Cruising down millennials' fashion runway: a cross-functional study beyond Pacific borders

Tat-Huei Cham, Boon Liat Cheng and Caryn Kar Yan Ng

Abstract

Purpose – *The clothing industry is one of the earmarked industries in many countries following the rising demand and consumption of clothing products among millennials. Malaysia and Thailand are known to be promising markets for this industry in the South East Asia region. The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of psychological and marketing factors on clothing interest among Generation Y consumers, as well as the interrelationships between self-confidence, product attitude and purchase intention. The impact of nationality was also examined as a moderator on the investigated relationships.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The data was collected among Generation Y consumers using a survey questionnaire, which had successfully gathered a total of 388 usable cases from the capital cities of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) and Thailand (Bangkok). These cities were selected for being the largest cities in its country which contain the highest number of shopping malls, offices and Generation Y population. Data analysis was then performed using both the SPSS and AMOS software.*

Findings – *Findings obtained acknowledged the importance of both psychological (i.e. fashion innovativeness, self-concept, fashion consciousness and need for uniqueness) and marketing (i.e. social media marketing and fashion advertisement) factors towards the clothing interest among Generation Y consumers. Consequently, clothing interest would influence their product attitude, self-confidence and purchase intention, with product attitude and self-confidence as the mediators between clothing interest and purchase intention. Multigroup analysis confirmed that there are differences between Generation Y consumers in both Malaysia and Thailand, where Thai consumers hold a stricter emphasis concerning the influence of social media marketing on clothing interest and self-confidence on purchase intention.*

Originality/value – *This study is one of the very few studies that explored the minimally investigated territory on the consequential importance of clothing interest within the clothing industry, specifically, through extending the literature on the influence of psychological and marketing factors towards the individuals' clothing interest. Moreover, this study also successfully highlighted the mediation role of product attitude and self-confidence in the relationship between clothing interest and purchase intention.*

Keywords Nationality, Social media marketing, Psychological factors, Clothing interest, Fashion consumption, Multigroup analysis (MGA)

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Apparel and clothing have evolved from a basic necessity to a form of culture and exposition. As such, it was valued at a total of $758.4bn as of the year 2018, with a positive forecast of approximately US$1,182.9bn within 5 years of extrapolation (Business Wire, Inc, 2019). The Asia-Pacific region has independently accounted for 38% in apparel demand in the year 2020, while prevailed as one of the top three contenders in market share alongside the USA and the European Union (Statista, 2020a). Specifically, international brands including Adidas, Nike and H&M have made the region their competing ground, with leading market shares at respective 0.9%, 0.8% and 0.5% for the year 2016 (Moore, 2018).

While China remains the capital player in global apparel consumption because of its enormous population (China Daily, 2018), countries including Malaysia and Thailand are, nonetheless, capable market spaces to the industry.

According to the 2016 national expenditure report, household spending on clothing and footwear is among the top expenditures in Malaysia, which accounted for 3.4% of the total expenses (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2017). Further highlighted by Rabimov (2018), Malaysia embraces the outlook of "Modest Fashion", where the country's cultural panorama was thoroughly showcased through the Kuala Lumpur Fashion Weeks since the early 2000s. Not to forget Thailand's effort in promoting its fashion industry by launching the "Bangkok Fashion City" initiative of raising the industrial standard since 2004 (Royal Danish Embassy, 2008). As of the year 2020, leather products, footwear items, fashion accessories and family apparels have amounted to a total revenue of US$1,039m and US$1,191m in both Malaysia and Thailand, which derived the 39th and 31st positions in international revenue gains (Statista, 2020b, 2020c).

While the average expenditures on both apparel and services were topped by the Generation X consumers, millennials (Generation Y) incorporated the largest portion or 3.7% of their total spending towards these subcategories (Marketing Charts, 2018). Being the sceptical bunch, millennials' tech-savvy nature has enhanced information susceptibility and social influences, which swayed their decisions upon societal-orientation (current trends), product quality and suitability (Ordun, 2015). With this, the younger generation are prompted to endorse greater brand awareness through clothing that demonstrate status (O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2014), so as to gain social conformity (Mohtar and Abbas, 2014). Apparel is, nonetheless, a dominant aspect that contributes both practical and expressional purposes among the younger generation. Generation Y has since gained substantial attention by apparel names like Uniqlo (i.e. strived to produce a $10bn in sales in the USA by 2020 in the urban millennial market), Adidas (i.e. a 3.4% increase in millennials' spending following a collaborative efforts for Adidas's Yeezy) and H&M (i.e. a 62% drop in profit in February 2018 as contributed by societal conscious millennials ensuing unsustainable approach in apparel manufacturing) as a matured market (Fashion Network, 2020; Lee, 2018a, 2018b; White, 2019).

Often, clothing are used as a testament of individualism, as well as the social medium that conveys personality (Salem and Salem, 2018; Safdar *et al.*, 2020). One's attire has, thus, acted to communicate symbolic meanings in the dimensions of ethnicity (Millan and Mittal, 2017), sensuality (Butigan *et al.*, 2013) and from a collective perspective, subcultural characteristics (Dickson and Pollack, 2000). Recognized by Thompson and Haytko (1997), a person's clothing preferences perform as an attribution that reflects individualistic image over than of the exposed body. Such associations is further strengthened following increased studies conducted towards understanding the primary purpose of apparel consumptions among millennials (Fu and Liang, 2019; Jain and Mishra, 2020).

