

When Identity Meets Intention: A Conceptual Integration of Planned Behaviour and Cosmopolitanism in Emerging Market Consumption of Foreign-Made Hygiene Products

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper examines consumer purchase intentions for foreign-made hygiene products in emerging markets, with a particular focus on Malaysia. It integrates the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Identity Theory (SIT) to provide a more holistic understanding of consumer behaviour in a globalized context. While TPB emphasizes the role of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping behavioural intention, this study introduces cosmopolitanism, a key construct in SIT that reflects openness to global cultures and products as a mediating variable between these factors and purchase intention. By positioning cosmopolitanism as a bridge between rational decision-making (TPB) and identity-driven consumption (SIT), the proposed model highlights the cultural and psychological dimensions influencing consumer acceptance of foreign-made hygiene products. This integration underscores the importance of both cognitive evaluations and social identity traits in explaining consumer behaviour. The paper contributes to theory in advancing a cross-disciplinary model that captures the interplay of behavioural and cultural determinants, and to practice by offering insights into how foreign brands can better tailor market entry and positioning strategies in Malaysia and other emerging markets. Ultimately, the study enriches understanding of how globalization and cultural identity converge to shape purchasing decisions in the hygiene sector.

Keywords: Consumer purchase intention, emerging market, TPB, cosmopolitanism

INTRODUCTION

In the context of today's highly globalised economy, consumers are progressively encountering and engaging with an expanding array of foreign products, influenced by the proliferation of international trade, digital platforms, and cross-cultural exchanges. The global market for consumer products is increasingly influenced by cultural dynamics, and emerging markets like Malaysia present unique opportunities and challenges for foreign products. Consumers in these markets are not only driven by personal preferences but also by their social identities, which include values, cultural affiliations, and global openness. Historically, colonial powers controlled the trade and access to high-quality goods, which reinforced the perception that western products are modern, technologically advances, and reliable (Nair, 2017). This mentality has not completely disappeared, instead, it continues to influence present-day consumer attitudes in post-colonial societies. In Malaysia, the International Trade Administration (ITA, 2024) reported that major international brands have established a strong foothold, supported by data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2019), which recorded consumer spending of approximately USD 407 million on imported toiletries and cosmetics. Consistent with this trend, Statista (2020) found that foreign personal care and hygiene products dominate Malaysian consumers' choices in the health and beauty segment. Birruntha (2019) reported that fewer than 40 percent of Malaysians consistently purchase local products, even though more than 75 percent are aware of the government campaigns. In the context of hygiene products, Malaysian consumers' purchase intentions for foreign-made products can be shaped by these cultural and social identity traits. Global consumer markets are increasingly characterised by the interplay between local identity and global consumption patterns. Hygiene products and personal care items have become essential commodities, often perceived as symbols of quality, safety, and modernity when imported (Rahman and Reynolds, 2022). In emerging markets, foreign-made hygiene products are positioned not only as necessities but also as aspirational goods associated with higher standards of living (Nguyen and Simkin, 2021).

This paper aims to integrate Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with Cosmopolitanism from Social Identity Theory (SIT) to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding purchase intentions for foreign-made hygiene products in Malaysia. Cosmopolitanism, defined as an openness to and acceptance of diverse cultures and global products, serves as a mediating variable that bridges the relationship between the TPB factors (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) and the intention to purchase foreign hygiene products. This integrative approach offers insights into how cultural openness and global identity shape consumer behaviour in Malaysia's evolving marketplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Planned Behaviour and Consumer Intention

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is one of the most widely applied frameworks for explaining and predicting human behaviour, particularly in the domain of consumer decision-making (Ajzen, 1991). TPB posits that behavioural intention, the motivational factor that indicates how hard people are willing to try and how much effort they plan to exert, is the most immediate determinant of behaviour. This intention is shaped by three antecedents; i) attitude, which refers to an individual's overall positive and negative evaluation of performing the behaviour, ii) subjective norm, which reflect perceived social pressures to perform or not perform the behaviour, and iii) perceived behavioural control, which represents the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour, often shaped by resources, accessibility, and opportunities.

