self-oriented (i.e., self-concept value), to examine the impact of customer engagement and brand loyalty. De Vries and Carlson (2014) further modified Jahn and Kunz's research model by adding co-creation value, brand strength while remaining functional value, hedonic value and social value. When a study on a restaurant's Facebook fan page, Kang et al. (2014) explored the impact of functional benefits, hedonic benefits, social-psychological benefits and monetary benefits on active participation, brand trust and brand commitment. In examining customer satisfaction and customer engagement behaviour outcomes such as purchase and feedback behaviour, Carlson et al. (2017) conceptualised five dimensions of values: functional value, socialisation value, emotional value, innovativeness value and relationship building value, and constructed them into value-in-the-brand-page-experience. Jayasingh (2019) constructed seven factors on brand loyalty, which are information seeking, entertainment, economic benefits, social benefits, trust, social influence and brand love.

2.4 Hypothesis development

2.4.1 Functional value

Functional value is one of the key motivators to drive consumer participation on brand page and brand loyalty. The functional value refers to as the utility derived from a product, expected performance, and/or perceived quality (Kang et al., 2014). The degree of functionality of the brand page determines the online community's attitude and behaviour towards the brand. Online communities search for information about the brand, product, service or company because they want to get information about new products, how the service works and also look for product reviews (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Ceyhan, 2019). Research on airline marketing reveals that the customers preferred the most up-to-date and reliable information to decrease risk or anxiety (Seo & Park, 2018). The information quality also affects the attitude of the online communities and they could easily make comparison among the brand pages (Zhang, Benyoucef, & Zhao, 2016). In order for the online communities to satisfy their functional-gratifications needs, they require access to functional, helpful, useful and practical content (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Ceyhan, 2019). The online communities are willing to share, comment and repurchase the products when they feel their functional value have been met on the brand page.

There are some situations that the functional value may not be the main motivators for online communities. The degree of participation on brand page is varied and depends on the industry, such as restaurants. A study by Kang et al. (2014) indicates that functional value has no significant effect to motivate online community in participating actively on the restaurant's brand page as the brand page is not a primary outlet for consumers to seek product information. The most important factor to drive consumers into visiting and engaging on brand pages is for seeking information. The consumers tend to access the business page on social media to find out information and reviews related to products/services before purchasing (Whiting & Williams,

2013; Jayasingh, 2019). They may use social media to seek health information, personal or professional growth (Asghar, 2015). The consumer will actively engage on the related brand page and stick on the brand page if they find the page provides the information they need. This reasoning leads to the hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between functional value and brand loyalty.

2.4.2 Hedonic value

Hedonic value is a basic motivation for any media use (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015), hence it is definitely a strong driver of brand page usage. Hedonic value refers to utility derived from feelings or affective states gained through consumer experiences (Kang et al., 2014). The content that can arouse or excite positive emotions or passions are the intangible returns that the online community look for (Kang et al., 2014). The online communities also look for activities to relax or escape (Whiting & William, 2013) and to pass the time on social media where they can expect fun and enjoyment that they cannot experience offline (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Jayasingh 2019). Brand pages which are fun, entertaining, pleasant and exciting attract more active participation from online communities (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). The online communities are motivated to like, comment and share the contents with other online communities when they gain hedonic gratifications (Hsu et al., 2015). The entertaining content is not necessarily brand related, as long as it entertains the online communities (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013).

However, research by Ceyhan (2019) revealed different results which showed hedonic value has no significant influence towards the Instagram page on brand loyalty although it motivates purchase intentions of Instagram users. Hedonic value is considered as one of the most important determinants of brand loyalty. A study showed that hedonic value encourages consumers to participate on restaurant brand Facebook fan pages and influences brand commitment (Kang et al., 2014). Other studies also revealed that users who are amused by the brand page will share and recommend the posts to others, and in turn this leads to brand loyalty (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Jayasingh, 2019). As such, this study expects a significant positive association between hedonic value and brand loyalty.

2.4.3 Social value

Social value refers to gratifications gained through social interaction among individuals and groups on the social networking websites. The online communities have the opportunity to meet new people and communicate with each other. Individuals join brand's online communities and participate in a group to seek social support and friendship in the community (Hajli, 2014). To get new friends is one of the key factors for consumers to participate on brand page and feel attached to the brand (Jayasingh, 2019). Studies have shown that, by communicating and exchanging ideas and experiences of a product/service on a brand page, the individuals of the brand's online community may develop friendships (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2014; Ceyhan, 2019).

According to Jahn and Kunz (2012), consumers participate in fan page to meet, to find out and to interact with people like them. Similarly, Sharif and Sulaiman (2019) also assert that customers tend to search for other customers who share similar thoughts, beliefs and goals. The online brand communities satisfy their social needs when they find someone with similar interests, values and behaviours (Jayasingh, 2019). Few scholars use social identity theory to explain consumers' active participation in the brand page's activities because of the social interaction benefit and the feeling of sense of belonging in the online community (Dholakia & Durham, 2010; Kang et al., 2014). Once the online brand communities feel satisfaction from social value gained on brand page, they are more engaged on brand page and this leads to brand loyalty. Nevertheless, a study from Ceyhan (2019) revealed that the social value has no significant impact on purchase intention among Instagram users, however, it is still an important motivator to increase their brand loyalty on different perspectives such as commitment and word of mouth.

Social value was found to stimulate the brand loyalty. The brand communities are willing to share their personal experience, opinion and recommendation with others personally or via social media. Social value influence customer's engagement with brand pages, which in turn leads to brand loyalty (De Vries & Carlson, 2014). Social value has been shown to have a significant effect on members' active participations on fan pages, and in turn encourages brand trust and brand commitment (Kang et al., 2014). From the aforementioned studies, this study also anticipates a significant positive relationship between social value and brand loyalty.

2.4.4 Brand interaction value

A good long-term relationship established with the online community get much attention from brand marketers. The brand pages served as a popular platform where the relationship arises through the two-way communication and interaction between brand marketers and the online community (Kujur & Singh, 2020). Interesting enough the online community would see brands as their friends and tend to build relationship with their favourite brand. High brand interaction value perceived by the online communities ensure that they access the brand page more frequently and enhance the relationship with brand. A strong brand relationship established on social networking sites increases the likelihood of online community's commitment to the brand, word-of-mouth and repurchase (Jahn & Kunz, 2012).

Literature has shown that trust, satisfaction and commitment are the main parameters of the quality of the relationship between a brand and its consumers (Kujur & Singh, 2020). The capability of the brand owners in enhancing brand trust among the brand community leads to improvement in the relationship with customers and subsequently their customer loyalty (Laroche et al., 2013). Similarly, Jahn and Kunz (2012) also emphasize that the opportunities given to the online community to interact and communicate with the brand, give feedback to and get answers from the brand are important to enhance brand loyalty. The online brand communities are concerned about the responsiveness of the brand page managers. An immediate reply and proactive communication with online communities would cultivate their sense of brand-related belonging and hence encourage their commitment to the brand (Islam et al., 2017).

The online communities feel more engaged when they are able to interact, communicate, give feedback and get answers with the brand (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). The high level of interaction with brand would foster the bond which further affect their loyalty to the brand (Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014, Hsu et al., 2015, Thongmak, 2017). As the online community has strong trust on brand page and their needs are met through interaction with brand, it is more likely that they will engage more with the brand page, purchase or repurchase, and recommend the brand to others. Therefore, this study expects a significant positive relationship between brand interaction value and brand loyalty.

2.4.5 Economic value

Economic value refers to special deals, better price and free coupons (Kang, 2015) and it also can be viewed as discount, promotions, free gifts, reward and to win prizes over the competition or games (Jayasingh, 2019). Social networks sites provide a convenient and a comfortable way to receive brand related information including special offers (Gironde & Korgaonkar, 2014). As being part of a long-term relationship with companies, the online brand communities focus on not only the core benefits of products/services, but also expected additional incentives, rewards, prizes (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smith, 2011). Also, monetary savings such as discounts or special prices, as well as special treatment, individualised services (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998; Harris, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2003), where they are able to access particular information or enjoy VIP services to reflect their special consumer status (Hollebeek & Solem, 2018). Although strong supporters of a brand are willing to pay premium prices for the brand, but they feel more valued when additional benefits are given in terms of economic value (Gwinner et al., 1998).

The online brand communities would feel motivated if there are some remunerations in return for participating in activities launched on brand page. Their economic value gratifications would

be met when they get some remuneration on interacting, sharing and commenting on brand page (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Jayasingh, 2019). Studies also suggest to launch special promotions and give away coupons for online community to enhance their loyalty towards the brand page (Kang et al., 2014). However, there are concern that monetary benefits give negative perception on perceived quality and may dilute the brand image. It is considered as an ineffective strategy to hold on to an online community on a brand page (Buil, Chernatony, & Martinez, 2013). Furthermore, a few prior studies have shown that economic value such as incentives has no significant relationship with consumer engagement (Chua & Banerjee, 2015) and or leads to low level engagement activities such as likes, shares and comments (Kujur & Singh, 2020).