However, in-depth literature review within this area has outlined diverging notions. From one end, purchasing behaviours were assessed through exploring the cognitive standpoint, constituting variables of uniqueness, value consciousness (Henninger *et al.*, 2018), cultural and religion endorsements (Zainudin *et al.*, 2019), attitude and subjective norms (Nash, 2019). From the other end, marketing and social dimensions were appraised, with accounts for content sharing (Natalia, 2019), social influencers (Sanmiguel *et al.*, 2018), online communities (Helal, 2019) and collaborative consumptions (Iran and Schrader, 2017). Further acknowledged by Jones and Kang (2019), the importance of browsing freedoms, pre-viewable function, immediate fulfilment, interactivity, source credibility and the virtual storage mechanism are highlighted as contemporary motivators on apparel purchases. Nevertheless, earlier works were mainly single-dimensional (one independent variable → dependent variable) over a multifaceted construct. Findings yielded have also overlooked the potential interdependency between both psychological and marketing elements on actual market

behaviours. Millennials have even demonstrated stern dissimilarities towards fashion consumptions, which differentiated the cohort into in-trend pursuers, ethical believers, quality seekers and value shoppers (Sorensen and Jorgensen, 2019). Multi-dimensional study within this area can, therefore, offer more comprehensive insights towards todays' fashion market.

Additionally, cross-cultural analyses were conducted in understanding fashion consumption between consumers from different cultural background (Faschan et al., 2020; Souiden et al., 2011). Yet, such research was primarily conducted in understanding the behaviours between consumers of distant nationalities (e.g. Australia and Italy, China and the USA). Dissimilarities between cultural and societal environments would be imperative in gauging the consumption behaviours across separated cultural segments, regardless of geographical proximity (i.e. neighbouring countries). By investigating fashion consumption between the Malaysian and Thailand markets, this study explored the interrelationships between both psychological (i.e. fashion innovativeness, self-concept, fashion consciousness and need for uniqueness) and marketing factors (i.e. social media marketing and fashion advertisement) on clothing interest among Generation Y consumers; in turn, verifying the indirect influences of clothing interest towards purchase intention through the development of product attitude and self-confidence. Apprehended results are expected to provide greater insights on the consumption requirements of fashion and apparel products among Generation Y consumers.

All-in-all, the remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, existing literature on the concepts are reviewed and the developed hypotheses are presented. Secondly, the research methods and data analysis are described. Finally, obtained research findings are discussed, and implications of the study are further provided.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses development

2.1 Theory of generational cohorts (Generation Y)

According to Pentecost and Andrews (2010), Rahulan et al. (2015), a generation cohort consisted of a group of individuals who were born within the same generational interval and experienced comparable events during their formative years. Common engagement in generation-defining ordeals and life events would develop their shared personalities and perceptions (Dencker et al., 2008; Motta et al., 2002). The Theory of Generational Cohort was further proposed by Mannheim (1952) and expanded by Strauss and Howe (1997) to conceptually explain the formation of shared predilections, values and practices within a cohort who possess similar societal, cultural, governmental and financial experience during late adolescent and early adulthood. Herewith, generational segmentation is based on a person's lifecycle in which their preference is formed through the impactful incidents in their earlier life (Jackson et al., 2011). Essentially, generational cohort is perceived as a better approach for market segmentation as compared to age group (Koksal, 2019; Ting and de Run, 2015a; Ting and de Run, 2015b). As each generation encountered different life events, they possess several cohort-specific traits, with Baby Boomers prefer one-stop physical stores for their purchase (Martin, 2009), Generation X capitalizes on using the Internet for their product information and online purchase (Philip, 2015) and Generation Y would willingly make purchases without prior experience on the tangible product (Harris et al., 2011; Moore, 2012; Ordun, 2015).

Highlighted by Tee et al. (2013), Generation Y has emerged as a feasible market to various apparel brands because of their availability of additional disposable income. This is self-explanatory for individuals born between the year of 1977 and 1994, as they are working adults between the age of 26 and 43 years old (Paul, 2001). Moreover, shopping complexes are chosen as the recreational location for this generation, which further demonstrated their extensive purchasing power (Euromonitor International, 2013). Not to mention, this generation tends to accept diverging cultures, opinions and practices under greater resilience and leniency (Fry, 2015; Tee et al., 2013). Generation Y, thus, shows greater

significance on purchase frequency, fandom towards fashion, as well as belief and impulsive consumption in the field of fashion retailing (Pentecost and Andrews, 2010). As they were born into metropolitan districts and developed cities, increased freedom and financial ability have also made Generation Y the appropriate customers to apparel products (Kim *et al.*, 2009).

2.2 Theory of stimulus–organism–response

Drawing from the stimulus response theory, stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) is regarded as the interaction and reaction of individuals towards surrounding stimulus. According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the S-O-R model can be explained as the stimulus (S) received by an individual, which influenced his or her evaluation (O), and their response (R) towards the stimulus (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Since its inception, the S-O-R paradigm has been widely used in multiple studies to understand individuals' unconscious and conscious perceptions towards certain subjects (Cheah *et al.*, 2019; Mowen, 2000). In the context of marketing, it was commonly used to represent the consumers' decisions that influence their behavioural outcome (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Suparno, 2020).

