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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCT CUES, ATTITUDE TOWARDS
BRAND AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF AUTOMOBILES**

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ABSTRACT

The varying characteristics reflective of the actual diversity in how intentions are conducted have found that intentions are significantly better predictors of purchase behavior for existing products and for durable than for non-durable products. These results are remarkable because in practice, intentions are often used to predict sales for new non-durable products and also that intentions are better predictors of behaviors over short that over long time horizons. Branding is also important because it communicates a brand's business proposition. The most successful visual expression of a brand is its core attributes and it needs to establish a positive emotional relationship between the brand and its audiences. Building a local, regional, or national brand with a clearly defined and understood target audience is difficult and even more difficult when a global brand is at stake. Some global brands are strongly associated with their country of origin. In certain categories, this is part of the essence of the brand. Automobiles are the most notable examples. The objective of this study is to understand the variable influencing consumers' purchase intention related to automobiles. In particular, this study provides an insight into the perception of Malaysian consumers with regards to their purchase intention of a certain brand of automobiles.

Key words: Purchase intention, attitude towards brand, automobiles and product cues.

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian car market characteristics have shown that it is predominantly, a passenger car market. Passenger cars account for 81% of the total new vehicle sale in 2003. Automobile sales have achieved industry highest in 2005, where 416692 automobiles were sold in Malaysia. The market share shows that the local brand (Proton) decreases over the past few years. Proton market share are as follows: 2001 – 63.75% (208746 units), 2002 – 59.56% (214373 units), 2003 – 48.49% (155420 units), 2004 – 43.84% (166833 units) and 2005 – 39.87% (166118 units) (Malaysian Automobile Association, 2006). In contrast, imported brand sales have increased significantly and in 2005, foreign branded automobiles companies are already taking 60.13% of the Malaysian automobile market (Malaysian Automobile Association, 2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past researches on purchase intention focus mainly on country of origin as a contributing factor (Pecotich, Pressley & Roth, 1996). Factors' pertaining to attitude toward brand is contributed in terms of theoretical and empirical perspective regarding purchase intention. Purchase intention is formed by continuous marketing efforts. It is well recognized that attitude toward brand is important in formation of purchase intention. For example, previous study found that country of origin, country image and warranty is also a contributing factor towards purchase intention (Pecotich, Pressley & Roth, 1996; Han, 1988; Bearden & Shimp, 1982)

Agarwal and Malhotra (2005) in their study indicate that intrinsic cues are a contributing factor towards purchase intention. Extrinsic cues, such as country of origin, country image and warranty also are contributing factors towards purchase intention. However, perceived risks and prices are factors that do not contribute towards purchase intention (Snoj, Korda & Mumel, 2004; Bearden & Shimp, 1982; Maxwell, 2001).

PRODUCT CUES

Consumers evaluate products on the basis of two characteristics. The first one is the intrinsic cues like the serviceability, technical advancement, design etc. The second is the extrinsic cues like country of origin, country image, warranty, price and perceived risks (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Field, 2003; Zhang & Zarb, 1996). Intrinsic cues are the attributes that cannot be changed or manipulated without changing the physical characteristics of the product itself (Gutman & Alden, 1985). Consumers find it difficult, if not impossible to evaluate the intrinsic cues accurately. For example, Proton Savvy, a model from Proton is using the engine from Renault. Even though consumers have the opportunity to test drive the car, they might not know the actual performance of the automobile. Although, there are methods to determine the actual performance of the automobile, only few consumers may have the knowledge and experience to do that, prior to purchasing the automobile.

Nevertheless, consumers will form their own perceptions on these cues, irrespective of their accuracy. Some of these intrinsic cues could be hypothesized as having little consequence to consumers when evaluating an automobile. However, Monroe & Krishnan (1985) study have produced a contrary result. Their findings have shown that intrinsic cues are likely to have a greater impact on product evaluations than extrinsic cues. In this study the dimensions of intrinsic cues consist of technical advancement, serviceability, durability and design is adapted from previous studies (Han, 1988; Haubl, 1996; Herche, 2003; Nagashima, 1970).

