

THE CULTURAL VALUES OF MALAYSIAN CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Very few studies have been conducted in Malaysia to comprehensively focus on the Malaysian culture as a whole. The few studies that have been done attempted to look at the differences in values between the Malays, Chinese and Indians. This study attempts to study the Malaysian culture as a whole and try to classify them according to the cultural values classification provided by previous researchers. The six values proposed are divided into six categories of values; theoretical value, economic value, aesthetic value, social value, political value and religious value. A total of 662 respondents chosen through snowball sampling method were surveyed in the study. The results indicated that a higher percentage of Malaysians as a whole have high scores for religious value as well as political values. A higher percentage of Malaysians have low scores for theoretical and aesthetic values while the percentages are quite similar for high and low scores for economic value, and social value. The regression analyses showed that demography have significant relationships with all dimensions of cultural values with the highest r^2 at 0.16 for religious values. The results of this research do support previous studies on cultural values in the region.

Keywords: cultural values, Malaysian consumers

INTRODUCTION

The cultural values of individuals, groups and nations are still being studied until today due to its importance in determining competitive advantage or disadvantage, and effectiveness of individuals, groups, companies and nations (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003). Very few studies have been carried out in Malaysia to understand the value systems of its people. These few studies carried out have identified values which are useful to understand its influence on management practice but they are still gaps in the knowledge of the value systems of Malaysians (Asma, 2001; Asma & Lim, 2001; Smith & Schwartz,

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1997; Fontaine & Richardson, 2005; Syed, Karim, & Wajiran, 2004; Roselina, Syed & Yusof, 2002). One cultural classification that has not been used to study the Malaysian culture is the framework provided by Allport, Vernon and Lindzey (1960). This study applied the classification of culture by Allport et al., (1960) into six dimensions namely theoretical value, economic value, aesthetic value, social value, political value and religious value. The population consist of Malaysians from various ethnicities of (a) *bumiputra* (indigenous to Malaysia) comprising of Malays, Kadazandusun, Melanau and Bidayu, Bajau, Iban and (b) Non-*bumiputera* comprising of Chinese, Indians and other non-*bumiputera* groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Values

Cultural values are examples of a person's template or cultural blueprint for action (Arnould, Price & Zinkhan 2004; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). As agreed by some social scientists (Rokeach, 1983; Arnould et al., 2004; Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2004; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010) values include instrumental values, shared beliefs about how people should behave, and terminal values, or desirable life goals. Instrumental values include competence, compassion, sociality, and integrity. Meanwhile, terminal values postulation of social harmony, personal gratification, self-actualization, security, love and affection, and personal contentedness. Cultural values are shared broadly across a society. They are learned, reinforced, and modified within subcultures, ethnic groups, social classes, and families. Cultural values transcend in particular situations. Some believe that behaviours developed from attitudes, which in turn derive from more general or abstract cultural values. This is referred to value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy. According to this model, within any given consumption choice situation, abstract values affect midrange attitudes that lead to specific behaviour. Therefore, some researchers believe that values could influence and explain a variety of individual and collective consumer behaviours (Arnould et al., 2004).

Among the frequently used value measures are the List of Values and Hofstede's worker values. University of Michigan Survey Research Center developed the List of Values (LOV) measure that includes eight values: sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment, warm relationships with others, self-fulfilment, being well respected, a sense of accomplishment, security, and self-respect (Arnould et al., 2004).