Economic value, such as discounts, promotions, free gifts, rewards and chances to win prizes has been shown to encourage consumer engagement and subsequently leads to positive attitudes and higher purchase intentions (Drossos et al., 2007; Jayasingh, 2019). A few studies found a positive effect between economic value and brand loyalty. In particular, where consumers' attitude toward restaurants increases when the restaurants offer gift certificates (Han & Kim, 2009) and where special promotions and coupons effectively strengthen consumer-brand relationship among online communities (Treadaway & Smith, 2010). In line with previous studies, this study anticipates a significant positive relationship between economic value and brand loyalty.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research framework

Based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory as a theoretical framework, this study examines the motivation of an individual in the online brand communities behind their loyalty towards the brand on the social media page. The factors of functional value, hedonic value, social value, brand interaction value and economic value have been identified as those which may influence Malaysian online brand community's brand loyalty. This study established the framework based on modification of the research model by Jahn and Kunz (2012) and Jayasingh (2019). This study considers the functional value, hedonic value, social value and brand interaction value suggested by Jahn and Kunz (2012) to examine whether these factors have positive relationship with the brand loyalty among the online brand communities in Malaysia. An additional factor, that is the economic value introduced in Jayasingh (2019)'s study, is also added to the framework considering that monetary benefits have been widely used in businesses.

Figure 1 presents the framework of this study, to examine the effect of functional value, hedonic value, social value, brand interaction value and economic value, on the brand loyalty. These values have been found in variety of journals which either have direct or indirect relationship with brand loyalty.

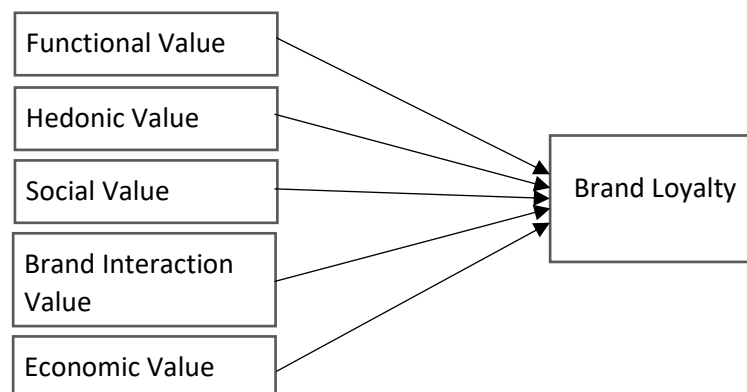


Figure 1. Research framework

3.2 Data

According to Statista (2020), the social media users in Malaysia represent 81 percent of its total population as of January 2020. Considering that the difficulty in identifying and locating the population of the online brand communities from these social media users, the target population of this study consists of social media users in Malaysia who are following any brand page on Facebook and Instagram. However, this study did not focus specifically on a particular brand. In other words, the respondents in this study are those in one or more online brand communities of different brands from various industries, taking into account the generalization of the result and also ensuring there are sufficient data collected for analysis. By setting an alpha error of 0.5 with 5 tested predictors, the minimum sample size recommended for this study, as given by the G power is 138. As such, this study has collected a total of 150 responses from those respondents who are in one or more online brand communities of different brands in Malaysia. This study adopts the measurement items of functional value, hedonic value, social value and brand interaction value used by Jahn and Kunz (2012). The measurement item of economic value is adopted from Jayasingh (2019)'s study. Please refer to Appendix A for the detailed measurement items. Only those respondents who are following a brand page on social media are requested to answer the questionnaire. Snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling method is used in this study to find the respondents from different regions, age groups, ethnicity and income levels, through referrers or respondents' networking (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016). The questionnaires were distributed online through emails, WhatsApp and other social media platforms such as Facebook, and Instagram.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Results

The descriptive statistics of the 150 respondents taking part in this study is presented in Table 1. The table shows that there are slightly more females (87%) compared to males (63%). The largest proportion of the sample (34.7%) falls in the age group of 36 and 45 years old, followed by age group of 26 and 35 years old (23.3%). While respondents aged between 46 and 55 years consist of 27%, below 25 years old are 16% and more than 56 years old are 12%. A total of 97 (64.7%) of the respondents are Chinese, 42 (28%) of the respondents are Malay and 11 (7.3%) are Indian. The data of this study is collected from different regions in Malaysia. Majority of the respondents are from the Northern Region (38.7%), Central Region (27.3%), and Southern Region (21.3%). Other's respondents are from the Eastern Region (11%) and East of Malaysia (8%). In the aspect of income level, most of the respondents' earnings are between RM2501 to RM5000 monthly (39.3%), followed by a monthly income ranging between RM5001 and RM10000 (27.3%) and below RM2500 (21.3%), while the rest earned above RM 10000 (12%).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
<u>Gender</u>			<u>Region</u>		
Male	87	58.0	Northern (Perlis, Kedah, Penang)	58	38.7
Female	63	42.0	Central Region (Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur)	41	27.3
<u>Age (years)</u>			Southern Region (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor)	32	21.3
< 25	24	16.0	Eastern Region (Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu)	11	7.3
26 - 35	35	23.3	East Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak)	8	5.3
36 - 45	53	34.7			
46 - 55	27	18.0			
> 56	12	8.0			
<u>Ethnicity</u>			<u>Income Level (RM)</u>		
Malay	42	28.0	< 2500	32	21.3
Chinese	97	64.7	2501 - 5000	59	39.3
Indian	11	7.3	5001 - 10000	41	27.3
			> 10000	18	12.0

In measuring the internal consistency of all variables, the findings of reliability test for this study shows that, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of all the five independent variables and dependent variable ranged from 0.881 to 0.976, which are all above 0.70, as presented in Table 2. The result is in line with the guidelines that state a minimum reliability of 0.70 would be an acceptable level (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2014). The table also shows that the mean for Brand Loyalty is 3.4778 with the standard deviation of 0.7538. Among all independent variables, the highest mean value is Functional Value which is 3.5867 with standard deviation 0.7974. It is followed by Hedonic Value with a mean value of 3.4550 and standard deviation 0.7853; Brand Interaction Value with a mean score of 3.3600 and standard deviation 0.7866; Economic Value with a mean value of 3.2222 and standard deviation 0.9660. The factor that has the lowest mean is Social Value which is 3.1533 with standard deviation 1.0366.

Table 2. The reliability test and descriptive statistics of the variables

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Min	Max
Brand Loyalty	9	0.944	3.478	0.754	150	1.44	5.00
Functional Value	4	0.934	3.587	0.797	150	1.00	5.00
Hedonic Value	4	0.933	3.455	0.785	150	1.25	5.00
Social Value	4	0.976	3.153	1.037	150	1.00	5.00
Brand Interaction Value	4	0.917	3.360	0.787	150	1.00	5.00
Economic Value	3	0.881	3.222	0.966	150	1.00	5.00

Note: Please refer to Appendix A for the detailed means and standard deviations of the measurement items.

Table 3 shows that the Pearson's pairwise correlations between all the independent variables and the Brand Loyalty (dependent variable) are statistically significant at the 1% significance level. The pairwise correlations between the independent variables are also found to be significant, however, there is no serious correlation issue between independent variables since the highest magnitude of correlation of 0.682 between Social Value and Hedonic Value is still lower than the typical threshold of 0.800 (Berry & Feldman, 1985).

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Analysis

	Brand Loyalty	Functional Value	Hedonic Value	Social Value	Brand Interaction Value	Economic Value
Brand Loyalty	1					
Functional Value	0.653*	1				
Hedonic Value	0.634*	0.629*	1			
Social Value	0.520*	0.538*	0.682*	1		
Brand Interaction Value	0.502*	0.601*	0.600*	0.656*	1	
Economic Value	0.227*	0.336*	0.304*	0.342*	0.511*	1

Note: * denotes significant at 1% (two-tailed) significance level.

The result of the multiple regression model is presented in Table 4. The ANOVA result reported in Table 4 (Panel A), the *F*-value of 30.523 indicates that the model is fit and is statistically significant at a 1% significance level. The R-squared value of 0.515 implies that 51.5% of the variance of Brand Loyalty can be explained by all five factors. Consistent with the result of the pairwise correlations reported in Table 3, the model does not suffer from multicollinearity, as shown by the variance inflation factor (VIF) in Table 4 (Panel B). The lowest VIF value in the model is 1.357 and it is given by the Economic Value. The highest VIF value is given by the Brand Interaction Value (2.426), and it is lower than the VIF thresholds of 2.5 suggested by Johnston, Jones, and Manley (2018).

The result of the regression model also shows that both the Functional Value and Hedonic Value are statistically significantly positively related to the level of Brand Loyalty at 1% significance level. However, the Social Value, Brand Interaction Value and Economic Value are found to be statistically insignificant in improving the Brand Loyalty. The result implies that higher level of Functional Value and Hedonic Value, which may cause greater satisfaction among the online brand communities, will result in increase in Brand Loyalty. On average, an additional increase by one unit in Functional Value and Hedonic Value will improve the Brand Loyalty of the online brand communities by 0.380 and 0.305 unit respectively. The beta of Functional Value and Hedonic Value shows that, *ceteris paribus*, for every increase of one standard deviation in Functional Value and Hedonic Value respectively, there is a 0.402 and 0.318 standard deviation, or $0.402 \times 0.7538 = 0.303$ and $0.318 \times 0.7538 = 0.240$ increase in the Brand Loyalty of the online brand communities.

Table 4. The results of the ANOVA and regression model

Panel A: ANOVA Result	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	
Regression	43.560	5	8.712	30.523***	
Residual	41.101	144	0.285		
Total	84.660	149			
R-square	0.515				

Panel B: Regression Model	Coefficients	Beta	Std. error	t-value	VIF
Constant	0.870***	-	0.238	3.652	
Functional Value	0.380***	0.402	0.076	5.012	1.907
Hedonic Value	0.305***	0.318	0.085	3.596	2.323
Social value	0.052	0.072	0.064	0.820	2.280
Brand Interaction Value	0.050	0.052	0.087	0.572	2.426
Economic Value	-0.044	-0.056	0.053	-0.835	1.357

Note: Dependent variable: Brand Loyalty; *** denotes significant at 1% significance level.