Nonetheless, multiple studies have often identified one's psychological perspective in the role of the "organism", where it precedes consumption responses, while being directly influenced by external stimulus (Aggarwal and Rahul, 2017; Arora *et al.*, 2020; Kühn and Petzer, 2018). In this regard, elements including usefulness, information quality, virtual presentations and physical experience are shown to be the stimulus that develop consumers' conception in the forms of trust, satisfaction and perceived value, which in turn, affect their consumption intention. As recommended by Cachero-Martínez and Vázquez-Casielles (2017), organizations which prioritized market differentiation through stimulating customers' value and satisfaction would require comprehensive efforts on every aspects of the marketing mix (i.e. quality assurance of product offering with maintaining an effective price and promotional strategy). Whereas, a study by Mohammad Didarul Alam and Mohd Noor (2020) has determined quality as the stimuli that generates corporate image, while being the antecedent to the loyalty among Generation Y consumers. The theory further explained product-related information as a determinant that reflects the perceived reliability of an organization, while shaping the consumers' purchasing decision (Zhu *et al.*, 2020). Principally, psychological factors have maintained its relevance as the stimulated variables.

Such rigidity has presented this study with an exploratory area to investigate psychological factors (i.e. fashion innovativeness, self-concept, fashion consciousness and the need for uniqueness) alongside marketing factors (i.e. social media marketing and fashion advertisement) as the stimulating variables that influence perception formation and subsequent consumption responses (i.e. purchase intention), specifically among Generation Y consumers. The S-O-R model has, therefore, served as the foundation to the current research model.

2.3 Clothing interest

Clothing interest is defined as an individual's "attitude and beliefs about clothing, the knowledge and attention paid to their clothing, and the concern and curiosity concerning his/her and others' clothing" (Gurel, 1974, p. 12). A person's interest evidently depends on the amount of money, time, energy and effort one is willing to sacrifice for a product or information regarding a particular fashion (Gurel, 1974; Lim *et al.*, 2020; Lukavsky *et al.*, 1995). Clothing interest can, therefore, be described as the general enjoyment, investment and attention an individual holds towards their clothing (Kaiser, 1997). Individuals with high clothing interest would also be more in-trend with their apparel selection (Moody *et al.*, 2009). It is regarded as the indicator to one's image, social status, lifestyle, personality, self-consciousness and self-impression (Cham *et al.*, 2018; Kumar *et al.*, 2009; Zeb *et al.*, 2011).

More often than not, fashion companies are keen in unravelling the factors that can potentially contribute to the consumers' interest in purchasing their apparel products (Zeb *et al.*, 2011). Based on the fashion lifecycle as proposed by Sproles (1979), the causal relationships between both psychological and marketing variables, clothing interest and purchase intention were investigated.

2.4 Psychological factors

2.4.1 Fashion innovativeness. Consumer psychology has suggested innovativeness as an important personality trait dominated by every individual in adopting contemporary ideas and products (Hirschman, 1980; Rogers *et al.*, 2005). It plays an important part in ensuring marketing success through influencing consumers' level of receptiveness (Jai and Tung, 2015). Yet, the concept of innovativeness holds multiple definitions as dependent over the explored context and industry (Citrin *et al.*, 2000; Jai and Tung, 2015). For the current study, fashion innovativeness is hereby defined as one's inclination towards adopting new and different fashion products and services at an earlier interval to the mass society (Goldsmith, 2000). Its importance has then been highlighted by Blackwell *et al.* (2001) in view of the extensive influence on consumers' fashion adoption behaviour.

Cho and Workman (2011), Jai and Tung (2015), Muzinich *et al.* (2015) have further provided additional supports on the industrial relevance of innovativeness, by demonstrating positive correlations between fashion innovativeness and media exposure, engagement to fashion-related information and increased fashion spending. Previous studies have hereby reported fashion innovativeness as the key factor that influences consumers' intention and decision to adopt a new fashion (Cho and Workman, 2011; Jai and Tung, 2015; Park *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, fashion innovativeness was also determined to be a strong predictor on an individual's interest on clothing consumptions (Choo *et al.*, 2014; Lee, 2018a, 2018b; Phau *et al.*, 2015). As recognized by Rahman and Kharb (2018), fashion innovators often rely heavily on marketing-generated information (e.g. magazines and social media advertisements) for their apparel selection and clothing purchases. However, Matthews and Rothenberg (2017) then proposed a counter statement through emphasizing the existence of shared apparel preference between innovative and non-innovative consumers' regarding similar product attributes, whereas Choo *et al.* (2014), Phau *et al.* (2015) have suggested the prevalent influence of innovativeness on consumers' interest on assessing both fashion brands and products, before making their purchasing decision. Fashion innovativeness is also recognized as a significant influencer on consumers' interest and behaviour towards apparel recycling (Lee, 2018a, 2018b).