After its initial publication (Vernon & Allport, 1931), the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey study of values had a substantial impact on psychological research and practice. In terms of the metric of citation count, by 1970 the Allport et al.'s values was the third most popular non-projective personality measure. Overall, it was the fifth most cited personality measures, after the Rokeach and the TAT (Buros, 1970; Buros, 1972). Citations of the Allport et

al.'s values averaged over 80 per year. However, during the mid-1970s, Allport et al.'s values dropped to 27 (Buros, 1978). In 17th place by the early 1980's, the average annual citation rate declined to one (Buros, 1985). By 1989, Allport et al.'s values was no longer listed in the Mental Measurements Yearbook – having fallen into psychological oblivion (Buros, 1989). The feasible reason for the declining use of Allport et al.'s values was the emergence of other value measures, in particular Rokeach's (1983) Values Survey comprises of 18 instruments and 18 terminal values, and Schwartz's (1992) 52 rating scale. Although these two instruments are popular today, concerns have been expressed about their psychometric adequacy (Kopelman, Rovenpor & Guan, 2003). Likewise, Peng, Nisbett, and Wong (1997) concluded (p. 341): "... the low criterion validity of commonly used values survey methods might be avoided by using the behavioural scenario method". Ironically, such a measurement method has long existed in the venerable Allport et al.'s values.

Based on the earlier view of Spranger's (1928), he explains that the essence of a person is best captured by understanding the individual's value-philosophy. Allport et al.'s values yield impassive measures of values grounded in Spranger's six-ideal types; theoretical, economic, political, aesthetic, social and religious. According to Allport (1961, p. 454): "We know a person best if we know what kind of a future he (or she) is bringing about and his (her) moulding of the future rests primarily on his (her) personal values".

Accordingly, for forty years after its initial development, the Allport et al.'s value was widely used for counselling, pedagogical, and research purposes. That the Allport et al.'s values provided valuable insights for the purpose of counselling was noted by Hogan (1972, p. 356): "When used with cooperative subjects, it provides dependable and pertinent information concerning individual cases".

Allport and his associates, Vernon and Lindzey (1960) developed six categories of values; theoretical value, economic value, aesthetic value, social value, political value and religious value. Manifestation of each of them is explained below.

- i. *Theoretical Value*: Values the discovery of the truth. Empirical, critical and rational ideas are used to order and systematize knowledge, e.g., a scientist values truth (Allport et al., 1960).
- ii. *Economic Value*: Values what is useful. Those driven by this value are interested in practical affairs, especially business and judge things by their tangible utility, e.g., a businessperson may value usefulness (Allport et al., 1960).
- iii. *Aesthetic Value*: Values beauty and harmony. People may be concerned with grace and symmetry and finding fulfilment in aesthetic experiences, e.g., an artist values beauty (Allport et al., 1960).

- iv. *Social Value*: Values altruistic and philanthropic love. People may be kind, sympathetic and unselfish and value others, e.g., a nurse may have a strong love of people (Allport et al., 1960).
- v. *Political Value*: Values power and influence. This includes those who seek leadership and enjoy the competition and struggle, e.g., a politician may value power (Allport et al., 1960).
- vi. *Religious Value*: Values unity. This is someone who seeks communion with the cosmos and mystically relates to its wholeness, e.g., a monk or nun who values unity (Allport et al., 1960).

Malaysian Culture

Malaysia, a multi-racial country with a rich cultural heritage, for example, has approximately 28 million people (Department of statistics Malaysia, 2012), with three main ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indian) in Peninsular Malaysia and several indigenous ethnic groups in the East Malaysia (natives of Sabah and Sarawak). It has a mixture of languages; however Malay is the official language and English also being spoken widely. The local dialects of Chinese, Indian, Kadazandusun, Murut, Bajau, Iban, Malanau, Bidayu and other indigenous dialects in Sabah and Sarawak are also being practised.

One of the singular features of Malaysia is its multi-racial population, which practices various religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity. Each ethnic group has its own beliefs. In accordance with the Federal Constitution, Islam is the official religion of Malaysia but there is freedom of worship. The foundation of the national culture is Malay culture, which is native to this region. Islamic values are embedded in Malay culture (Abdul Razak & Kamarulzaman, 2009). The Malay culture emphasizes values on courtesy, moderation, tolerance, harmony and cordial relations among family members, neighbours and community (Kamaruddin et al., 2009). As Malaysian respect each other's beliefs and faiths, cultures and religious festivals such as Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Christmas, Harvest Festival Day, Gawai Day and other auspicious occasions are given due importance.