4.2 Model assumptions validity

Since the reliability of a regression model very much depends on the validation of the model assumptions, in addition to the multicollinearity test discussed earlier, further tests that is, the normality, and heteroscedasticity tests were undertaken to ensure no violation of the regression model assumptions. The results are presented in Figure 2. The distribution of the distribution patterns illustrated by the histogram and normal probability plot of the regression standardised residual, as shown in Figure 2 (a) and (b), indicate that the data does not violate the normal distribution assumption. The scatter plot of the regression standardised residual also shows that the residuals are randomly scattered above and below the x -axis, which implies that the data is homoscedastic and does not suffer from heteroscedasticity.

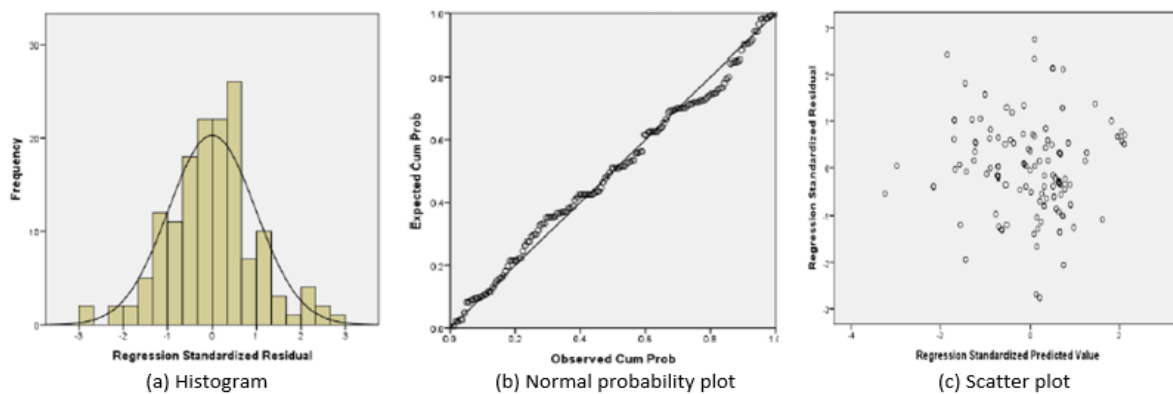


Figure 2. Regression model assumptions validity: (a) Histogram, (b) Normal probability plot, and (c) Scatter plot of regression standardised residual.

4.3 Discussion

The statistically significant positive association between functional value and brand loyalty found among online community in this study is in line with the findings of previous studies (Ceyhan, 2019; Jayasingh, 2019). These studies have shown that information is the most important motivational factor that drives consumers' loyalty towards brand on the social media pages. Consumers would become more knowledgeable, informative and satisfied by following their favourite brand page and subsequently developing positive feeling towards the brand, and sharing the brand with others or repurchasing the brand (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). The significant positive relationship between hedonic value and brand loyalty is supported by studies that reveal hedonic value is an important determinant of brand loyalty (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Kang *et al.*, 2014; Jayasingh, 2019). Clearly, consumers are seeking for entertainment on their favourite brand page. They are looking for fun and pleasure to fill up spare time and to alleviate stress when using social networking sites.

Although this study found insignificant effect of social, brand interaction and economic values on brand loyalty, such finding it not unique. De Vries and Carlson (2014) and Ceyhan (2019) also found that social value has no significant influence either on loyalty or engagement of brand fan page, or to purchase the related brand. Likewise, Jahn and Kunz (2012) also found that social value does not have direct consequences towards brand loyalty, and the result suggests that the interaction among individuals in online brand communities may lead to increase of engagement but not necessarily encouraging brand commitment, word of mouth and purchase intention. The online community may visit the brand page and are satisfied with only reading the posts, without any interaction with other people on the brand page. Also, although the online community may have high brand interaction value, that is, they are satisfied with the responsiveness of the brand and are engaged with the brand, but they may not engage in other behavioural consequences, such as word of mouth or repurchase. The insignificance of economic value may be explained by

previous studies which found that economic benefits have no influence on either satisfaction or loyalty (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012), monetary benefits have no influence on brand page participation (Kang *et al.*, 2014) and engagement (Kumar & Nayak, 2019; Kujur & Singh, 2020) which further led to brand loyalty. The price discounts, special offers, competitions may attract the online community to the brand page, but do not increase satisfaction or loyalty (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). The online brand communities who have strong commitment to the brand may not be sensitive or interested in the discount price, prize and other rewards.

5. Conclusion

This study portrays the online community as an important group of consumers in fostering brand loyalty and aims to identify the motives of the online community for their continuous participation on a brand page, hence would be a good orientation for brand loyalty development and enhancement. This study found that both functional value and hedonic value on the brand page are the most important motivators to drive brand loyalty among online communities in Malaysia. The result suggests that marketers should focus more on the functional value and hedonic value (content-oriented) of their brand page, rather than the social value, brand interaction value (relationship-oriented), and economic value. In other words, the online community may not necessarily be looking for social support, interaction with other people and brand marketers, or special offers on the brand page. Hence, these values do not have a significant effect to enhance their commitment and loyalty to the brand. The result also implies that marketers should develop contents that are most appealing to the online brand community's gratifications values to improve their loyalty towards the brand. The brand page should deliver informative, rich and customised information contents to fulfil the satisfaction of online communities. The brand page should focus on offering interesting, entertaining and innovative content to online communities as media richness is shown to enhance brand loyalty (Huang *et al.*, 2018; Jahn & Kunz, 2012).

This study augments literature related to brand loyalty, online brand communities and the Uses and Gratifications theory. Specifically, the study provides insight into social media users' perceived values that drive their satisfaction and loyalty towards the brand via the fan page. The result also helps brand marketing practitioners in Malaysia to understand how these perceived values may influence the brand loyalty of online communities, particularly from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory. This study has a few limitations. First, this study focuses on the online communities of brand pages created by the brand providers. Such online communities may be different from the online communities initiated by the brand consumers and supporters themselves, in which the latter provides more opportunity for user generated content and interaction among members. Hence, future studies can consider the interactivity element (Huang *et al.*, 2018), relational (Carlson, 2018), social influence (Jayasingh, 2019) and sense of membership (Huang *et al.*, 2018) in their research. Second, this study assumes that the respondents from online communities are actively engaging with the brand page and online brand communities, thus the mediating roles of participation or brand page engagement were not included in the study. Therefore, for a more comprehensive study, the engagement factors could also be included in future studies (De Vries & Carlson, 2014; Chen & Tasi, 2020). Third, the respondents in this study were selected from online brand communities of different brands from various industries, which may have different values, needs and wants. Future research can focus on a specific brand or a certain group of online brand communities (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Islam *et al.*, 2017). Lastly, this study is conducted at a particular point in time. Since consumer habits may change over time, it is recommended to undertake longitudinal research to observe the dynamic behaviours of online communities. Future studies can examine the needs and wants of online brand communities during a specific time, such as during festival seasons or crisis. Such knowledge is useful to brand practitioners in developing brand-related offerings in different situations (Islam *et al.*, 2017).

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Appendix A. The measurement item, mean and standard deviation of the variables.

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Brand Loyalty		
<i>I feel I am part of a community around this brand.</i>	3.19	0.967
<i>I am an active supporter of this brand.</i>	3.37	0.966
<i>I interact with this brand.</i>	3.08	1.114
<i>I recommend this brand to other people.</i>	3.69	0.811
<i>I introduce this brand to other people.</i>	3.63	0.855
<i>I say positive things about this brand to other people.</i>	3.83	0.755
<i>I intend to remain loyal to this brand in the future.</i>	3.55	0.864
<i>I will not stop buying/supporting this brand.</i>	3.47	0.887
<i>I think of myself as a loyal consumer/supporter of this brand.</i>	3.48	0.903
Functional Value		
<i>The content of this fan page is helpful for me.</i>	3.59	0.837
<i>The content of this brand page is useful for me.</i>	3.65	0.891
<i>The content of this brand page is functional for me.</i>	3.58	0.861
<i>The content of this brand page is practical for me.</i>	3.53	0.902
Hedonic Value		
<i>The content of this brand page is fun.</i>	3.35	0.868
<i>The content of this brand page is exciting.</i>	3.43	0.886
<i>The content of this brand page is pleasant.</i>	3.61	0.818
<i>The content of this brand page is entertaining.</i>	3.43	0.870
Social Value		
<i>I can meet people like me on this brand page.</i>	3.31	0.835
<i>I can meet new people like me on this brand page.</i>	3.29	0.856
<i>I can find out about people like me on this brand page.</i>	3.41	0.906
<i>I can interact with people like me on this brand page.</i>	3.43	0.915
Brand Interaction Value		
<i>I can interact with the brand on this brand page.</i>	3.31	0.835
<i>I can communicate with the brand on this brand page.</i>	3.29	0.856
<i>I can give feedback to the brand on this brand page.</i>	3.41	0.906
<i>I can get answers from the brand on this brand page.</i>	3.43	0.915
Economic Value		
<i>I interact this brand page in order to access discounts and promotions.</i>	3.47	1.079
<i>I interact on this brand page to participate in competitions and games to win prizes.</i>	2.90	1.015
<i>I interact on this brand page to get reward/free gifts.</i>	3.29	1.127

Note: The 5-point Likert scale measurement items of Brand Loyalty, Functional Value, Hedonic Value, Social value, Brand Interaction Value were sourced from Jahn and Kunz (2012), and the Economic Value were sourced from Jayasingh (2019).

Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences

The Effect of Workplace Spirituality on Employee Performance

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Abstract

Employees in the 21st century seek a work environment which allows them to find a sense of purpose at work, within an atmosphere filled with respect and courteous interactions between the employees and their surroundings. The spiritually-oriented work environment is crucial because it shapes employees' behaviour at the personal level and eventually, improves employee performance. In this paper, a theoretical framework which explains how the spiritual work environment (inner self, community and meaningful work) improves employee performance is presented. This framework can be a reference for organisations in gauging their spiritual work environment, and subsequently incorporating spiritual elements at work as a way to influence employee performance. In return, it contributes to the long-term survival and success of the organisation.

Keywords:

Spiritual Environment;
Work;
Employees;
Inner self;
Community;
Meaning of Work.

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1. Introduction

Organisation survival depends upon its ability to maintain competitive advantage (Singh, 2019). One of the internal sources for competitive advantage lies in the level of employee performance whereby efficient and effective work can lead to various cost savings. Therefore, organisations will be able to focus more on research, development and innovations activities (Van Der Walt, 2018). However, the dynamic changes at global landscape exposes organisations to new external and internal challenges. For instance, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced employees to adapt to job rotations and work-from-home arrangements (Sindhu, 2020). These changes can be stressful and overwhelming, thereby tipping the work-life balance. Consequently, employees feel more of the need to integrate both work demands and personal needs. This calls attention to the need for spirituality at work. This is because, spirituality enables employees to synchronise their inner selves within a positive community setting to find meaning when performing their work (Daniel, 2019) and shapes employee behaviour and influences their performance (Bharadwaj and Jamal, 2020). Accordingly, this study attempts to explain the effect of spiritual work environment on employee performance.

2. Literature review

Harrington et al. (2001) argued that spirituality is about individuals' spirit and inner life, the realisation of real purpose and meaning in their work beyond monetary rewards and task performance, or true meaning at work. Spirituality has been linked to work ethics and the values employees place on their job and workplace, which has been found to increase with age (Mahakud and Gangai, 2015). Workplace spirituality assists individuals in acknowledging their

relationships with their groups, which affects their actions (Chen and Sheng, 2013) and provides individuals deeper perceptions about their lives and selves, and is related to mindfulness, meaning of work, sense of community, organisational values, benevolence and inner life (Joshi and Jain, 2016).

Past literatures have favourably linked workplace spirituality to various work-related outcomes, including stress (Cook and Babyak, 2019; Wadhera and Bano, 2020), career purpose, coherence as well as sense-making (Lips-Wiersma, 2002), wellbeing (Pawar, 2016; Arnetz et al., 2013), earnings management motivations (Chen and Sheng, 2013), employee commitment (Jena and Pradhan, 2018), organisational commitment (Sewwandi and Dhammika, 2020), and workplace incivility from supervisors and colleagues (Lata and Chaudhary, 2020). Chawla (2016) maintained that organisations that manage their salespeople's emotion and spiritual side will be more successful. Spiritual leadership has also been recognised as encouraging belongingness and uniqueness among diverse employees in work settings with high societal relevance (Gotsis and Grimani, 2017). In a more recent study, workplace spirituality has been found to be positively related to ethical climate, prosocial motivation, and moral judgement (Otake-Ebede et al., 2020). However, in Ayoun et al. (2015), it was determined that spirituality is not related to ethics or moral intensity. These studies, nevertheless, have not adequately link workplace spirituality to employees' performance.

Employee performance is employees' ability to achieve set objectives (Arifin et al., 2020). Pawirosumarto et al. (2017) highlight that employee performance include the extent of employee desires and efforts to accomplish his/her work. This is vital as it contributes to competitive advantage and success of a company (Daniel, 2019; Anitha, 2013). Thus far, work environment has been recognised to significantly impact employee performance (Amin and Majid, 2017). Workplace spirituality forms the work environment within which employees operates. In particular, Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) argue that spiritual work environment creates distinctive work atmosphere which positively impacts employee performance.

According to Bharadwaj and Jamal (2020), employees look for an environment which resonates with their spirituality. Specifically, a spiritual work environment allows employees to associate their inner lives in finding a sense of purpose while they are working to achieve company goals (Singh, 2019). Therefore, workplace spirituality drives employee performance in return for something more than simply material rewards (Sardana, 2018). There has been an emerging and growing focus on spirituality in recent years, with a definite upward trend on spiritual work environment (Philip, 2016; Loehr and Schwartz, 2001). Ashmos and Duchon (2000) define spiritual work environment as a virtuous environment characterised by three main elements, namely inner life, as well as community and meaningful work. This implies that a spiritual work environment is present when employees have the opportunity to express themselves, establish positive community relationship and perform work that relates to their life purpose (Daniel, 2019). The key implication drawn from these findings is that organisations must consider employees spiritual well-being in order to improve their performance (Golparvar and Hassan, 2014; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008).

3. Theoretical framework

The Meaning of Work (MOW) theory relates employees' performance to their psychology (Michaelson, 2005). Figure 1 shows the three main mechanisms to improve employee performance, namely the organisation resonance, work resonance and personal resonance in accordance to MOW. In particular, organisational resonance considers environmental support and connections, work resonance includes autonomy and self-identity and spiritual resonance incorporates values and higher purpose (Modica, 2018). This study uses the MOW theory to confirm the relationship between the three elements of spiritual work environment, namely inner-self, community and meaningful work to employee performance. The relationship between these three elements to employees' work performance is depicted in Figure 2.

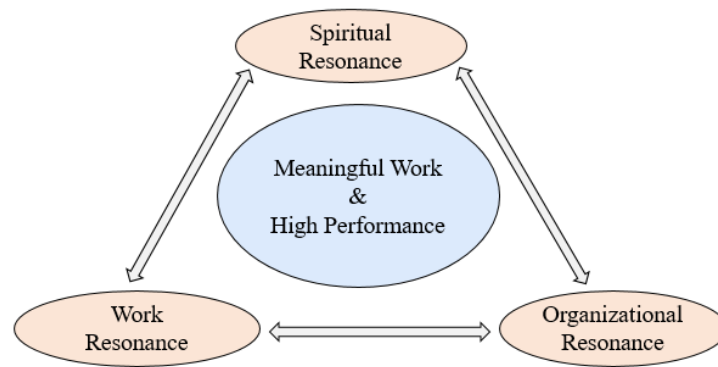


Figure 1: Meaning of Work Theory

Inner life is the first element of a spiritual work environment. It refers to a work environment where employees have the opportunities to express themselves and personify their internal values while performing work (Daniel, 2019; Fry and Nisiewicz, 2013). Hafni and Chandra (2020) studied the effect of inner life on the performance of 111 lecturers in a private university. They found a positive relationship between inner life and employee performance. The result, however, was based on a small sample - a higher education institution in Indonesia. In an earlier study, Daniel (2019) used a larger sample size with employees from health, manufacturing, education and technological sectors. The result was consistent with the finding from Hafni and Chandra's study in 2020. These findings infer that employees whose inner lives are integral to their work will have higher motivations to accomplish the jobs (Singh, 2019; Kramer and Teresa, 2011). Therefore, the first proposition for this study is:

P1: Inner life enhances employee performance.

Community is the second element of a spiritual work environment. It refers to positive interactions between employees and their surroundings (Daniel, 2019). According to Dhiman and Marques (2011), the companies Google and IKEA adopt spiritual work environments by encouraging their employees to practise self-reflection, kindness and respect. These non-egocentric practices contribute to higher level of employee performance in these companies (Hafni and Chandra, 2020). However, a more recent study by Campbell and Hwa (2014) found no relationship between community and employee performance. The limitation of this study is that it utilised Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure employee performance. KPIs considers quantifiable set of performance and hence, ignores intangible measurements such as employee motivation and spirituality (Shahin and Mahbod, 2007). It would have been more useful to incorporate survey questionnaires as an instrument to measure employee performance. Moreover, studies like Royal and Rossi (1996) and Fachrunnisa et al. (2014) suggested that sense of community shapes behaviour and contributes to higher employee performance. Therefore, the second proposition for this study is:

P2: Positive interaction with the community enhances employee performance.

The third component of a spiritual work environment is meaningful work. It refers to a set of activities which gives a sense of purpose to employees (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). This suggests that meaningful work goes beyond its economic function to include a sense of accomplishment, autonomy and independence (Doan et al., 2020; Wairimu, 2020; Vecchio, 1980). As a result, meaningful work becomes an intrinsic motivation which drives employee performance (Bowie, 1998). Studies by Daniel (2019) and Claes and Quintanilla (1994) found positive relationship

between meaningful work and employee performance. The main implication drawn from these findings is that the sense of purpose derived from meaningful work provides employees with internal cues and energy to keep their focus in the midst of the demanding and fast-paced working atmosphere (Kendall, 2019; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Accordingly, the third proposition for this study is:

P3: Meaningful work enhances employee performance.