Extensive studies have applied TPB to consumer research, confirming its predictive power in contexts such as health-related behaviour, sustainable consumption, and cross-cultural purchasing decisions (Armitage and Conner, 2001; Paul et al., 2016). However, critics argue that TPB emphasizes rational evaluation but does not fully account for the influence of identity and cultural orientation in shaping consumer intentions (Sparks, 2015). This gap opens the possibility of integrating constructs from Social Identity Theory (SIT) to provide a more nuanced understanding of consumer intention.

Cosmopolitanism in Consumer Research

Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that individuals derive part of their identity from membership in social, cultural, or national groups, and this identity shapes intergroup attitudes and behaviours (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Within consumer research, this means that product evaluations and purchase intentions can be influenced not only by functional attributes but also by identity-based orientations such as ethnocentrism, animosity, or cosmopolitanism (Shah et al., 2021). Cosmopolitanism refers to an openness to foreign cultures, products, and lifestyles, and a willingness to engage with diversity beyond one's local identity (Cleveland et al., 2011). Cosmopolitan consumers tend to value global connectivity, associate foreign products with quality and authenticity, and are generally more favourable toward global brands (Rieffler et al., 2012). In emerging markets, cosmopolitanism has been shown to counterbalance consumer ethnocentrism and cultural resistance thereby facilitating the acceptance of foreign-made goods (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2016).

In the context of TPB, cosmopolitanism can serve as a mediating variable that influences how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control translate into purchase intention for foreign-made hygiene products. First, cosmopolitanism shapes attitudes by enhancing the perceived value, safety, and prestige for foreign products. Second, it reinforces subjective norms, since consumers embedded in cosmopolitan networks (e.g., peers or family members with global orientations) are more likely to experience social encouragement to purchase foreign-made products, third, cosmopolitan consumers often perceive fewer barriers related to perceived behavioural control, as they are accustomed to global availability, online shopping and cross-border consumption (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007).

Thus, cosmopolitanism mediates the relationship between the TPB constructs and purchase intention. Consumers with higher cosmopolitan orientation are more likely to hold favourable attitudes, perceive supportive social norms, and experience fewer obstacles, which collectively increase the likelihood of purchasing foreign-made hygiene products. Incorporating cosmopolitanism into TPB therefore enriches the understanding of consumer behaviour by integrating cultural identity with rational decision-making, offering a more holistic model for

explaining purchase intentions in emerging markets (Guo et al., 2025; Lee and Wang, 2022; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2021; Rieffler and Diamantopoulos, 2020; Prince et al., 2021).

Hygiene Products in Emerging Markets

Hygiene products occupy a vital role in public health and consumer well-being, particularly in emerging markets, where rising urbanization and increasing health awareness have accelerated demand (World Health Organization, 2020). Foreign-made hygiene products are often perceived as safer, more reliable, and of superior quality compared to local alternatives, largely due to advanced manufacturing standards, brand reputation, and international certifications (Rahman and Reynolds, 2022). This perception has strengthened consumer trust in foreign brands, especially in categories such as personal care and feminine hygiene. Nevertheless, consumer behaviour in these markets cannot be explained solely by perceptions of quality. Cultural identity, nationalism, and price sensitivity exert strong influences on purchasing decisions (Nguyen and Simkin, 2021). For instance, locally produced hygiene products may be preferred by ethnocentric consumers who view foreign goods as threatening to local industries or cultural values (Sharma et al., 1995). At the same time, affordability is critical determinant in emerging economies, where disposable income is limited, and consumers must balance aspirational preferences with financial constraints. Adding further complexity, cosmopolitanism has emerged as a key consumer identity trait influencing purchasing intention where cosmopolitan consumers are open to global cultures, value diversity, and often perceived foreign products as enhancing their sense of modernity and global belonging (Cleveland et al., 2009).

Understanding these identity-based orientations is crucial for multinational corporations (MNCs), as consumer decisions in the hygiene sector are shaped not only by functional considerations of safety and price, but also symbolic meanings tied to identity and cultural values (Arnett, 2002). In this context, cosmopolitanism functions as a mediating variable, bridging the rational factors outlined in TPB with the social identity dimensions of consumer choice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSITIONS

Conceptual Framework Development

This study integrates the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) with cosmopolitanism to explain consumers' purchase intention towards foreign-made hygiene products in emerging markets. TPB asserts that intention is shaped by three primary antecedents: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. While TPB has been widely applied across consumer behaviour contexts, scholars highlight that individual-level values and orientations can strengthen or weaken these determinants (Han et al., 2020). Cosmopolitanism is defined as openness and receptiveness to foreign cultures and products (Rieffler et al., 2012), represents one such orientation particularly relevant in the hygiene product sector. Consumer with higher cosmopolitan tendencies may evaluate foreign-made hygiene products more positively, perceive stronger social approval, and find it easier to overcome barriers such as price or accessibility. Thus, cosmopolitanism not only influences the TPB constructs but may also mediate the pathways between TPB determinants and purchase intention. The proposed conceptual model combines TPB and Cosmopolitanism to explain the purchase intention for foreign-made hygiene products in Malaysia. Consumers' attitudes toward foreign hygiene products are shaped by their level of cosmopolitanism, higher cosmopolitanism is expected to lead to more positive attitudes towards foreign products.

Hypotheses Development

The proposed conceptual framework positioning cosmopolitanism as both a direct predictor of purchase intention and a mediator that links TPB constructs with intention. Propositions as shown below:

Cosmopolitanism and Attitudes

Consumers with strong cosmopolitan orientations tend to value global experiences and appreciate foreign products, perceiving them as higher quality, innovative, and trustworthy (Cleveland et al., 2011). In the context of hygiene products, higher cosmopolitanism is expected to translate into more favourable attitudes toward foreign-made brands.

H1: Higher cosmopolitanism positively influences consumers' attitudes toward foreign-made hygiene products.

Cosmopolitanism and Subjective Norms

Cosmopolitan consumers are often embedded in social networks that support global openness and international consumption (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2016). This orientation increases sensitivity to subjective norms, as peers and reference groups may endorse the consumption of foreign products. Social influences, including family and friends, impact subjective norms. Consumers with high cosmopolitanism are more likely to be influenced by global trends and societal acceptance of foreign products.

H2: Higher cosmopolitanism positively influences subjective norms regarding the purchase of foreign hygiene products.

Cosmopolitanism and Perceived Behavioural Control

PBC reflects consumers' belief in their ability to purchase and access products (Ajzen, 1991). Cosmopolitan individuals may have greater exposure to global retail outlets, online platforms, and product knowledge, which enhance their sense of control when purchasing foreign-made hygiene products. Consumer with cosmopolitan values may find it easier to access foreign –made products due to their exposure to global platforms (e.g. international retailers, online shopping).

H3: Higher cosmopolitanism enhances perceived behavioural control, increasing ease of purchasing foreign-made hygiene products.

Mediating Role of Cosmopolitanism

While ATT, SN, and PBC are direct determinants of purchase intention, cosmopolitanism may mediate these relationships. For instance, favourable attitudes may only translate into purchase intention when consumers also possess a cosmopolitan orientation that aligns with global product acceptance. Similarly, subjective norms and perceived control may be amplified when filtered through cosmopolitan values. Cosmopolitanism is expected to mediate the relationship between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control and purchase intention. Consumers with high cosmopolitanism are more likely to have favourable attitudes, stronger subjective norms, and higher perceived behavioural control toward foreign products, which ultimately leads to a higher purchase intention.

Beyond its indirect effects, cosmopolitanism may H4: Cosmopolitanism mediates the relationship between attitudes, subjective norms, perceive behavioural control, and purchase intention for foreign-made hygiene products.

Cosmopolitanism and Purchase Intention

directly influence purchase intention. Prior research shows that cosmopolitanism consumers display stronger preferences for global brands and foreign-made products (Riefler et al., 2012; Nguyen and Simkin, 2021). In the hygiene product context, cosmopolitan orientation is likely to increase willingness to purchase foreign products.

H5: Higher cosmopolitanism positively influences consumers' purchase intention toward foreign-made hygiene products.

In sum, this chapter proposes a conceptual framework where cosmopolitan functions both as an antecedent and a mediator within the TPB model. It directly influences attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and purchase intention, while also mediating the linkages between TPB determinants and purchase intention. This integrated approach allows for a more nuanced explanation of consumer behaviour in emerging markets, particularly in industries where foreign-made hygiene products carry symbolic and fictional value.

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed framework contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) by integrating cosmopolitanism, offering a more comprehensive explanation of consumer behaviour in emerging markets. While TPB has been widely applied to predict purchase intention, scholars argue that contextual and cultural variables can enrich the model's predictive power (Han et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2016). The inclusion of cosmopolitanism as a mediating variable highlights the significance of global openness and cultural orientation in shaping consumer attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. This responds to calls for more nuanced approaches to studying consumer decision-making in cross-cultural settings (Nguyen and Simkin, 2021).