Conversely, Chung and Cho (2018) has investigated clothing interest in the antecedent position to both item-specified and instinctive innovativeness. Even so, innovativeness among fashion advocates would frequently spearhead fashion trends within the wider marketplace, further prevailed as an impactful fashion-change agent on fashion leaders and followers alike (Baker *et al.*, 2019). Fashion innovativeness has, thus, manifested individual disposition on physical attractiveness, recreational spending, self-identification, aesthetic remarks, as well as the tendency for impulsive consumption (Anić *et al.*, 2018). The current study is hereby operated towards understanding the extent to which fashion innovativeness would directly influence clothing interest, following the stipulated hypothesis:

H1. There is a significant relationship between fashion innovativeness and clothing interest.

2.4.2 Self-concept. Self-concept is defined by Solomon (1996) as an individual's perception and attitude towards a product. It is regarded by Kumar *et al.* (2009) as a person's feeling and thought which portray his or her unique identity to provide a personalized differentiation within the larger society. Consumers often develop their self-concept through the influence of societal and environmental factors that guide the formation of perception and feeling,

followed by their behaviour and personal image (Kumar *et al.*, 2009; Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987). Essentially, the ability for personal expressiveness has overshadowed societal benefits in terms of ethicality in motivating fashion-related purchases. Self-concept was also determined as an important influencer on consumers' perception regarding a marketed brand, advertisement, salesperson and product (Chang *et al.*, 2013). In fact, the variable outweighed brand engagement in affecting both brand preferment and loyalty, with ascertaining the compatibility between brands and the consumers' fashion concept (Liu *et al.*, 2018). Apparel selection based on consumers' self-concept is further proposed by Legere and Kang (2020) to be a practice that seeks identification and physical improvement without forgoing personalized solitude and secrecy.

Specifically, fashion products have always been a prime example in forming and exhibiting self-image (Chang *et al.*, 2013). McNeill (2018) further referred clothing as a self-expression tool that performs symbolic communication, whereas fashion brand is proposed by Kumar *et al.* (2009) as a strong foundation in projecting an individual's desired concept. One's self-concept is, therefore, evinced as a definitive antecedent to the formation of clothing interest (Cham *et al.*, 2018). Notably, consumers' tend to lose their interest on a particular apparel concept following marketers' decision for mass marketing (Grewal *et al.*, 2016). Nonetheless, the studies by Chang *et al.* (2013), Khare *et al.* (2012) have demonstrated significant relationships between self-concept and fashion involvement, clothing interest and actual purchase. Such can be affiliated to the consumers' concern for status, self-esteem, social insecurities and awareness towards societal norm (Millan and Mittal, 2017). Based on the evidence above, hypothesis is stipulated:

H2. There is a significant relationship between self-concept and clothing interest.

2.4.3 Fashion consciousness. Growth of the global fashion industry can often be retraced to a wide range of online and offline marketing platforms that educate and promote fashion products to their potential customers. This then promotes fashion consciousness among consumers through enabling massive exposure to fashion-related updates (Leung *et al.*, 2015). According to Walsh *et al.* (2001), fashion consciousness is defined as an individual's desire to incorporate the latest fashion into his or her clothing. The study by Leung *et al.* (2015) further proposed the elements of style and product attributes in outweighing suitability and comfort towards the purchasing decision of apparel products among fashion conscious consumers. This group of consumers are also found to allocate greater attention on stylish fashion pieces that reflect their personalities (Cho *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, Khan (2020) has also confirmed fashion conscious consumers in demonstrating a wider variation, belief, attitude and outlook on apparel-related information over those who are less fashion conscious.

Following the report by Hassan and Harun (2016), fashion consciousness is based heavily on culture, specifically on the apparelling pattern, clothing inspiration, desire for differentness and origin of fashion information towards deciding actual clothing purchases. Whereas a study by Kautish and Sharma (2018) has then determined fashion consciousness as the intermediate factor that connects individual values to the consumption of apparel products. Attention is hereby casted on the congruency between marketed message and clothing preference of the targeted market in establishing preeminent customer engagement (Barry and Phillips, 2016). Essentially, fashion consciousness would be accounted towards enhancing one's interest for clothing and fashion consumption (Cho *et al.*, 2015; Zaman *et al.*, 2019). The variable, thus, holds similar potential to the desire for personalized uniqueness in generating positive perception towards a particular fashion brand (Tak and Pareek, 2016). With limited research that investigates the significance of fashion consciousness within the younger community, the hypothesis is stipulated as follows:

H3. There is a significant relationship between fashion consciousness and clothing interest.

2.4.4 Need for uniqueness. According to Snyder and Fromkin's (1980), consumers' need for uniqueness (NFU) is understood as an individual's trait of purchasing clothing products that differentiate themselves from the others to enhance their social image. Admittedly, everyone possesses different level of motivation to be different and unique (Ruvio, 2008). Past studies have further documented a strong association between NFU and the desire to use differentiable products (Cheema and Kaikati, 2010). Such traits can often be observed through consumers':

■ product selection that counters conformity;

■ unpopular choice in their product consumption; and

■ avoidance of similarity (Knight and Kim, 2007).

Likewise, they would willingly risk in adopting unique products towards achieving social exclusivity (Schumpe *et al.*, 2016). While quality remains essential in influencing the purchase intention of apparel products, the latter would not be achieved without consumers' outlook on NFU and interest (Giridhar *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, NFU should not be overlooked, especially within the study of status-based consumption (Butcher *et al.*, 2017).