In Malaysia, the Malay follows the Malay custom or *adat*. The term *adat* has an available domain of meaning. Described by Abdul Razak and Kamarulzaman (2009), it is sometimes interpreted to encompass all aspects of Malay culture and societal spirit, from styles of grooming and living accommodations to rules of etiquette and social interaction, but it is most commonly limited to the major life crisis such as ceremonies of birth, employment, wedding and death. Due to their additional religious significance, these rituals of passage are more or less common to all Muslims in Malaysia (Abdul Razak & Kamarulzaman, 2009). *Adat* symbolizes an ideal state in which an individual

maintains harmonious social affiliation with his fellow. Thus a Malay individual thinks foremost of himself in relation to other people and the way in which they are connected. Further explain by Abdul Razak and Kamarulzaman (2009), the principle of *adat* requires a person to behave not according to his self-centred reasons, but what is prescribed by ritual; constantly monitoring his own behaviour to ensure that it is socially acceptable for any occasion.

The development of cultural values in Malaysia is fundamentally derived from the religious value, especially among the Malays as a majority uphold the religious value of Islam. Other religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and Christianity are practised by other segments of the population, may also have an influence in shaping their cultural values. However the linkage is still lacking in empirical findings.

The establishment of a relationship between demographics and cultural values has been identified in various studies (Marshall, Solomon & Stuart, 2012; Glueck et al., 2012; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010; Taras, Kirkman & Steel, 2010); Abdul Razak & Kamarulzaman, 2009; Smith, Peterson & Schwartz, 2002; Wickliffe, 1998).

Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010) believe that the demographics are the foundation of cultural values. Every society formed a set of cultural values in which deeply held beliefs about right and wrong ways to live, that it imparts to its members (Solomon et al., 2012), and for example, most Americans punctuality is a core value. As proposed by Solomon et al. (2012), most people in Venezuela, Pakistan, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Greece and Portugal tend to develop the cultural values of collectivist different from the communities in the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada and Netherlands who tend to form the individualistic cultures.

In the study of Smith et al. (2002) proposed that different countries display different cultural values. Employing the three sources of cultural values; Hofstede (1994), Schwartz (1994) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), conducted a study in 47 countries yields a distinct results in identifying the cultural values formation in different nations.

In the work of Wickliffe (1998), it investigates the relationship between demographics of ethnicities (i.e. Korean consumers and American consumers) and cultural values of individualism and collectivism. The findings suggested that Korean ethnic was more towards collectivist compared to Americans who was more towards individualistic, supporting a significant relationship between ethnicity and cultural values (Wickliffe, 1998).

Taras et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis based on data from 598 studies representing over 200,000 individuals found stronger association of the cultural values and demographics of age, gender and occupation. Cultural values associations identified to be stronger for older rather than younger respondents and for adult males rather than adult females, but weaker for students, rather than for managers and employees (Taras et al., 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The present study used the cultural values measures developed by Allport et al. (1960). The measurement was selected because of its ability to detect cultural values held by an individual at the present time without being influenced by past or future cultural values. The conceptualisation of cultural values consisted of six dimensions: (a) theoretical value, (b) economic value, (c) aesthetic value, (d) social value, (e) political value and (f) religious value. Allport et al. (1960) introduced the items with a ranking-order scale, i.e., first choice (labelled as 4 score), second choice (labelled as 3 score), third choice (labelled as 2 score) and final choice (labelled as 1 score). Respondents ranked the choices in order based on their preference.

Allport's (1960) measurement may be suitable for nonparametric nature study (Kopelman et al., 2003). Previously published works have highlighted this concern about the low internal consistency (factor analysis) and reliability of the measurement. Thus, these issues have been highlighted as the main weaknesses by previous researchers (Kopelman et al., 2003). Allport's (1966) study of values was among the most cited measures in the 1960s and 1970s but gradually declined in the 1980s. Kopelman et al. (2003) have highlighted that the decrease may be caused by the nature of the measurement and the emergence of other measures, such as Rokeach's (1983) and Schwartz's (1992).