Automobile purchase is a high involvement product and it is difficult for consumers who do not have any technical background to evaluate. Since automobile is a tangible product, consumers more frequently evaluate product by using intrinsic cues (color, design and specifications of a product) and extrinsic cues (price, brand name and warranties) (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Zhang & Zarb, 1996). Moreover, it is perceived to be risky and is highly self expressive (Reed, Story & Saker, 2004).

ATTITUDE TOWARDS BRAND

For researchers evaluations are important as they form the basis for consumer behaviors, such as brand choice. Attitude toward the brand has been defined by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) as a predisposition to respond consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular brand. Also, Mitchell and Olson (1981) defined attitude toward the brand as consumers' overall evaluation of good or bad of the brand. Branding is important for an organization. Some may think it is just a logo or package. It is a combination of all the physical and emotional characteristics of a company, a product or service encountered by the consumer at all points of contacts (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Branding is important because it communicates a brand's business proposition. The most successful visual expression of a brand is its core attributes and the need to establish a positive emotional relationship between the brand and its audiences, both

internal and external. Building a local, regional, or national brand with a clearly defined and understood target audience is difficult enough, but the challenges increase geometrically when a global brand is at stake (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001).

Some global brands are strongly associated with their country of origin. In certain categories, this is part of the essence of the brand. Automobiles are the most obvious examples. The German cultural psyche is embodied in Mercedes Benz, Porsche and BMW and what is more Italian than a Ferrari. Other categories are actually defined by their region of origin: Dom Perignon Champagne, Jack Daniels whisky and Jose Cuervo Tequila could exist as such if they did not evoke specific areas within France, Tennessee and Mexico (Roelling, 2001). The relationship between country of origin effects and branding has recently attracted renewed attention. Ettenson (1993) have suggested that objective product-country knowledge can under certain circumstances, increase consumers reliance on country of origin in judging a product, particularly if the brand name of that product is unfamiliar. It seems that more knowledgeable consumers may be more sensitive to a product's country of origin than less knowledgeable consumers (Schaefer, 1997). In contrast, Cordell (1992) found that brand familiarity did not reduce the importance of or reliance on country of origin. Consumers may consider not buying an unfamiliar foreign brand simply because they may make unfavorable inferences about the quality of the brand from the lack of familiarity with products from the country (Han, 1990).

The effect of price on perception of purchase value was not significant. The brand name was more important informational cue than "made-in" for Belgian consumers, but not for Canadian consumers (Han, 1989). On the other hand there are still brands that emphasize the value of "made-in" (e.g. Audi) and/or point out the value of "German engineering" (Mercedes) (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch & Du Preez, 1995). In a comparative study between country-of-origin of brand and country of manufacture, Han and Terpstra (1988) found that while both countries of manufacture and brand name affect consumer perceptions of product quality, country of manufacture were found to have more powerful effects than brand name on consumer evaluations of bi-national products. However Khatchaturian and Morgansky (1990) found that associating a brand with less industrialized countries could potentially lower the quality image of that brand type. The discussion of intrinsic cues is important in this study, as it has been largely to explain consumer attitude towards brand of a particular products. There is still lack of research whether consumers from Southeast-Asia would make the same distinction in favor of domestic brands.

PURCHASE INTENTION

What we think, we will buy represents purchase intention (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2001). Purchase intention is defined as the degree to which a person has formulated conscious plans to perform or not to perform some specified future behavior (Warshaw & Davis, 1985). High level of intention to purchase was related to positive belief as compared to consumers with low level of purchase intention (Shim & Drake, 1990). Purchase intention is the consumers' tendency to act toward an object and is generally measured in terms of intention to buy (Kim, 2003).

Purchase intention is an important factor for an organization and was used routinely to make strategic decisions concerning both new and existing products and the marketing program that supports them (Morwitz, Steckel & Gupta, 2006). Numerous studies have been performed to explain the determinants of purchase intentions. The gripping reasons that interest marketers on purchase intention research are:

- For new product, purchase intention is used in concept tests to help managers determine whether a concepts merits further development (Li, 2004).
- In product tests, to direct attention whether a new product merits launch.
- Purchase intention help marketing manager decide which geographic markets and segments the product should be launch (Sewall, 1978; Silk & Urban, 1978; Urban & Hauser, 1993).