Nonetheless, past studies have consistently reported fashion products as a tool to express the wearers' uniqueness and social image (Cham *et al.*, 2018; Kauppinen-Räisänen *et al.*, 2018; Lang and Armstrong, 2018). The variable has prevailed as a determining factor to clothing interest, and an indirect determinant to purchase intention of apparel products (Cham *et al.*, 2018; Kumar *et al.*, 2009; Lang and Armstrong, 2018). Gillen and Dunaev (2017) have also proposed a close parallel between both self-admiration and self-characterized NFU in resulting greater efforts being allocated towards acquiring a unique appearance. Such claim is reinforced by Kauppinen-Räisänen *et al.* (2018) with acknowledging societal-driven NFU as the predictor towards the preferred selection of luxury apparel brands in establishing both obvious and detailed appearance differentiations. Based on the above discussion, the following has been hypothesized:

H4. There is a significant relationship between need of uniqueness and clothing interest.

2.5 Marketing factors

2.5.1 Social media marketing. Web 2.0 has created a new norm for people to co-create, collaborate, communicate and share content on social networking sites since the early 90s (Enders *et al.*, 2008). Various social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube) have also allowed virtual interactions and idea exchanges that transcend physical boundaries (Cheah *et al.*, 2019; Lim and Cham, 2015; Ting *et al.*, 2016). Such convenience has offered business corporations with a more cost-effective mean towards greater customer engagement as compared to the traditional media (Cheah *et al.*, 2019). Social media marketing (SSM) is, therefore, acknowledged as one of the most powerful marketing tool in today's business front in view of its inclusiveness and reachability (Thackeray *et al.*, 2012).

According to Akar and Topçu (2011), SMM is defined as the use of social media channels to promote a fashion brand and its products. Such advancement has benefitted a wide range of businesses through its convenience in delivering a well-targeted marketing message so as to develop a favourable product impression and attitude (Shareef *et al.*, 2019). It further allows businesses to build a unique and contemporary business model, while creating and maintaining a long-lasting customer relationship (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). In return, marketers could gain a better understanding on their consumers' needs and expectations that assist their product offering and service delivery. As recognized by Godey *et al.* (2016), SMM is vital to a brand's marketing and promotional

strategies to reach their potential customers at a lower advertising cost. Evidence has also highlighted the importance of SMM to the fashion and apparel industry. Specifically, Chanel, a luxury brand from Paris, managed to attract about 25 million in fashion followers through employing a dedicated Instagram team to market its products, which outperformed the other industry players including Gucci, Dior and Louis Vuitton (Valérie and Celine, 2018).

Fundamentally, SMM was found to significantly influence customers' attitude and brand awareness in the fashion industry, which is imperative in generating subsequent brand loyalty, commitment and impartial product-related feedbacks (Kedzior *et al.*, 2016; Langaro *et al.*, 2018; Tong *et al.*, 2018). Besides, past studies have also presented a significant causal relationship between SMM and the consumers' interest towards fashion products and brands, followed by an indirect influence to their actual purchasing behaviour (Hahn and Kim, 2013; Lipsman *et al.*, 2012; Nash, 2019). With Teichmann (2011) confirming a positive correlation between product expertise and self-confidence, social media that enable customizable message delivery based on the users' browsing history has ensured effective market targeting that yields well-informed customer patronage. However, there remains limited exploration on the relevance of SMM towards clothing interest. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. There is a significant relationship between SMM and clothing interest.

2.5.2 Fashion advertisement. Advertisement is generally understood as any form of announcement or persuasive message communicated via mass media in paid or donated time or space by an identified individual, company or organization (American Marketing Association, n.d.). It is reported as a robust marketing tool following the ability to influence customers' emotion, grabbing attention, directing purchase intention, while generating a lasting impression (Adibi, 2012; Cham *et al.*, 2020). Advertising is, therefore, imperative in reaching potential customers, creating brand-related awareness, conveying product knowledge, attracting market attention and directing the consumers' decision-making process (Bhutada and Rollins, 2015). As explained by Amer *et al.* (2019), both price and advertisement were determined as the external factors that guide consumers' individualistic preference. Tarhan and Ateş (2020) further proposed the importance of critical planning to apparel firms in executing their marketing strategies to ensure favourable market response (e.g. physical display and promotional message). Yet, such claim is rebutted by Olajide *et al.* (2018) who emphasized peer pressure and social influence over advertisement and promotion as crucial considerations towards the development of fashion interest. Nonetheless, Lee and Lee (2016) have highlighted the significance of brand image on customers' clothing selection; thus, suggested the need for conscientious administration towards a company's advertising plan and execution.

