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Japanese Food Product Purchase Intention: Comparing Students With and Without Japanese Language Learning Experience

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the Japanese food product purchase intention between students who studied and who did not study Japanese language at the university. In total 199 usable responses were analysed using an independent sample T-test analysis and a one-way analysis of variance. The result showed a significant difference in the Japanese food products purchase intention between the groups which did not study Japanese language and with those enrolled in Japanese language classes at the university. However, there was no significant difference in Japanese food products purchase intention between different levels of Japanese language proficiency groups.

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Keywords: Japanese language; translations; product labelling; food products; purchase intention.

1. Introduction

Trade liberalisation has encouraged a free trade policy which motivates countries to export their products to other countries. Japan-Malaysia free trade policy has opened wider door for both countries to market their products (Rahman, Molla & Murad, 2008). The declaration of the second wave of Japan-Malaysia economy partnership by Malaysian prime minister in 2013 helps to renounce the first Look East Policy that was established since 1980s.

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The bilateral relationship tie between Japan-Malaysia helps Japanese investors to penetrate Malaysian market. In the early stage of the first Look East Policy, Japan-Malaysia partnership focused on technology transfer and workforce training (Furouka, 2007). However, in the past few decades, Japanese business retailers started to enter Malaysian markets competing with western products that were already available in this country. From year 1995-1999, there were 38 major Japanese retail companies in Malaysia such as AEON, Isetan and Nisshin Shouji (Toyo Keizai 2003: pp. 1334 – 1348 in Larke, 2006). To date, this number is increasing as companies such as Muji Ryouhin and others are also starting to set their stores in Peninsular Malaysia (The star, 2012) as well as in East Coast Malaysia (The Borneo Post online, 2014). Some of these Japanese chain stores sell household and grocery products that include Japanese food products on their racks. Since Japanese language literacy among Malaysians is low, the printed information on the products' packaging should be properly translated to English or Malay language. However, a recent study by Aznur Aisyah, Abdullah and Nezu (2013) revealed that labelling of Japanese food products in Malaysia was not properly translated into English or Malay language that can be understood by the customers in Malaysia. Issues such as mistranslation and direct lexical borrowing can be seen on the labels of Japanese food products packaging. Besides that, the attempt to translate the Japanese food products usually focused on the ingredients of the food products only and not on how to prepare the food and storage instruction. Since Japanese language literacy among Malaysians is low, improper translation of the Japanese label of food products will result in poor understanding of the content and usage instructions.

Due to the limited empirical validation on the differences in the purchase intention of Japanese products among different groups of customers in Malaysia, the main aim of this study is to determine whether there is any difference in perceived Japanese food products purchase intention between different groups of potential purchasers. A comparison was made between those who understand Japanese language from their learning experience in the university and those who do not understand Japanese language in their intention to purchase Japanese food products.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Japanese Language Learning Experience

Packaging design is not the only factors that can affect consumer purchase intention. Product labelling plays a major role as “salesman on the shelf” (Pilditch, 1972). The ‘salesman’ is the main mediator between the product's company and the customers. According to Carneiro, Minim, Deliza, Silva, Carneiro, and Leão (2005), higher percentage of consumers is likely to read the label first before making the decision to purchase a product. Descriptive labelling can help consumer to imagine the taste of the food before making purchase decisions (Wansink, Van Ittersum, & Painter, 2005). Linguistics elements of the products such as brand name also have an impact on consumers' memory that leaves an impression which could influence consumer purchasing intentions (Schmitt, Pan & Tavassoli, 1994). Schmitt et al. (1994) reported that Chinese characters used in product branding help sustaining consumers' memory about the products which influences the customers to purchase a product. Chinese writing characters that use logographic shapes have better results on customers' impressions as single kanji orthography can deliver a few meaning in limited spaces of the product labelling layout. Japanese language that borrowed Kanji orthography in their writing system (Shibatani, 1990) can have the same impact on consumer purchase intention.

In addition, a study done by Mukai (2014) shows that typeface design of Japanese product labelling has influence towards customers' purchase intention in Japan. Even though the study is limited to tea beverages, it showed the effects of font style usage in displaying Japanese products that can transmit different feelings towards customer perception of the product. However, this result will not have significant impacts if the targeted consumers do not have the knowledge about Japanese writing system and the beauty of Japanese writing style such as customers in the Malaysian market. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1: There is a difference in perceived Japanese food product purchase intention according to Japanese language learning experience.

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