- For existing products, purchase intention are used to forecast future demand (Armstrong, Morwitz & Kumar, 2000)

These forecasts are useful inputs to decide whether to increase or reduce production levels, whether to change the size of the sales forces and whether to initiate a price change. In addition, purchase intentions are used to pretest advertising and evaluate proposed promotions for both new and existing products (Morwitz et al., 2006). Purchase intentions are also extensively used by academic researchers as proxy measures for purchase behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Akaah, Korgaonkar & Lund, 1995; Akhter & Durvasula, 1991; Schlosser, 2003).

In a meta-analysis study by Morwitz et al., (2006) that examine the varying characteristics reflective of the actual diversity in how intentions are conducted have found that intentions are significantly better predictors of purchase behavior for existing products and for durable than for non-durable products. These results are remarkable because in practice, intentions are often used to predict sales for new non-durable products (Gruber, 1970; Haley & Case, 1979; Jamieson & Bass, 1989; Pringle, Wilson & Brody, 1982). Morwitz et al. (2006) also found that intentions are better predictors of behaviors over short than over long time horizons.

Beliefs-Attitudes-Behavioral Intentions Model

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between respondents' perceptions of product cues, attitude towards brand, ethnocentrism and purchase intentions. This study makes use of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1967) model of beliefs-attitudes-behavioral intentions to explain the relationships between consumers' perceptions of product cues (intrinsic and extrinsic cues) (beliefs), attitude towards brand (attitudes), ethnocentrism and purchase intentions (behavioral intentions). Fishbein and Ajzen (1967) developed a conceptual model in explaining the relationship between beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

The underpinning of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1967) model is grounded in the distinction between beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviors. Beliefs are the primary blocks in the model. Based on direct observation or information received from outside sources or by way of various inference processes, a person learns or forms a number of beliefs about an object. Then they associate the object with various attributes. Consequently, a person forms beliefs about oneself, about other people, about institutions, behaviors, or events. The entirety of a person's beliefs serves as the informational base that ultimately determines their attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. Attitude can be described as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object. Meanwhile, a behavioral intention refers to a person's subjective probability that they will perform some "specific" behavior.

Based on Fishbein and Ajzen's (1967) conceptual framework, a person's intentions, in the final analysis, are a function of certain beliefs. Some of these beliefs influence the person's attitude toward the behavior. Specifically, a person attitude toward performing a given behavior is related to their beliefs that performing the behavior will lead to certain consequences and his evaluation of those consequences. The assumption is that the more favorable a person's attitude toward an object, the more they will intend to perform positive behaviors (and the less they will intend to perform negative behaviors) with respect to that object.

The criterion variable in Fishbein and Ajzen's (1967) model is the individual's behavioral intention. Fishbein and Ajzen (1967) stated that behavioral intentions serve as an intervening variable between one's attitudinal and obvious behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen (1967) believe that the best predictor of a given behavior should be the person's intention to engage in that behavior. In order to predict a specific behavior (purchase intention), it is necessary to measure the person's attitude and intentions toward performing that behavior. Thus, if one can predict behavioral intentions, one can also predict actual behavior (Hemdi, 2005; Newberry, Klemz & Boshoff, 2003).

THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Based on the literature discussed above, the theoretical framework for this research is shown in Figure 1.0. The framework attempts to explain the influence of product cues on consumers' attitude towards brand. The independent variable is product cues. The mediating variable is attitude towards brand and the dependent variable is purchase intention.