Additionally, previous evidence suggested advertising as a direct antecedent to product impression, market awareness, customers' product perception and their purchase decision (Bhutada and Rollins, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2017; Martins *et al.*, 2019). This acts as a form of reflective consumption by aligning the advertised concept to the viewers' perception (Cui, 2017). As identified by Yan *et al.* (2012), fashion advertisement is a vehicle that influences consumers' fashion interest and fashion choice, followed by their actual purchase. Consumers' fashion consumption is shown to succeed their exposure to fashion advertisement. However, Nettelhorst *et al.* (2020) revealed advertisement as undesirable interference to consumers that would often be minimized or avoided. Accounting for different outlooks on the robustness of advertisement in affecting market perception within the apparel industry, its significance remains debatable. The hypothesis is, thus, stipulated as follows:

H6. There is a significant relationship between fashion advertisement and clothing interest.

2.6 Relationships between clothing interest, product attitude, self-confidence and purchase intention

According to Stanforth (2009), Wattanasuwan (2005), apparel goes beyond the possession of physical products to enclose symbolic meaning in self-expression, self-esteem, social status, personality and identity. This is supported by Cham et al. (2018), Ahuvia and Wong (2002) who suggested fashion as a form of socio-cultural and lifestyle representations among younger consumers, while prevailed as a primary concern on their interest and purchase intention. Essentially, purchase intention is defined as the consumers' likelihood to involve in certain transaction following their evaluation of an apparel product (Reynolds et al., 1977). The variable possesses substantial tendency in predicting actual purchasing behaviour (Morwitz and Schmittlein, 1992). Earlier studies within the context of fashion and clothing have subsequently highlighted affection and interest as a direct predictor to their purchase intention of apparel products (Cham et al., 2018; Son et al., 2013; Vikkraman and Sumathi, 2012). Yet, Huang et al. (2019) have presented a contrasted opinion by recognizing the importance of product belief and perceived value towards purchase intention, while refuting the significance of fashion interest. The studies by Mohamed et al. (2019), Thompson and Tong (2016) have also demonstrated similar findings through outlining the direct influence of fashion leadership, environmental consciousness, individual belief, brand image perceived quality and word-of-mouth on purchase intention of apparel products, whereas knowledgeableness, affection, perceived risk and perceived value are proposed by Gangwani et al. (2020) as the significant predictors within the same context.

In understanding the causal association between consumers' psychological build-up and their consumption intention within the apparel industry, Copeland and Bhaduri (2019) have outlined the components of product-related knowledge, assessment of available information and the expected gain through consuming the purchased apparel item. With this being said, product interest has prevailed as a potential predictor to purchase intention, despite its resemblance to product image and perception. The studies by Cham et al. (2018), Son et al. (2013) have also unveiled a strong association between clothing interest and purchase intention among younger consumers. The potential impact of interest towards constructive behavioural intention is, thus, acknowledged, with the following stipulated hypothesis:

H7. There is a significant relationship between clothing interest and purchase intention.

Besides, product attitude is defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) as an individual's enduring evaluation of an apparel product that influences his or her actual behaviours. Herewith, attitude was found to directly and indirectly influence purchase behaviour (Bentler and Speckart, 1979). According to Kim and Kim (2017), Lee et al. (2018), attitude formed towards fashion products is shown to possess a strong association on purchase intention. The study by Kim et al. (2016) have also presented similar findings with its significance affected by the consumers' nationality, knowledge, purchasing experience and type of apparel product. Additionally, their judgment formed on both aspects of hedonistic and utility would be accounted towards such intention (Moon et al., 2018). The variable, therefore, surfaced to construct a positive groundwork towards actual purchase before the formation of consumers' perception through actual consumption experience (Chun et al., 2018). Argument is then presented by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) on the domain where interest is an imperative factor in determining consumers' product attitude. As described by Foroudi et al. (2018), favourable attitude towards a brand holds similar effect to brand awareness, perceived quality, brand identification, brand image and country-of-origin in yielding both possessive intention and loyalty among the targeted consumers. The relationship has, nonetheless, been illustrated via numerous studies within the context of fashion brand and product (Kim and Kim, 2017; Kim and Lee, 2008).

Moreover, brand and product attitude has been established as a variable that connects celebrity endorsement and personal lifestyle to purchase intention (Vidyanata et al., 2018).

Product attitude was further found to have a mediating effect between perceived attributes of smart wear and purchase intention (Ko *et al.*, 2008). A study by von Sikorski and Müller (2018) has then confirmed attitude as a mediating factor on the relationship between consumers' perception towards an organization and their purchase intention. Similar findings were also obtained by Aruan and Wirdania (2020), Liu and Xing (2017) on the relationships between religious belief, cultural devotion, functionality, fashion leadership and consumption intention of apparel products. Such review has, thus, highlighted the mediating potential of attitude towards purchase intention within the fashion industry (Balakrishnan, 2017). Accounting for the discussion above, following hypotheses are stipulated:

H8. There is a significant relationship between clothing interest and product attitude.

H9. There is a significant relationship between product attitude and purchase intention.

H10. Product attitude mediates the relationship between clothing interest and purchase intention.