As a solution to this concern and for the purpose of multiple and hierarchical regressions analyses testing, which was required in this study, conversion of the score into a ratio scale was carried out by this study. Converting the original score into a ratio scale would overcome the inequality of total items in each dimension, as previously mentioned.

The target population of this study were Malaysian consumers. Based on the year 2000 population and housing census report for Malaysia (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2000). The study sample was collected from the territories of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Kuching, Sarawak and Selangor, Peninsular Malaysia. The data collection method used was the snowball sampling method which enabled this study to collect data from 662 respondents.

FINDINGS

A total of 662 participants were included in the final sample. The description of the respondents' information reveals that more than half of the respondents were female (56%) and the remaining were male (44%). Most (54%) of them reported their marital status as not married, and 46% were married. More than half (52%) of the respondents were without dependents or children, 10% had one dependent or child, 12% had two dependents or children, 12% had three dependents or children and 14% had four or more dependents or children. Most of the respondents (46%) were approximately aged 22 to 30 years, 28% were aged 31 to 40 years, 12% were aged 41 to 50 years, 11% were aged 21 or

younger and the remaining 3% were 51 years old or older. The ethnicity background was composed of two groups (a) *Bumiputera* (indigenous to Malaysia) comprising of Malays (44%), Kadazandusun (12%), Melanau and Bidayu (6%), Bajau (6%), Iban (4%) and (b) Non-*bumiputera* comprising of Chinese (12%), Indian (10%) and other ethnicities (2%).

The personal annual income reported by the 622 respondents showed that 22% were in the range of RM10,000 or less, 31% were in the range of RM10,001 to RM20,000, 26% were in the range of RM20,001 to RM30,000, 12% were in the range of RM30,001 to RM40,000, and 9% were in the range of RM40,001 or more.

Regarding educational achievement, most (61%) of the respondents achieved their tertiary level (31% holding a diploma, 26% holding a degree and 4% having earned a masters or PhD degree), and the remaining 39% were considered as the non-tertiary level (37% possessed the qualifications of secondary school or lower, and 2% had no formal education achievement).

Allport et al.'s measurement of cultural values provides five items measuring theoretical value and four items measuring political value, aesthetic value, social value and economic value. The religious value is measured by three items. In describing the respondents' cultural values levels, they were divided into high and low categories based on the median value. If the score was more than the median value, it was considered to be a high value; if the score was less than the median value, it was considered to be a low value. This work is accordance with the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1967).

Table 1 Respondents' cultural values

Variables	Description	Frequencies	Percentage
Theoretical value	<i>low</i>	409	62
	<i>high</i>	253	38
Political value	<i>low</i>	310	47
	<i>high</i>	352	53
Aesthetic value	<i>low</i>	403	61
	<i>high</i>	259	39
Religious value	<i>low</i>	282	43
	<i>high</i>	380	57
Social value	<i>low</i>	339	51
	<i>high</i>	323	49
Economic value	<i>low</i>	337	51
	<i>high</i>	325	49
	<i>N</i>	662	

The factor analysis conducted managed to form six factor loadings. The results indicated low factor loadings, in which most of them were less than the cutoff point of 0.30. Comments of factor loadings and low reliability have been directed to the measurement in the literatures. Due to the measurements had been frequently used since the 1960s, this research decided to retain all of the items. The Cronbach alphas for the measurement ranges from .5 to .76. The scores of the respondents on cultural values are as in Table 1.

Table 1 provides the information concerning the respondents' cultural values level. Most of respondents reported high level in religious value (57%). Almost an equal number of respondents scored high (51%) and low (49%) level for the social and economic values. For political value, slightly more Malaysians scored high (53%) as those who scored low (47%). It was seen that most of the respondents scored low levels for the aesthetic (61%) values and theoretical values (62%).