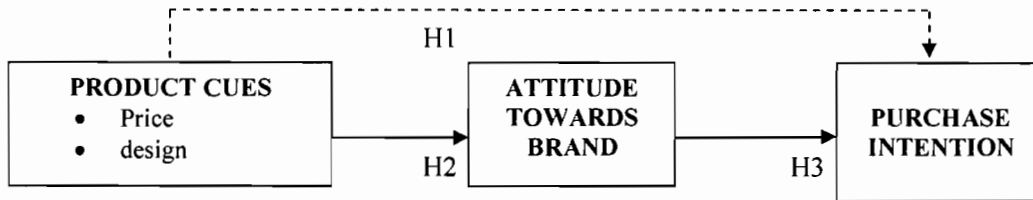


Figure 1.0 The Research Framework

The product cues was measured based on nine items adapted from Agarwal and Teas (2002), Field (2000) and Nagashima (1970). The nine items reflect respondents' perceptions towards intrinsic cues of automobiles. The dimensions of product cues are price and design. A five-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree were used to determine respondent's agreement on all items measuring their perceptions on the intrinsic cues. On the other hand, attitude towards brand is measured based on Burton, Lichtenstein, Netemeyer & Garretson (1998) measurement. A five-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree were used to determine respondent's agreement on all items measuring their attitude towards brand. Purchase Intention is measured based on Agrawal & Teas (2002) measurements.

To test the study framework, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

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| H1 | There is a positive and significant relationship between product cues and purchase intention |
| H1a | There is a positive and significant relationship between design and purchase intention. |
| H1b | There is a positive and significant relationship between price and purchase intention. |
| H2 | There is a positive and significant relationship between product cues and attitude towards brand. |
| H2a | There is a positive and significant relationship between design and attitude towards brand. |
| H2b | There is a positive and significant relationship between price and attitude towards brand. |
| H3 | There is a positive and significant relationship between attitude towards brand and purchase intention. |
| H4 | Attitude towards brand mediates the relationship between product cues and purchase intention. |
| H4a | Attitudes towards brand mediates the relationship between design and purchase intention. |
| H4b | Attitudes towards brand mediates the relationship between price and purchase intention. |
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The hierarchical regression analyses were carried out to examine the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable in the model. To test the mediating effect, Baron & Kenny's (1986) approach was implemented. Specifically, hypothesis 4 posits that attitude towards brand mediates the relationship between product cues and purchase intention. Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the mediating effect of attitude towards brand on the relationship between product cues (design and price) and purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 564 questionnaires were returned from 865 questionnaires that were distributed to part-time students of seven public universities in Malaysia. The response rate is 65.20%. From the 564 questionnaire returned, a total of 35 questionnaires were rejected due to several reasons such as incomplete answers from respondents. Therefore, only 529 (61.17%) questionnaires were coded and analyzed. The sample is deemed suitable as part-time students form a big portion of automobile owners and represent the cross-section of consumers in the Malaysian market.

RESULTS

The respondents' profile of this study is shown in Table 1.0. Respondents were asked questions pertaining to age, gender, ethnicity, marital status and income. The majority of the respondents are in the 25-35 age group (58.2%), followed by less than 25 age group (19.5%) Next, the 36-45 age group (19.3%), followed by 46-55 age group (2.6%) and .4% are in the > 56 age group. In terms of gender, female outnumber the male respondents. From the total of 529 respondents, 293 are female compared to 236 male. In terms of ethnic group, the majority are Malays (84.1%), followed by Chinese (7.2%), Indian (5.1%) and other races (3.6%). In terms of marital status, 319 or 60.3% are married and 210 (39.7%) are single. On income, 40.3% of the respondents earned between RM 1000-RM 2000 monthly, followed by those earning between RM 2001-RM 3000 (27.4%). Meanwhile, 12.1% of the respondents earned less than RM 1000 and between RM 3001-RM 4000. A small percentage of 8.1% has a monthly income of more than RM 4001 as shown in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0
Respondents Profile

Demographic Profile	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Age	< 25	103	19.5
	25 – 35	308	58.2
	36 – 45	102	19.3
	46 – 55	14	2.6
	> 56	2	.4
Gender	Male	236	44.6
	Female	293	55.4
Ethnic	Malay	445	84.1
	Chinese	38	7.2
	Indian	27	5.1
	Others	19	3.6
Marital Status	Single	210	39.7
	Married	319	60.3
Monthly Income	≤ RM 1000	64	12.1
	RM 1000 – RM 2000	213	40.3
	RM 2001 – RM 3000	145	27.4
	RM 3001 – RM 4000	64	12.1
	≥ RM 4001	43	8.1

GOODNESS OF THE DATA

The internal reliability of intrinsic cues was examined by computing its Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha value was adopted as a tool for reliability examination. The bigger the alpha value indicated that it has a higher internal consistency. The reliability of measurement is considered fairly high if the alpha value bigger than the acceptable reliability of .60 (Sekaran, 2000). Results from this study has shown the Cronbach Alpha is greater than .60, which shows that it was highly reliable as shown in Table 2.0. The Cronbach's alpha for intrinsic cues were in the above .80. The dependent variable, attitude towards brand also had a good reliability coefficients exceeding .80. Therefore, the internal consistency of the measure used in this study is considered acceptable.