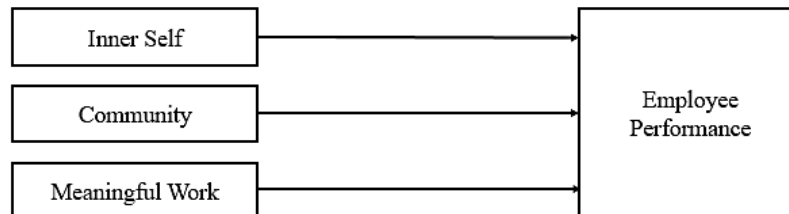


Figure 2: Research Framework

4. Conclusion

Organisations can provide employees with a spiritual work environment which can help them harness spirituality by encouraging employees to engage with their inner self, develop a sense of community and find a sense of purpose while performing work-related activities. It is crucial for companies to provide a spiritual work environment to employees in the midst of the current challenges being faced, especially the Covid-19 outbreak. The pandemic has changed the ways employees work and hence, the provision of a spiritual work environment will help develop their spiritual potential and can lead to higher levels of work performance. Inner selves can be developed either via religious activities, meditations, or recreations. These activities should be supported and encouraged by organisations by providing the place, coaching, as well as awareness. Community activities by employees, either by themselves as individuals or their participation in the organisation's community events must be recognised adequately. It is also imperative that organisations develop a strong community relations department that will look into community-related events. This helps to create awareness and eventually employees' interaction with the community. Apart from highlighting instrumental values of work and their contribution, it is also imperative that organisations emphasise the spiritual values of their existence and link the organisations' performance to non-financial ends.

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Issues and Perspectives in Business and Social Sciences

Influencers of University Students' Career Decision

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Abstract

Making a career decision is often challenging among students for which they are expected to decide on a career in times of uncertainty that will have an impact on the rest of their lives. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing undergraduate students' career decision and to propose recommendations aimed to rectify career indecisions. The independent variables chosen for this research are extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, and interpersonal factors, which is derived based on the tri-dimensional model of career choice proposed by Carpenter and Foster in 1977. An additional independent variable, which is industrial training, was added as an extension of the research framework as it is perceived to potentially influence undergraduate students' career decision as well. All data were collected from 200 undergraduate students from a private university using questionnaires and analysed by utilising Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 22). The study results indicate that intrinsic factors are the most influential in affecting undergraduate students' career decision which is followed by interpersonal factors. However, extrinsic factors and industrial training were found to have insignificant relationship with career decision making.

Keywords:

Career decision;
Factors;
University students.

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1. Introduction

Making a career decision is among the most complicated and significant decisions in which individuals have to make during their lifetime. It is often that university students are the ones experiencing career indecisions and related career decision-making difficulties (Morgan & Ness, 2003). Most young graduates fall within the population age of 20 to 24 years (Department of Statistics, 2017), of which they can be labelled as youth as defined by Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia (1997). Even though youth is viewed as a period of exciting yet tumultuous time, they are expected to make a career decision in times of uncertainties that will have a life-long impact on the rest of their lives (Shea & Joy, 2012). Barker and Kellen (1998) reported that only half of the students enrolled in universities and colleges completed their studies within four years while the other half either completely drop out or change their major from one to another, thus, adding more coursework and time to their college years. This is a result from making a career decision before fully realising one's personal values, needs, options and other factors which could have been a determinant of one's career success (Barker & Kellen, 1998). Individuals facing difficulties in making a career choice may attempt to push the responsibility of making the decision to someone else, delaying the decision, refraining from making a decision, as well as failing to make

an optimal career choice (Gati, Saka, & Krausz, 2001). Chen and Liew (2015) further added that career indecision may even lead to temporary unemployment.

In retrospect of the COVID-19 pandemic that has been surging since the preceding year, the Malaysian economy contracted by 5.6% in 2020 from a growth of 4.4% in 2019 due to restrictions on the economic activity resulting from containment measures by the government responding to the pandemic (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021b). The decline in economy growth can be seen to be portrayed in the increase of unemployment rate rising from 3.3% in 2019 to 4.5% in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021a). According to the Annual Report 2016 released by Bank Negara Malaysia, it was estimated that the youth unemployment rate was approximately three times higher compared to the national unemployment rate (Ibrahim & Mahyuddin, 2016). The population aged 15 to 24 years reached a high unemployment rate of 12% in 2020, recording a total of 314,000 of youths unemployed in year 2020 itself compared to 10.5% in the preceding year (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021b). Most young graduates fall in the population age of 20 to 24 years and thus, they may be among the ones facing difficulties in securing a job upon graduation. It highlights the concern of the rising trend of Malaysia's unemployment rate, considering the pandemic situation as well. These statistics of the unemployment rate among graduates remains a serious concern and it is deemed to be attributable by students' lack of career readiness and maturity, putting aside the changing economic landscape and labour market impacted by the COVID-19 (Mansor & Tan, 2009).

With limited knowledge and awareness of the professional world, students are pushed and pressured to figure out what career they should pursue even though they may be clueless about what they may want to do in the future. Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, final year university students aged between 21 to 23 years old should have been able to crystallise and specify their career options according to career developmental tasks (Mansor & Tan, 2009). The ability to make a right career decision is of utmost importance as it has a lifelong impact on one's life, and it can be taxing and stressful on students as well knowing the consequences of making a wrong career decision.

The focus of this research is to investigate the factors influencing career decision among students. Very few studies on factors influencing students' career decision were done in Malaysian universities. For instance, Mansor and Tan (2009) studied the independent variables including financial outcomes, interest in the subject, future job opportunities, and ease of subject. Wesarat et al. (2017) explored the independent variables which are nationality, gender, age, and grade point average. There is lack of research on the factors associated in influencing students' career decision such as categorising it into a tri-dimensional model of career choices as proposed by Carpenter and Foster (1977) based on extrinsic, intrinsic, and interpersonal factors in the Malaysian context. Moreover, past researches on this topic may be outdated as the perception of students on factors influencing their career decision may change over time. Thus, this presents a research gap in which this study aims to fill. This study report shall address the research gap by examining the factors influencing students' career decision using tri-dimensional approach including extrinsic, intrinsic, and interpersonal factors with an addition of another variable which is industrial. Previous research mainly focused on specific-wise factors, in which this study will segregate those factors into three categories as proposed by Carpenter and Foster (1977). The research objectives are (1) to identify the most and least important factors affecting the career decisions process of undergraduate students and (2) to examine the underlying factors influencing undergraduate students' career decision.

The results of this study are relevant for the university management, employers, and students. An accurate understanding on the factors associated in influencing undergraduate students will be the foundation for the university to design and develop programs to support and guide students in deciding the right career decision and make them more sustainable in the labour market. Therefore, it is important for the university management to develop and implement

effective tools and programs by understanding the perception and factors affecting students' career decision to support their career development (Marinas et al., 2016). In an employers' perspective, understanding what factors students perceive as a main driver in making a career decision can use this information in developing a sound recruitment plan for the best graduates and retention of high-quality staff. The results of this study will enable students to consider more career alternatives and by identifying the factors they use in selecting a career, a comprehensive and detailed career plan can be developed.

2. Literature review

Career choice is defined as the kind of profession one intends to pursue in life (Edwards & Quinter, 2011). Geciki (Geciki, 2002 as cited in Ahmed et al., 2017) defined career as occupational, commercial, or industrial activity a person may adopt during the stages of life from education or till his death. It was pointed out by past researchers namely Barreto and Aiello-Vaisberg (Barreto & Aiello-Vaisberg, 2007 as cited in Hsiao & Nova, 2016), Gati et al. (2001), and Nepomuceno and Witter (Nepomuceno & Witter, 2010 as cited in Hsiao & Nova, 2016), that career decision normally occur during adolescence and it is a major decision in a person's life, which may seriously affect the person's future in regards to fortune, lifestyle, education, and personal and professional acquaintanceships. According to Dubar (Dubar, 2005 as cited in Hsiao & Nova, 2016), career choice is akin to personal and occupational identity, worldview, and further decisions. An individual making a career decision over his or her life span involves lifelong psychological and behavioural processes as well as contextual factors which influences one's career decision (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). Gokuladas (2010) implied that career choice involves students selecting the occupation and professional field they wish to pursue by matching their choices to their own individual needs.

Career decision making is a lifelong process and it shapes one's future career (Baliyan & Baliyan, 2016; Mansor & Tan, 2009). Most people make their career decisions by balancing their interests and values with opportunities, cost of pursuing those job opportunities, as well as their talents. Career choice is not influenced by only individual factors. It is also influenced by various factors including economic, cultural, social, and environmental (Baliyan & Baliyan, 2016). According to Venable (Venable, 2011 as cited in Baliyan & Baliyan, 2016), the career choice that individuals makes are unique to their own situation which are determined by a combination and interaction of various factors.

2.1 Expectancy Theory

The Expectancy Theory model is often used in predicting people's occupational preference and choice (Mitchell & Beach, 1976). This model is based on the notion that the strength of a person's tendency to behave in a certain way is dependent on the expected outcome or consequence, and the attractiveness and value perceived of those outcomes by the individual (Lawler, 1973). This theory model was developed by Victor H. Vroom in the year of 1964. He conceptualised that career choice is dependent on the degree of a given alternative that will most likely bring forth valued outcomes than other alternatives (Mitchell & Beach, 1976). Vroom (1964) defined an individual's expectancy as the person's belief regarding the probability of his decision will lead to a specific outcome of interest. The Expectancy Theory model can be used to predict career choice as suggested by Vroom (1964). The theory also postulates that people join organisations along with their own expectations and whether those expectations are met, will influence the decision to remain or leave the organisation (Daly & Dee, 2006). An explanation of why people choose to behave in a certain way is provided by this theory.

According to the expectancy theory, social factors include parents' influence, friends, and teachers' influence, social status and economic conditions which also includes job opportunity, amount of salary, as well as work-life balance (Baliyan & Baliyan, 2016). Vroom (1964) suggested that the Expectancy Theory is based on four assumptions:

- i. People join organisations with expectations of their needs, motivations, and working experiences.
- ii. People's behaviour are derived from a conscious choice whereby they are free to choose behaviours based on their own expectations.
- iii. Different people expects different things from an organisation (i.e. salary, career advancement, promotion, job security)
- iv. People select among alternatives or decide on opportunities to pursue by optimising their expectations and outcome of the job.