Self-confidence is understood to reflect an individual's belief upon dealing with various situations in his or her life (Bearden *et al.*, 2001; Jürgensen and Guesalaga, 2018). According to Jürgensen and Guesalaga (2018), self-confidence represents one's belief in his or her ability to identify and select satisfying fashion alternatives. As such, fashion is deemed a tool that enhances self-confidence through expressing one's identity, affinity, status and lifestyle (Clark *et al.*, 2008; Nash, 2019). Oh and Abraham (2016) have then determined knowledgeable consumers to possess greater fashion adaptability and lower price sensitivity. On the contrary, a study by Khraim (2018) has acknowledged consumers' involvement as the factor that increases product certainties while shaping the current fashion norm. Confident consumers would often choose the apparel that they have deemed compatible to their individuality and image (Jürgensen and Guesalaga, 2018; Koller and Salzberger, 2012). Therefore, it was also investigated alongside perceived quality, risk and environmental attributes towards understanding the purchase intention among younger consumers (Quintal *et al.*, 2016).

Past studies have further reported higher tendency in fashion purchase and adoption by individuals with greater self-confidence because of their proficiency in making informed purchases (Koller and Salzberger, 2012; Jürgensen and Guesalaga, 2018; Yaoyuneyong *et al.*, 2018). As proposed by Perry (2017), self-confidence is comparable to personal belief and societal pressure for its significant influence on fashion adoption. Besides social conformity, fashion orientation and financial ability, Widaningsih and Mustikasari (2018) have also determined self-confidence as a factor that leads to unplanned purchase. The discussion has, thus, offered substantial interpretation on the significance of self-confidence on the purchase decision of apparel products.

Furthermore, self-confidence has demonstrated mediating potential between consumers' knowledge and purchase intention (D'Souza *et al.*, 2019). Its mediating role is also demonstrated within the study by Al-Zu'bi (2015), specifically between social conformity and the search for apparel information. However, such research was principally examined from the perspectives of organizational management and knowledge proficiency (Ibrahim and Jaafar, 2017; Osman *et al.*, 2018). To understand the potential impact of self-confidence within the apparel industry, following hypotheses are, therefore, stipulated:

H11. There is a significant relationship between clothing interest and self-confidence.

H12. There is a significant relationship between self-confidence and purchase intention.

H13. Self-confidence mediates the relationship between clothing interest and purchase intention.

2.7 Moderating effect of nationality (Malaysian vs Thais)

Nationality plays an important role in affecting brand equity and purchase intention within the apparel industry (Ko and Zhang, 2009). Fundamentally, cultural differences between countries moderate the indirect relationship between perception and consumption intention of luxury brand (Cunningham, 2019). With Generation Y consumers being typically divided into professionals with established household and career, and inexperienced pursuers amidst building a sustainable living, both categories are highly susceptive to personal upbringings upon perceiving the value of luxury goods (Stępień and Lima, 2018). As researched by Zhao et al. (2018), subcultures have prevailed as a source of inspiration towards apparel design through both environmental and subjective representation. With this, cultural differences between counties remain apparent within larger countries like China, where collectivism, acquaintances' proximity and inherent conformity of youths in one county does not necessary reflect the other (Dong et al., 2018).

More so in the Asia-Pacific region, Han (2017) and Ko and Zhang (2009) have proposed differences in magnitude of partisanship and impartiality between China and Korea, which dominated the brand-related evaluation among residents of each country. In the context of clothing and footwear, nationality exerts a moderating effect on the relationship between magnitude of innovation and customer equity (Zhang et al., 2013). This is further highlighted by Youn et al. (2019) in the area of advertisement acceptance between Chinese and Japanese consumers. Under circumstance of immerse product availability, different cultural approaches towards social hierarchy, risks, societal compliance, masculinity, future outlook and pleasure would influence the purchasing behaviour between citizens of different countries (Lu et al., 2018). Discussion, thus, clarified the role of cultural inheritance in terms of rational, emotional and societal foundations towards consumers' intuitive judgment on domestic products (Conner et al., 2017).

Additionally, the disparity in individual perception between Asian and Western cultures was vastly investigated, particularly in aspects of product (Kuah and Wang, 2020), advertisement (Errmann et al., 2019; Lee and Lee, 2017; Liu et al., 2019) and consumer behaviour (Rajamma et al., 2010; Weber et al., 2017). In another case, the study of one's birthed nationality and their latter residency demonstrated the tendency for ethnocentrism, where consumers' acceptance towards products within the home- and host- countries is dependent over the nature of both communities (Banna et al., 2018). Because of cultural dissimilarities, previous findings have also established nationality as a compelling moderating factor between neighbouring countries within the Asia-Pacific region (Han, 2017; Ko and Zhang, 2009; Youn et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2013). The current study hereby expanded upon such significance to explore the moderating effect of nationality between Malaysia and Thailand in the context of apparel consumption, following the postulated hypotheses:

H14a. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between fashion innovativeness and clothing interest.

H14b. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between self-concept and clothing interest.

H14c. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between fashion consciousness and clothing interest.

H14d. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between need of uniqueness and clothing interest.

H14e. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between SMM and clothing interest.

H14f. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between fashion advertisement and clothing interest.

H14g. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between clothing interest and purchase intention.

H14h. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between clothing interest and product attitude.

H14i. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between product attitude and purchase intention.

H14j. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between clothing interest and self-confidence.

H14k. Nationality has a moderating effect on the relationship between self-confidence and purchase intention.

H14l. Nationality has a moderating effect on the indirect effect of clothing interest on purchase intention through product attitude and self-confidence.