Table 2.0
Reliability Coefficients for the Major Variables

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha
Independent variable (Product cues)		
Price	7	.91
Design	4	.81
Mediating variable		
Attitude towards brand	5	.88
Dependent variable		
Purchase intention	4	.89

HYPOTHESES TESTING

Hierarchical multiple regressions were used to investigate the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable as posited in the research hypotheses. Regression analysis is considered appropriate for this study since both the independent and dependent variables were measured on a continuous scale. The four assumptions underlying multiple regressions analysis as suggested by Hair et al. (2006) were initially examined and followed.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCT CUES TO PURCHASE INTENTION

From the results (Table 3.0), it was found that the two dimensions of product cues explain 34.60% ($R^2 = .35$) of the variance in Purchase Intention. The dimension of product cues namely design ($\beta = .16^{***}$, $p < .01$) and price ($\beta = .32^{***}$, $p < .01$), are positively and significantly associated with purchase intention. Therefore, it is obvious that H1a and H1d are supported. The results of hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 4.0.

Table 3.0
Multiple Regression Analysis: Product Cues and Purchase Intention

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Beta
Purchase Intension	Design	.16***

Price	.32***
R ²	.35
Adjusted R ²	.34
F	39.36***

Note. Significant levels *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 4.0

Summary of the Hypotheses Testing Results from Multiple Regression Analysis

	Hypotheses testing	Results
H1	There is a positive and significant relationship between product cues and purchase intention	Supported
H1a	There is a positive and significant relationship between design and purchase intention.	Supported
H1b	There is a positive and significant relationship between price and purchase intention.	Supported

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCT CUES TO ATTITUDE TOWARDS BRAND

Hypotheses H2 (and its corollary hypotheses) are hypothesized as having a positive and significant relationship between all dimensions of product cues and attitude towards brand as presented in Table 5.0. To test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was carried out to determine the relationship between product cues (design and price) and attitude towards brand.

From the results, it was found that the two dimensions of product cues explain 50% (R² = .50) of the variance in attitude towards brand. The dimension of product cues namely design ($\beta = .17***$, $p < .01$) and price ($\beta = .32***$, $p < .01$). The result has shown that design and price are positively and significantly associated with purchase intention. Therefore, it could be concluded that H2a and are supported. The results of hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 6.0.

Table 5.0

Multiple Regression Analysis: Product Cues and Attitude Towards Brand

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Beta
Attitude Towards Brand	Design	.17***
	Price	.32***
	R ²	.50
	Adjusted R ²	.49
	F	73.28***

Note. Significant levels *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 6.0

Summary of the Hypotheses Testing Results from Multiple Regression Analysis

	Hypotheses testing	Results
H2	There is a positive and significant relationship between product cues and attitude towards brand.	Supported
H2a	There is a positive and significant relationship between design and attitude towards brand.	Supported
H2b	There is a positive and significant relationship between price and attitude towards brand.	Supported

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDE TOWARDS BRAND TO PURCHASE INTENTION

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the direct relationship between attitude towards brand and purchase intention. From the results (Table 7.0), it was found that attitude towards brand explain 41.10% ($R^2 = .41$) of the variance in purchase intention. The dimension of attitude towards brand ($\beta = .64^{**}$, $p < .01$) are positively and significantly associated with purchase intention. Therefore, it could be concluded that H3 are accepted. The results of hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 8.0

Table 7.0

Multiple Regression Analysis: Attitude towards Brand and Purchase Intention

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Beta
Purchase Intention	Attitude Towards Brand	.64***
	R^2	.41
	Adjusted R^2	.41
	F	367.57***

Note. Significant levels * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 8

Summary of the Hypotheses Testing Results from Multiple Regression Analysis

	Hypotheses testing	Results
H3	There is a positive and significant relationship between attitude towards brand and purchase intention.	Supported

THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS BRAND ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRODUCT CUES AND PURCHASE INTENTION

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test the mediating effect of attitude towards brand on the relationship between product cues (design and price) and purchase intention.