Aforementioned, the Expectancy Theory can be used to predict career choice among many other existing models according to past empirical researches (Mitchell & Beach, 1976). Hayibor (2012) points out that this theory is applicable to conditions whereby stakeholders secure their interests by deciding the action they will take against or perceive about an organisation. Therefore, he applied the Expectancy Theory in his study which was aimed to investigate and analyse the factors influencing accounting students when seeking for jobs.

2.2 Extrinsic factors

Extrinsic factors are defined as financial remuneration and market-related factors that are extrinsic to the nature of the job itself (Paolillo & Estes, 1982; Gul et al., 1989; Auyeung & Sands, 1997; Baliyan & Baliyan, 2016). Financial and job-market factors are related to the availability of jobs, opportunity for career advancement, career options flexibility, job security, excellent long-term earnings, and good initial salary are among the determinants influencing job seekers to decide on a career (Gul et al., 1989; Felton et al., 1994; Mauldin et al., 2000). Extrinsic factors refer to an importance placed on making money, job security, potential earnings, and job availability (Elizur, 1984; Ros et al., 1999; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Other than financial rewards, extrinsic factors such as job security, opportunity for career advancement, and job availability were found to have significant relationship with career decisions as well. A study conducted on students' preference when selecting a career revealed that job security, anticipated challenging work, and career advancement are among the most important factors behind making a career decision (Bundy & Norris, 1992). Similarly, Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003) indicated that university students were mostly influenced by extrinsic factors such as financial remuneration, opportunity for career advancement, working environment, and so forth. To confirm that extrinsic factors indeed have significant influence on career decision, the following hypothesis is proposed for this study:

H1: There is significant relationship between extrinsic factors and undergraduate students' career decision.

2.3 Intrinsic factors

Intrinsic factors are defined as factors relating to the satisfaction derived from a job and helps individuals to be creative and autonomous within an intellectually challenging and dynamic environment (Ahmed et al., 1997). Intrinsic factor refers to an importance placed on autonomy, intrinsic interest, and independence (Elizur, 1984; Ros et al., 1999). According to the authors examining on undergraduate students' motivation who selects teaching as a career choice, intrinsic factors is defined as those which reflect themes of personal satisfaction and possessing personal interest in the subject and career itself (Chuene et al., 1999; Yong, 1995; Young, 1995). It was stated that intrinsic factors are focused on the job content as well as the opportunity to receive further training and career advancement. More specifically, intrinsic factors include job related factors such as the power and authority the job entails, working environment and opportunities for career advancement, intrinsic interest in the job profession, creativity and expected professional challenges (Bai, 1998; Aycan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003; Gokuladas, 2010; Felton et al., 1994; Carpenter & Foster, 1977; Beyon et al., 1998). Olamide and Olawaiye (2013) also considered grades to be an intrinsic factor falling under "personality descriptors" that may limit opportunities in the future. Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003) revealed that intrinsic factors such as self-aspirations mostly affect one's career choice. Similarly, Zhang (2007) concluded her research

whereby interest in a specific subject is perceived to influence career decision making as well. In order to determine whether intrinsic factors have influence on career choice as evidenced by aforementioned studies, the following hypothesis is proposed for this study:

H2: There is a significant relationship between intrinsic factors and undergraduate students' career decision.

2.4 Interpersonal factors

Carpenter and Foster (1977), Beyon et al. (1998) and Gokuladas (2010) reported that interpersonal factors refer to the influence of parental, family, relatives, friends, as well as professors. The study on factors determining secondary school students' career choice by Olamide and Olawaiye (2013) involving 100 students as sample size revealed that various environmental factors including parents will influence students' career choices. If a student does not have any plans for a career, provided that parents exert enough pressure on them to pursue a particular career field, the student will follow his or her parent's suggestion. Environmental factors that exerts relative influence on career choice are parents, relatives, siblings, peers, teachers, and counsellors which makes up a student's support system (Olamide & Olawaiye, 2013). Studies also found that most students' career choice is perceived to be influenced by the attitude and expectations of parents and teachers. It was found by researchers that family, parent, or friends have a significant influence on students' making a career choice (Emmanuelle, 2009; Mudhovozi & Chireshe, 2012). In Asian countries, parents exerts significant influence on their children's career choice to the extent that parents are the ones who choose the career that their children pursue (Wong & Liu, 2010; Baines, 2009). Other similar studies concluded that parents were perceived to be the most influential in students' career decisions (Basow & Howe, 1979; Hoffman et al., 1992) which may be attributed to their close relations with one another. To verify whether interpersonal factors have influence on career decision, the following hypothesis is developed for the purpose of this study:

H3: There is a significant relationship between interpersonal factors and undergraduate students' career decision.

2.5 Industrial training

An industrial training is an opportunity for undergraduate students to gain professional working experience as part of their formal education in a university by partaking in supervised and planned work as well as being exposed to real-world corporate environment (Renganathan et al., 2012). It was stated by Ko (2007) that students' satisfaction of their industrial training experience may affect their confidence in choosing a career development path. To have realistic career expectations, the experience for which students obtains from partaking in industrial trainings is of high importance (Lam & Ching, 2007). Salatan (2016) explored the influence of internship experience on students' career selection and found that students perceived industrial training planning to be an important factor in influencing their internship experience satisfaction which ultimately lead to deciding whether or not they will pursue a career in the tourism and hospitality industry. Industrial trainings are perceived to be effective tools in helping students to make better career choices by ensuring that students gain practical experience through experiential learning (Lee & Chao, 2012). Students are able to put into practice what they have learned theoretically in university which directly and indirectly contributes to the sustainability of learning processes that leads to an improvement of informed career decision making. To verify whether industrial training have influence on career decision, the following hypothesis is developed for the purpose of this study:

H4: There is a significant relationship between industrial training and undergraduate students' career decision.

2.6 Research Framework

A research framework was developed for the purpose of this study as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the independent variables (Extrinsic, Intrinsic, Interpersonal, and Industrial Training), and the dependent variable (Undergraduate Students' Career Decision).

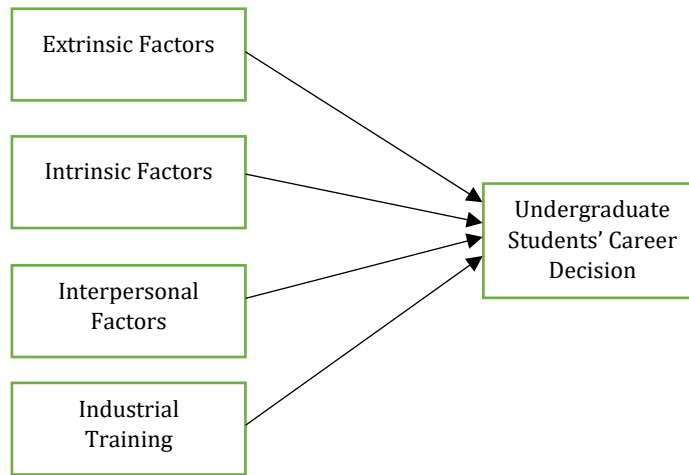


Figure 1: Research Framework

The research framework components comprising of independent and dependent variables were developed by referring to the tri-dimensional model of career decision proposed by Carpenter and Foster (1977). This model proposed that there are three main factors that influences career decision namely extrinsic factors (good salary and benefits, job security, career advancement, prestigious occupations and availability of the job), intrinsic factors (self-interest, self-image, personal values, and opportunity for learning and development), and interpersonal factors (influence of parents, friends, and professors). An additional independent variable which is industrial training was included into this research framework as it could potentially influence undergraduate students' career decision as well.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study used quantitative data collection techniques and study designs. Descriptive and survey research design were adopted for the purpose of achieving the objectives of this study. Descriptive survey research would be suitable for this study as it will result in the indication of percentage of people who holds a particular perception on the subject matter after the issues of this study are defined and basic information in relation to this study is available in the form of literature review (Neuman, 2014). This design is appropriate for the purpose of this study as a self-administered survey in the form of questionnaires will be collected from respondents as primary data for this study for analysing the perception regarding factors influencing career decisions of undergraduate students. In addition, a cross-sectional research design was used to collect information from undergraduate students in one of the universities in Melaka. It is simple and cost effective as this study examines only the variables at a single point in time (Neuman, 2014).

3.2 Research instrument

Questionnaires were used as a research instrument for achieving the objectives of this study. The questionnaires were directly distributed to respondents by the researcher to identify the

undergraduate students' perception of factors influencing their career decision. The questionnaire has a total number of three sections as follows:

- Section A: Demographic information (i.e. gender, age, year of study, and faculty)
- Section B: Factors Influencing Career Decision (Independent variables: extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, and interpersonal factors)
- Section C: Career Decision (Dependent variable)

Section A aims to elicit demographic information from respondents such as gender, age, year of study, area of study, industrial training experience, and whether they preferred the private or public sector. For section B, respondents were required to rate the Likert scale pertaining to their perception of factors influencing career decision which are the independent variables namely, extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, and interpersonal factors. Section C comprised of statements aimed to measure the dependent variable which is undergraduate students' career decision. For section B and C, a 4-point Likert scale were used to measure target respondents' perception of factors influencing career decision. The scale for "Extrinsic Factors" and "Intrinsic Factors" which are the independent variables ranges from 1 = "Not at all important" to "Extremely important". The scale for "Interpersonal Factors" which is also an independent variable ranges from 1 = "Very low" to 4 = "Quite high". Meanwhile, the scale for "Career Decision" which is the dependent variable ranges from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 4 = "Strongly agree". All of the scales used for this questionnaire do not have a midpoint to reduce central tendency error. The reason behind using a 4-point Likert scale is to eliminate social desirability bias (Garland, 1991) and propel respondents to provide a definite answer (Kroh, 2007). The questionnaire was developed based on Carpenter and Foster (1977) tri-dimensional model for career choice comprising of extrinsic, intrinsic, and interpersonal model. The questionnaire items were adapted and adopted from other related empirical researches mentioned in the literature review to suit the context of this study. All items in the questionnaire are close ended in order for the researcher to be able to analyse data in an accurate manner. Appendix A shows the items in the questionnaire.