From a managerial perspective, the framework suggests that multinational corporations (MNCs) should recognize and strategically target cosmopolitan consumer segments. These consumers are typically more receptive to foreign-made hygiene products, perceiving them as modern, innovative, and superior in quality compared to local alternatives (Cleveland et al., 2011; Riefler et al., 2012). To appeal to this group, firms should adopt global branding strategies while ensuring that products remain accessible and affordable in emerging markets where price sensitivity remains high (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2016).

In the Malaysian context, where cultural diversity and global exposure are increasing, cosmopolitan consumers are more likely to demonstrate favourable attitudes toward foreign hygiene products due to their international orientation and appreciation of global cultures (Rahman and Reynolds, 2022). Moreover, social influence plays a significant role in Malaysia's collectivist society, where purchasing behaviour is shaped by peer approval, family expectations, and media influence (Hofstede Insights, 2021). Cosmopolitan consumers are particularly responsive to global media and social networks, which reinforce the desirability of foreign-made goods.

Furthermore, the growth of online platforms and international retail channels reduces structural barriers, enabling cosmopolitan consumers to purchase foreign hygiene products more easily (Nguyen and Simkin, 2021). This accessibility strengthens perceived behavioural control, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase intention. Importantly, the mediating role of cosmopolitanism indicated that global exposure and cultural openness not only influence attitudes directly but also reshape broader social norms and perceptions of control, amplifying their effect on purchase intention.

In sum, this framework highlights the dual role of cosmopolitanism, as a driver of favourable evaluations of foreign hygiene products and as a catalyst that strengthens the predictive validity of TPB constructs. For managers, this implies that cosmopolitan orientation can serve as a basis for market segmentation and targeted strategies, while for policymakers, it underscores the importance of balancing global consumer trends with local industry protection.

CONCLUSION

This paper developed a conceptual framework that integrated the TPB with cosmopolitanism, grounded in SIT, to explain consumer purchase intention for foreign-made hygiene products in Malaysia. By positioning cosmopolitanism as both a direct antecedent and a mediating construct, the framework contributes to a more holistic understanding of consumer behaviour in globalising societies, specifically, it demonstrates how openness to diverse cultures and global consumption patterns influences key TPB factors such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, which in turn shape consumer intention.

From a theoretical standpoint, this integration extends TPB beyond its traditional cognitive-behavioural scope by embedding cultural-identity dimensions, consistent with calls to contextualise behavioural theories within diverse socio-cultural environments (Ajzen, 2020; Ng and Tan, 2021). By aligning SIT with TPB, the model acknowledges that consumer decision-making is not only rational and attitudinal but also rooted in cultural identity, social belonging, and global orientation (Arnett, 2002; Cleveland et al., 2011). This strengthens the explanatory power of TPB in emerging markets, where consumer preferences are often shaped by post-colonial histories, cultural affiliations, and aspirations for modernity (Nair, 2017; Rahman and Reynolds, 2022).

Form a managerial perspective, the framework provides useful insights for multinational corporations (MNCs) aiming to target cosmopolitan consumer segments while balancing affordability and accessibility. The dominance of foreign hygiene products in Malaysia (DOSM, 2019; Statista, 2020) suggest that firms can benefit from recognizing cosmopolitanism as a key driver of consumer choice. MNCs should emphasize not only functional product quality but also cultural narratives that resonate with globally oriented identities. Conversely, local producers may need to reposition their brands to appeal to hybrid identities, balancing local pride with cosmopolitan aspirations (Nguyen and Simkin, 2021; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2016). Understanding how cosmopolitanism interacts with social influence and perceived behavioural control can help marketers craft strategies that align with consumer values, thereby enhancing competitiveness in Malaysia's diverse and globalizing society.

Nonetheless, this paper has several limitations. As a conceptual paper, it does not provide empirical evidence to validate the proposed framework. Future research should test these relationships quantitatively, using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to assess direct, indirect, and mediating effects, as recommended in behavioural science research (Hair et al., 2021). Expanding this model to other product categories or emerging markets would further enhance its generalisability and refine its theoretical contributions.

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