The association between demographics and cultural values when tested using Pearson correlation indicated that age had a weak positive correlation with the cultural values dimensions of theoretical value ($r = .080; p < .05$) and aesthetic value ($r = .113; p < .01$) but was negatively correlated with religious value ($r = -.166; p < .01$). As for personal income, it had a weak negative correlation with religious value ($r = -.098; p < .05$) and economic value ($r = -.089; p < .05$). Similarly, the number of dependents had a weak negative correlation with the cultural values dimension of religious value ($r = -.100; p < .05$) but had a positive correlation direction with aesthetic value ($r = .085; p < .05$).

Regression analysis was carried out to test the relationship between demography and cultural values. The summary of findings is as in Table 2. All the cultural values dimensions' variances can be explained significantly from the lowest of 3.2% to the highest of 16% by demographic variables. Thus results proved that demography have significant relationships with all dimensions of cultural values proposed by Allport et al. (1960).

Table 2 Summary of the relationship between demography and cultural values

Independent variable	Dependent variables	Results	Remarks
Demographics	Cultural value		
	Theoretical value	$R^2 = .032, p < .05$	Supported
	Political value	$R^2 = .127, p < .01$	Supported
	Aesthetic value	$R^2 = .082, p < .01$	Supported
	Religious value	$R^2 = .160, p < .01$	Supported
	Social value	$R^2 = .088, p < .01$	Supported
	Economic value	$R^2 = .079, p < .01$	Supported

For theoretical value, the information shows that 3.2% variances of theoretical value can be explained by demographics significantly ($R^2 = .032, p < .05$). The results indicate that age ($\beta = .152, p < .05$), gender ($\beta = -.096, p < .05$) and marital status ($\beta = -.133, p < .05$)

On political value dimension the information illustrated that 12.7% variances of political value can be explained by demographics significantly ($R^2 = .127, p < .01$). The results indicated that almost all demographics dimensions including age ($\beta = .123, p < .05$), household income ($\beta = -.164, p < .01$) gender ($\beta = -.232, p < .01$), ethnicity ($\beta = .104, p < .05$), marital status ($\beta = .118, p < .05$), and education level ($\beta = .213, p < .01$) have significant influences on political value.

For aesthetic value the results indicated that 8.2% variances of aesthetic value can be explained by demographics significantly ($R^2 = .082, p < .01$). Only demographic of ethnicity ($\beta = .246, p < .01$) has a significant positive effect on aesthetic value.

Sixteen per cent (16%) of the variances in religious value dimension can be explained significantly by demographic variables ($R^2 = .160, p < .01$). Specifically, age ($\beta = .305, p < .01$), personal income ($\beta = .099, p < .05$), household income ($\beta = .130, p < .01$) and ethnicity ($\beta = .252, p < .01$) have significant positive relationship on religious value.

Regarding social value the regression results show that 8.8% variances of social value was explained significantly by demography ($R^2 = .088, p < .01$). Age ($\beta = -.249, p < .01$), gender ($\beta = .239, p < .01$), and marital status ($\beta = -.163, p < .01$) have significant influences on social value. Age and marital status are negatively related to social value.

On economic value dimension the result shows that demography explained 7.3% variances of economic value significantly ($R^2 = .073, p < .01$). Personal income ($\beta = -.112, p < .10$), gender, ($\beta = .071, p < .10$) ethnicity ($\beta = -.183, p < .01$) and occupation ($\beta = -.134, p < .01$) are found to be significantly related. The direction of relationship revealed that demographics of personal income, gender, ethnicity and occupation are negatively related to cultural values of economic value.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study fully support the relationship between certain demographics and cultural values. In general, the current study confirms the important relationship of certain demographics and cultural values dimensions of theoretical value, political value, aesthetic value, religious value, social value and economic value based on the R^2 value.

There is still a lack of study detailing the relationship between demographics and cultural values based on Allport et al. (1966) conceptualization that can be used as direct comparison to the current findings. However, the current finding is consistent with previous studies

conducted based on other cultural values dimensions (Marshall et al., 2012; Glueck et al., 2012; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010; Abdul Razak & Kamarulzaman, 2009; Smith et al., 2002; Wickliffe, 1998).