Pilot study was carried out to ensure the reliability of the survey items. As suggested by Johanson and Brooks (2009), a minimum of 30 respondents representing the population of interest were involved in the pilot testing. The items of the questionnaire was pilot tested with 30 undergraduate students on a random basis. The reliability of the instrument was checked using Cronbach's Alpha whereby the minimum value should be 0.60 as suggested by Hair et al. (1998). All items in the questionnaire for each variable are deemed to be acceptable as all Cronbach Alpha values listed exceeded 0.70 (Career decision = 0.758, Extrinsic factors = 0.915, Intrinsic factors = 0.912, Interpersonal factors = 0.852).

3.3 Sampling plan

The target population for this study were undergraduate students who are currently pursuing their bachelor's degrees. As the focus of this study is to examine the factors influencing undergraduate students' career decision, the target population was chosen because they will soon be graduating in the near future and this study may be able to help them in ways to make a sound career decision.

The sampling plan chosen for this study is non-probability sampling techniques. Firstly, convenience sampling method was used to disseminate questionnaires to students who are currently pursuing bachelor degree programs. Another sampling technique used for this study is snowball sampling (non-probability sampling technique) whereby students were asked to distribute the questionnaires to their friends.

3.4 Data collection method

The data was collected through surveys and the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to students within the premise of the university to ensure the validity of respondents and obtain full and prompt responses. The researcher also designed an online

questionnaire using Google Form to reach more respondents within a short period of time by sharing the link to the questionnaire through social media. To ensure the validity of respondents who answered the questionnaire through Google Forms, the researcher disseminated the links to the targeted population personally. The students were ensured anonymity in regards to the responses they provide in the questionnaires and it takes approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey. A study by James and Denis (2015) on the factors influencing career decision among undergraduate students in an African university context had a sample population 116 students being randomly selected. This study collected data from 200 students, which is slightly more than the previous study to improve the accuracy and reliability of data collected. To conclude, the number of sample size which was collected for this study was adequate according to GPower Version 3.1 whereby the number of respondents must be at least 195.

3.5 Data analysis method

The quantitative data obtained from disseminating questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics and inferential statistics for the analysis of this study. Descriptive statistics were generated using the SPSS such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to analyse the trend for data collected on respondents' demographic information for frequency analysis. The SPSS generated inferential statistics comprising of multiple regression analysis and Cronbach's Alpha.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Respondents' profile

Table 1 shows a majority of respondents (66%) were female while the remaining 34% were male. This may be attributable to more females enrolled in the university compared to males. Majority of the respondents of this study belonged to the age group of 21 – 23 with a percentage of 76.0% while the minority of respondents belonged to the age group of 27 and above (1.0%). The remaining respondents fall into the age category of 18 – 20 (10.5%) and 24 – 26 (12.5%). More than half of the total respondents were Chinese at a percentage of 72.5% while the remaining were Malay, Indian, and others. Slightly over half of respondents were in year 3 (51.0%) and there were over 30% of respondents in year 4. The remaining respondents were in year 1 (5.5%) and year 2 (9.0%). Majority of respondents were pursuing their studies in Business field (71.0%), followed by Engineering and Technology (12.0%), Information Science and Technology (10.5%), and Law (6.5%) respectively.

Close to half of respondents (48.5%) have undergone industrial. For those who have undergone industrial training, majority of the respondents deemed their internship experience as moderately relevant at the percentage of 18.0% out of 48.5%, which is then followed by those who perceived that their industrial training were only slightly relevant (14.0%) to their career decision. 12.5% of respondents perceived their hands-on working experience throughout the internship duration to be extremely relevant to their career decision, while on the other hand, only 4.0% deemed it to be not at all relevant. A huge majority of respondents deemed industrial training to be of great importance in influencing their career decision at the significant percentage of 93.5%. Students may be of the perception that by gaining real working experience in the form of industrial training, they may use such experience to decide on the career path for which they plan to pursue. On the other hand, only 6.5% of respondents perceived industrial training to have no importance in influencing their career decision. There is a significant amount of respondents who prefer to work in the private sector at the percentage of 80.5%. In contrast, only 19.5% of respondents prefer to work in public sectors.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	34.0
	Female	132	66.0
Age	18 – 20	21	10.5
	21 – 23	152	76.0
	24 – 26	25	12.5
	27 – above	2	1.0
Race	Malay	32	16.0
	Chinese	145	72.5
	Indian	19	9.5
	Others	4	2.0
Year of Study	1	11	5.5
	2	18	9.0
	3	102	51.0
	4	69	34.5
Area of Study	Business	142	71.0
	Law	13	6.5
	Engineering and Technology	24	12.0
	Information Science and Technology	21	10.5
Undergone Industrial Training	Yes	97	48.5
	No	103	51.5
Relevance of Industrial Training	Not at all relevant	8	4.0
	Slightly relevant	28	14.0
	Moderately relevant	36	18.0
	Extremely relevant	25	12.5
Importance of Industrial Training	Yes	187	93.5
	No	13	6.5
Sector Preference	Private sector	161	80.5
	Public sector	39	19.5

4.2 Descriptive analysis

The mean and standard deviation were obtained for all five variables, namely career decision, extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, interpersonal factors, and industrial training. The mean of variables range from 1.07 to 3.28. The mean score for extrinsic factors is the highest at 3.28. It is followed by intrinsic factors, career decision, and interpersonal factors at 3.23, 3.00, and 2.54 respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis for Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career Decision	3.00	0.469
Extrinsic Factors	3.28	0.371
Intrinsic Factors	3.23	0.400
Interpersonal Factors	2.54	0.584

4.3 Multiple linear regression analysis

Based on Table 3, 22.4% ($R^2 = 0.224$) of the variation in career decision is explained by extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, and interpersonal factors. The F-value is 14.077 which is significant at 0.000 level. Since the significant value is below $p = 0.05$, there is a model fit. This indicates that there is at least one of the independent variables have significant relationship with dependent variable.

The multiple regression table shows that intrinsic factors ($p = 0.000$) and interpersonal factors ($p = 0.000$) significantly influence career decision at 1% confidence interval level since the p value falls below 0.01. However, it appears that extrinsic factors ($p = 0.479$) and industrial training ($p = 0.947$) do not significantly influence career decision which is indicated by the p value above 0.05. The independent variable which influences career decision the most is intrinsic factors ($\beta = 0.299$) followed by interpersonal factors ($\beta = 0.284$). Therefore, the Multiple Regression analysis indicated that intrinsic factors are the most influential variable in explaining undergraduates' career decision.

To test the hypotheses, the p value generated in the Multiple Regression analysis table is referred to. Hypothesis 1 and 4 are rejected due to the p value exceeding 0.05 which rendered it as insignificant in influencing career decision of undergraduates. Meanwhile, hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3 are accepted since the p value is significant ($p = 0.000$) at 1% confidence interval.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Coefficients Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.058	0.295		3.583	0.000		
Extrinsic Factors	0.071	0.100	0.056	0.709	0.479	0.632	1.583
Intrinsic Factors	0.351	0.093	0.299	3.755	0.000***	0.622	1.607
Interpersonal Factors	0.228	0.051	0.284	4.449	0.000***	0.974	1.026
Industrial Training	0.008	0.121	0.004	0.067	0.947	0.983	1.017

Notes: F = 14.077 ($p = 0.000$); $R^2 = 0.224$

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of research objectives

The first objective of this study is to identify the most and least important factors which affect undergraduate students' career decision choices. This objective has been achieved as the Multiple Linear Regression analysis conducted gave a definite result in regards to determining which factors have the most and least influence on undergraduate students when making a career decision.

Table 4: Ranking of Independent Variables

Rank	Item	Sig. Value	Standardised Beta
1	Intrinsic Factors	0.000	0.299
2	Interpersonal Factors	0.000	0.284
3	Extrinsic Factors	0.479	0.056
4	Industrial Training	0.947	0.004

The variable which obtained the highest value of standardised beta generated from conducting Multiple Regression Analysis can be denoted as having the most influence on undergraduate students in making their career decision. In Table 4, it is observed that intrinsic factors are perceived to be the most important career decision making factor as it has the highest influence on undergraduate students' career decision, which is then followed by interpersonal factors, extrinsic factors and industrial training respectively. It should be noted that extrinsic factors and

industrial training do not have significant influence on the dependent variable. Therefore, the first objective of this study which is to determine the most and least important career decision making factors perceived by respondents has been achieved.

The second research objective is to examine the underlying factors influencing undergraduate students' career decision. Therein, the factors influencing career decision making identified for the purpose of this study are extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, interpersonal factors, and industrial training.