Hypotheses H4 are hypothesized that attitude towards brand mediates the relationship between design and price and purchase intention. To test the hypotheses, hierarchical regression analysis were carried out to determine the mediation effect of attitude towards brand.

As shown in Table 9.0, attitude towards brand has mediated the relationship between the two dimensions of product cues (design and price) and purchase intention. The inclusion of attitude towards brand has resulted in significant standard beta coefficient in step 2 for the independent variables. Therefore, it could be concluded that H4 are accepted (Table 10).

Table 9

Hierarchical Regression Results Using Attitude Towards Brand As A Mediator In The Relationship Between Product Cues And Purchase Intention

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Std Beta Step 1	Std Beta Step 2
Purchase Intention	Design	.25***	.11***
	Price	.41***	.19**
	Mediating Attitude Towards Brand		.47***

R ²	.33	.45
Adjusted R ²	.32	.44
R ² Change	.33	.12
F Change	127.28***	113.96***

Note. Significant levels *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 10.0

Summary of the Hypotheses Testing Results from Multiple Regression Analysis

	Hypotheses testing	Results
H4	Attitude towards brand mediates the relationship between product cues and purchase intention.	Supported
H4a	Attitudes towards brand mediates the relationship between design and purchase intention.	Supported
H4d	Attitudes towards brand mediates the relationship between price and purchase intention.	Supported

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to understand the impact of intrinsic cues on attitude towards brand of Proton automobile among Malaysian which have been met in this study. From the research, we conclude that product cues have a significantly positive influence on consumers' attitude towards brand. This study will provide a serious practical implication for the sole Malaysian automobile company, Proton and other automobile assemblers or distributors of automobiles in Malaysia. It provides an insight into the perception of Malaysian consumers with regards of their attitude towards a certain brand of automobiles. More importantly, it would help the marketer of Malaysian brand, Proton, to formulate strategies to promote the Proton brand among Malaysians. For export market, Proton needs to examine the attitude of consumer of these countries about their attitude towards a particular brand. Proton need to develop an appropriate marketing strategy to attract consumers' attention and increase their purchase intention. This study discovers that, intrinsic cues are an important factor in influencing consumers' attitude towards a particular brand. Therefore, in developing marketing strategies, manufacturers assemblers, and distributors of automobiles must first understand the consumers' formation of attitude towards a certain brand, in order to increase the effectiveness of their marketing strategy.

Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical relationships posited in the theoretical framework were empirically supported. Specifically, this study established the linkage between respondent's perceptions on product cues (intrinsic and extrinsic cues), attitude towards brand and purchase intention. In other words, this study adds further knowledge on the importance of product cues as the predictor of purchase intentions. This study also provides evidence to the importance of attitude towards brand as the intervening variable and purchase intentions. By indicating the existence of significant direct and indirect effects of product cues, attitude towards brand and purchase intentions and this study provides clear evidence that product cues are important in nurturing respondent's positive attitudes.

This study also provides empirical support for the conceptual framework developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1967) pertaining to the beliefs – attitudes - behavioral intentions relationships. Their suggestion that a person's beliefs about an object would influence the person's attitudes toward that object and that the person's attitudes toward the object would

influence the person's intentions toward the object were empirically substantiated. This study adds further knowledge on the behavioral intentions process.

Specifically, this process is sequential as follows: cognitive attitude, affective attitude and behavioral intentions. Most importantly, this study gave evidence to the independent effects of cognitive attitude and affective attitude on behavioral intentions.