For theoretical value, the Malaysians results indicated that overall a majority of Malaysians (68%) have low theoretical values. A weak or small (3.2% variance explained) significant relationship between demographics and theoretical value is identified in the current study. Additionally, the present findings reveal that age, gender and marital status significantly related to the theoretical value. Gender and marital status display a negative relationship with the theoretical value, meaning a person scores higher in theoretical value if female and single. The current findings propose that the theoretical value becomes more dominant when age of respondents increases, it implies accumulated knowledge may lead to more critical and logic thinking (Glueck et al., 2012).

For political value, slightly more Malaysian respondents have higher political value scores (53%) than lower scores. Demography was found to explain 12.7% of the variance in political value. Gender is a good predictor of political value followed by education, household income, age, marital status, and ethnicity respectively. Personal income and number of dependents are two demographics that were not significantly related to political value. The current study found that older respondents have higher political values than younger respondents. Household income showed a negative relationship, where the higher the household income the lesser political value. Gender reveals a negative relationship with political value implying that the female group shows higher political values than the male counterpart. The ethnicity demonstrates a positive significant relationship with political value with the *Bumiputera* showing higher political values as compared to the others. With regard to marital status, positive significant relationship with political value may denote a married consumer group tend to be higher in political value than non-married group. Pertaining to education, those with tertiary education level have higher political value scores than those with lower education.

For aesthetic value, a majority (61%) of the Malaysian respondents scored as low. A total of 8.2% variance in aesthetic value was explained by demography. When analysed according to the individual contribution, only ethnicity was found to be the significant contributor to the relationship. The artistic value may be less expressive or non-culturally sensitive (Leo, Bennett & Hartel, 2005; Chen, Chen & Lin, 2009) in the non-significant demographics when making a purchasing decision as proposed by the current findings. With regards to ethnicity, a positive relationship established is shown in the present study. The results indicate that *Bumiputera* consumers tend to display higher interest in 'beauty and harmony' or higher aesthetic value than the non-*Bumiputera* group.

A higher percentage (57%) of the Malaysian respondents scored high on religious value. A total of 20.5% of the variances in religious value can be explained by demography. Age is the strongest predictor of religious value followed by ethnicity, household income and personal income respectively. The current finding suggested that the older group of

consumers tends to be higher in religious value as compared to the younger consumers. In terms of ethnicity, the *Bumiputera* respondents have higher religious value scores. Personal and household incomes have higher religious scores.

For social value, the Malaysian respondents are about equal in high and low value scores (51% for low and 49% for high). A small percentage (8.8%) of variances in social value can be explained by demography. Specifically, gender and age stand as good predictors of social value, followed by marital status. Age demonstrated a negative relationship with social value indicating that the younger group tend to be higher in social value scores compared to the older group. In terms of gender, the male group tend to have higher social value scores than the female group.

The economic values of the Malaysian respondents are also about equal in high and low values (51% low and 49 % high). A total of only 7.3% of the variance in economic value can be explained by demography. Ethnicity followed by occupation, personal income and gender predominantly contributed to the significant relationship with economic value. Personal income is negatively related to economic value suggesting that economic value would be greater when personal income is lesser. The non-*Bumiputera* group have higher economic values than the *Bumiputera* group. This can easily be seen in Malaysia where the economy of the country is mainly controlled by the non-*Bumiputera* especially the Chinese controlling around 60% of the Malaysia economy. With regard to gender, the current finding suggested a positive relationship with economic value implying that the male groups have higher economic values than the female group

It is hoped that the results of this study can help Malaysian academics and policy makers in studying the linkage of these values to the actual behaviour and practices of Malaysians in organisations as well in the economic environment of Malaysia. Better decision making can be made if strategies, plans, and activities are matched with the values of the population so that it can be readily accepted and implemented by them to enable far better outcomes at the end of the day.

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