Extrinsic factors are denoted as not having significant influence on undergraduate students' career decision as the hypothesis which stated that there is a significant relationship between the two variables was rejected due to an insignificant p value above 0.05. The result of this study regarding extrinsic factors is in contrast with previous studies of similar topic. Undergraduate students' career decision seemed to be not extrinsic factors driven which was suggested otherwise by Marinas et al. (2016) and other prominent researchers. This may be attributable to majority of respondents belonging to Generation Y which are the groups for which employers will be looking to hire in the following years. This age cohort are those who are born between year 1980 to 2000 (William, 2008; Tay, 2011 as cited in Tan & Wan Fauziah, 2012). Generation Y is cited to focus more on intrinsic requirements involving non-financial motivations as opposed to extrinsic factors. Research findings by Ting (2017) found that intrinsic motivation is significantly important for Generation Y compared to extrinsic factors as they tend to pay more attention to their inner needs. However, in the same study, salary still plays a role in motivating and influencing Generation Y in career decisions and working performance.

The hypothesis which stated that there is a significant relationship between intrinsic factors and undergraduate students' career decision was accepted since the p value is significant ($p = 0.000$). Moreover, the Multiple Linear Regression analysis indicated that the independent variable exert significant influence on undergraduate students' career decision which is denoted by the significant value of below 0.05. It was also concluded that intrinsic factors have the most influence on career decision compared to extrinsic factors, interpersonal factors and industrial training. The resulting findings is in harmony with Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003) who found that intrinsic factors such as students' personal values and nature of the job that challenges them intellectually were the most influential. It was observed by Hsiao and Nova (2016) regarding Generation Y that intrinsic factors such as challenging nature of the job exerted great influence on career decision making, which can be suited to the scope of this study as the age cohort mainly belongs to Generation Y. It shows that Generation Y assign more relevance to openness to change such as learning new things and prioritising their personal values and interests in making a career decision as opposed to the traditional and conventional extrinsic factors which are often associated to have major influence on career choice in previous studies (Behling et al., 1968; Aycan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003; Schmutte, 2001). In retrospect of these findings, the objective of examining the relationship between intrinsic factors and career decision has been achieved.

Moving on, the hypothesis which stated that there is a significant relationship between interpersonal factors and undergraduate students' career decision was accepted since the p value is significant ($p = 0.000$). The Multiple Linear Regression analysis denoted that interpersonal factors also have significant influence and it is the second most influencing factor after intrinsic factors. The findings are in harmony with past researches such as Marinas et al. (2016) which found that interpersonal factors significantly influences career choice of undergraduate students who are majoring in business and administration. Abbasi and Sarwat (2014) also suggested that students are under great influence of their parents and friends, as well as placing great importance on social relations when selecting their career path. In particular, parents exert the most influence on undergraduate students' career decision which is indicated by the highest mean among other items under interpersonal factors such as relatives, teachers, friends or peers, and counsellors. Parents are among the major sources which impacts students' perception of the available and suitable career opportunities that will influence their initial career decision.

Respondents are greatly influenced by interpersonal factors when deciding on their career decisions which may be attributable to lack of working experience. Students have limited exposure towards real working experience so they tend to rely on job information from their parents who have years of working experience and are seen to be reliable sources of career information (Choo et al., 2012). All these findings lead to the achievement of this objective in examining the relationship between interpersonal factors and undergraduates' career decision.

The last factor that has the potential to influence undergraduate students' career decision is industrial training which is a type of working experience provided for students in universities where they may apply the theories which they have learned in a professional working environment. It is also said that industrial training is a platform for which students are given the opportunity to gain practical working experience and to have realistic expectations of the plausible career path to be pursued in the future (Lam & Ching, 2007). The hypothesis which stated that there is a significant relationship between industrial training and undergraduate students' career decision was rejected due to an insignificant p value above 0.05. This is contrary to the majority percentage of respondents deeming that industrial training was indeed an important type of working experience that will influence their career decision. The result derived was also in contrast with Edwards and Quinter (2011) who found that learning experiences are the most influential factors affecting career decisions among students. Even though the results derived using Multiple Linear Regression denoted that there is no significant influence of industrial training on undergraduate students' career decision, majority of respondents are of the perception that industrial trainings are important in determining their future career path according to their responses. Nevertheless, students may be of the perception that industrial training do not significantly influence their career decision due to being heavily influenced by intrinsic and interpersonal factors instead. While having already made a career decision, industrial training may be deemed as a reality check to verify that they have made the right career decision.

5.2 Research contribution

This research provides an insight of the factors influencing undergraduate students in making their career decisions. Knowing the factors which have an impact on undergraduate students' career decision making will allow them to examine their perception and processes when making a career decision. By having an insight of these factors, undergraduate students may construct a more comprehensive career plan by considering more career alternatives which will result in them making an informed career decision. The results and findings of this research will also contribute in terms of providing information about factors influencing career decision to relevant parties such as the university management in deciding on how to aid students in choosing a career path and for employers to recruit the right candidates.

5.3 Implications and recommendation

The implication of this research involves the university management, employers, as well as students. First of all, according to the data collected, majority of respondents perceived that industrial training is an important type of working experience that will influence their career decision. Therefore, it is perceived that gaining personal exposure of real working experiences through industrial training is vital for students in making professional choices related to their career (Marinas et al., 2016). Therefore, the recommendation for the university management is to actively collaborate with potential employers of graduates in terms of providing relevant industrial training for students that will significantly influence their career decision making. The university management should also do more to provide students with information on the type of careers available and advise them on the kind of careers that may be suitable for them. This will also implicate employers since most organisations would want to recruit talents especially among fresh graduates. The findings of this study will allow organisations to align their employment offerings such as benefits in terms of providing opportunities for self-development and chances to learn new things that may be in the form of job-rotation for which the organisations may then

promote these offerings to attract and retain talents as well as enhancing person-organisational or person-job fit. By realising the specific factors that greatly influences undergraduate students' career decisions, students themselves should initiate and actively obtain and keep abreast of career information by utilising the Internet as a platform by gaining access to employment websites such as LinkedIn and Jobstreet.com, as well as attending career fairs to gain real-time information regarding companies employment offerings and benefits that will help in making an informed and well-planned career decision.

5.4 Suggestion for future research

Further research on this study with the same line of thought should be done in order to better comprehend the factors and processes that influences students in making their career decisions. The future research on the same scope of study should include more students from both private and public universities to generalise findings on a broader population of the country by increasing the sample size. There could be other influential variables for which this study may not cover such as culture and academic performance which should also be considered to study this topic within the Malaysian context as most researches focused on the Western cultures.

5.5 Limitation

This study has limited sample size due to short amount of time span. The data collection was carried out in only one private university in Malaysia for which the findings of this study could not be fully generalised in the Malaysian context. Due to time and financial constraints, convenience sampling was applied within one private university premise which again, limits the generalisation of the results and findings.

5.6 Conclusion

As making a career decision before one's graduation is often challenging when the decision itself in times of uncertainty will have an impact on one's entire life, there is a need to investigate the underlying factors influencing undergraduate students' career decisions and to propose recommendations to alleviate career indecisions. The study found that intrinsic factors have the most influence on undergraduate students making a career decision, which was followed by interpersonal factors. These findings are in contrast with past researches whereby most of them emphasised on extrinsic factors having significant influence on career decision making, for which this study found that extrinsic factors do not have any significant influence over deciding on a career path. This study will help students to crystallise and specify their career decisions prior graduation by having a clear understanding of the factors to be taken into consideration when deciding on a career choice. All in all, making the right career decision is crucial to be successful as undergraduate students may be future pioneers or even leaders, which prompts the need for further research to analyse the underlying causal factors during career decision making.

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Appendix A

Construct	Item	Item Description	Source
Extrinsic Factors (EF)	EF1	Job availabilities	Carpenter and Foster (1977)
	EF2	Good initial salary	Carpenter and Foster (1977)
	EF3	Potential for future higher earning	Sibson (2011)
	EF4	Career advancement opportunities	Carpenter and Foster (1977)
	EF5	Job security	Carpenter and Foster (1977)
	EF6	High social standing	Carpenter and Foster (1977)
	EF7	Prestigious profession	Edwards and Quinter (2011)
	EF8	Opportunity to achieve good standard of living	Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003)
	EF9	Good employer reputation	Omar et al. (2015)
	EF10	Good fringe benefits (i.e. medical insurance, bonus, allowance etc.)	Abassi and Sarwat (2014)
Intrinsic Factors (IF)	IF1	My interest in a particular subject	Zhang (2007)
	IF2	Opportunity to learn new things	Corporaal (2012)
	IF3	Opportunity for self-development	Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003)
	IF4	Fit to the image that I have for myself	Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003)
	IF5	My personal values	Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003)
	IF6	My skills and abilities	Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003)
	IF7	Nature of the job that challenges me intellectually	Ahmed, Alam, and Alam (2010)
	IF8	My grades	Olamide and Olawaiye (2013)
Interpersonal Factors (IPF)	IPF1	Parents	Olamide and Olawaiye (2013)
	IPF2	Relatives	Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003)
	IPF3	Teachers	Olamide and Olawaiye (2013)
	IPF4	Friends or peers	Olamide and Olawaiye (2013)
	IPF5	Counsellors	Olamide and Olawaiye (2013)
Career Choice (CC)	CC1	I have made a career choice.	Borchert (2002)
	CC2	I have career plans at present.	Borchert (2002)
	CC3	I am aware of what career I'm planning to pursue.	Borchert (2002)
	CC4	I will choose my career choice based on my interest in a particular occupation.	Olamide and Olawaiye (2013)
	CC5	I intend to work in a profession related to my degree major upon graduation.	Fizer (2013)
	CC6	I intend to remain in the career field related to my degree major after graduation.	Watt and Richardson, (2007)