Within the Malaysian context, this study enhances our understanding of the role attitude towards brand on these consumers'. In particular, to the researcher's knowledge, this is the first local study that examines the relationships among consumers' perception of product cues, attitude towards brand, ethnocentrism and purchase intentions. From the results of this study, marketers can understand more about psychological effects that affect the consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Practical Contributions

From the practical perspectives, the results of this study offer several suggestions to the national automobile manufacturer, assemblers and distributors in Malaysia, especially Proton. Specifically, marketing managers should use the results from this study in order to enhance consumers' purchase intention. Product cues pertaining to price and design are found to have significant positive and direct effects on purchase intention. Design and price were found to have significant indirect effects on purchase intentions via attitude towards brand. Design and price were found to have significant positive and direct effects on attitude towards brand. Attitude towards brand have significant positive and direct effects on purchase intention. These positive attitudes would lead to positive behavioral intention. Thus, the results from this study would provide guidance for Proton on how to increase sales and market share and also to reduce the consumers' negative behavioral intentions.

Proton must make every effort to improve the consumers' attitude towards Proton brand as an ongoing basis. Proton needs to introduce innovative and contemporary design from time to time. By introducing new models, consumers would have a better choice besides just Proton Waja, Perdana, Wira, Iswara or Neo. Therefore, Proton needs to consider and introduce models of current design that can fulfill their target markets. Consumers want more than just a new model from Proton. Not just the exterior of the new models must be attractive, consumers also love to own an automobile that have an attractive interior. Also, having wide range of models will cater to the different segment of Malaysian market. With the introduction of new automobile, respondents will have a better choice, thus their attitude towards brand will be higher, which in turn will have higher purchase intention. Results from this study have empirically shown that if Proton is committed to produce automobile that have a good design can enhance the consumers' attitude towards Proton brand and purchase intention.

Besides that Proton also have to look at the pricing of their automobile. This study results have shown that perception on price have a direct influence on purchase intention and has as indirect influence on purchase intention via attitude towards brand. Thus, the price of Proton also should be considered to be a good buy, the price is acceptable, and automobile appears to be a bargain and is a value buy by the consumers. Results from this study have empirically shown that if Proton is committed to fulfill the consumers' wants, it can enhance the latter's attitude towards brand and purchase intention.

In sum, if Proton wants to increase consumers' positive attitudes towards their brand and to increase purchase intentions, they should make efforts to introduce better and current design and a better pricing structure for their automobile that are viewed by the consumers as important in influencing their attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Policy Implications

The results has emphasized that knowledge on purchase intention will provide a contribution towards the policy maker in formulating a favorable policy for the automotive industry. There is a need to have a policy on automotive industry for the purpose of enhancing purchase intention.

By and large, the finding has suggested that the antecedents are important in enhancing purchase intention. The findings of this study has revealed that attitude towards brand strengthened the relationship between the antecedents and purchase intention. Therefore, automobile industry players and the policy maker should promote or encourage purchase intention by implementing the following policy measures:

a. Policy makers can help to educate the public by informing consumers about the importance of the automobile trade, employment and the multiplying effect on the economy caused by the declining sales of Proton automobiles. This can be effective, as this study has revealed that consumer's attitude towards brand has a positive effect on purchase intention.

b. Our findings verified that price is not the sole determinant when consumer decides to purchase an automobile. Design of an automobile is the other variable that consumer take into account when they decide to purchase an automobile. Therefore, the implication for policy maker, automobile manufacturer and assembler is that marketing strategies are complex in order to enhance consumer purchase intention.

c. For functional products like automobile, automobile manufacturer need to think seriously about the marketing mix strategy that they used. For example, they need to carry out differentiated marketing that involves targeting several market segments and designing different automobile for each market.

Finally, for national automobile manufacturer, Proton should emphasize on price and design in their promotional and publicity campaign. The findings of this study have verified that price is one of the determinants in the consumers' decision in purchasing automobile. Proton need to ensure that the price of automobile is within the reach of the segment that they intend to serve. Besides the design of automobile need to be enhanced and Proton in this study has confirmed that the current proton policy by producing better design and appropriate prices can help boost sales and this concur with the study findings.

There are certain limitations of this study which need to be discussed. The study might not be suitable to infer to other product or service area. This study only performs research on automobile, particularly Proton, the national automobile of Malaysia. Since this study only perform research on automobile, future research can be conducted on different products or services. Also, comparison study can be conducted in different countries to compare the differences of these researches.

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