The research model has been outlined in Figure 1.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Sampling and data collection

Generation Y consumers from Malaysia and Thailand were determined as the respondents for this study. The data was collected among Generation Y shoppers from Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. As tabulated by the World Population Review (2020a, 2020b), Kuala Lumpur, which consisted a mix of Malay (45.9%), Chinese (43.2%), Indian (10.3%) and residents of other heritages (1.6%, which consisted Thailand, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Burma, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Vietnam, etc.), while experiencing growing working populations from other regions of Malaysia in seek of better job opportunities, as well as Bangkok, with having a multi-cultural façade across regional backgrounds of Japanese, Chinese, European, American, Cambodian, Laos and other Asian and Western origins, have justified

Figure 1 Research model
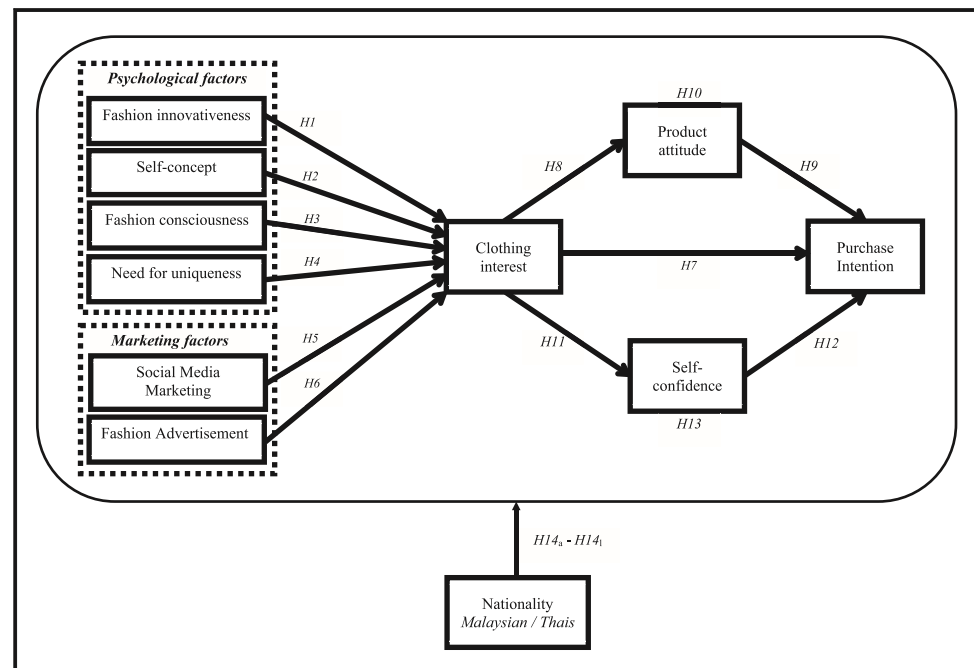
both regions as compatible research locations in obtaining comprehensive results with improved population and cultural representations. At the respective estimated populations of 7,996,830 and 10,539,415 for both Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok as of the year 2020 (World Population Review, 2020a, 2020b), these cities were selected with account for them being renowned cities that contain the highest numbers of shopping malls and offices in its country, while reported to hold the greatest population in Generation Y residents (Cham et al., 2018; Corporate Directions, Inc, 2016).

A total of 400 survey questionnaires were distributed equally to the respondents in both cities through the use of quota sampling. Quota upon the collected responses was hereby proportionated on similar characteristics of shopping malls, where the questionnaires for each city (e.g. 200) were distributed at two major shopping malls with each contributing 100 responses. Additionally, all the selected shopping malls are similar in term of their size, types of anchor tenants, acreage and concept. In obtaining justifiable responses, the researchers further used three control questions to determine the respondents' eligibility. These were as following:

- the respondent must fulfil the definition of Generation Y whereby he/she must be born within the period of 1977-1994;

- he/she had bought at least a clothing product in the past three months; and

- he/she must be a citizen of the researched countries.

To secure a high response rate and create a co-operative atmosphere among the targeted respondents, questionnaires were personally distributed to the respondents at the lobbies, waiting areas and restaurants of corresponding shopping malls, where Generation Y shoppers could be easily accessed. Following the data cleaning process, 388 observations among the collected responses were deemed usable for further data analysis with 12 observations being rejected because of incompleteness and suspicious response patterns (e.g. diagonal lining and straight lining responses). According to Saunders et al. (2012), the sample size of 388 is considered adequate for this study in representing a large population. By adopting the guideline given by Cohen (1988) and Green (1991), researchers have further determined the minimum sample size requirement for this study through using the G*Power software. Drawing from the suggestion by Faul et al. (2009), the G*Power output had revealed a minimum requirement of 138 samples at a minimum effect size of 0.15, a statistical power level of 80% and a significance level of 5%. Evidently, the total sample size of 388 for the study was, therefore, considered adequate.

3.2 Instrument and measurement

All items used for measuring the present constructs were adapted from the past studies. Fashion consciousness was measured using the five items from Sprotles and Kendall's (1986) on an individual's overall perception and emphasis towards fashion. The measurement for self-concept was adapted from Alfonso et al. (1996) in term of an individual's overall perception of his/her own self. The scale by Goldsmith and Hofacker's (1991) was used to measure fashion innovativeness in addressing the individual's fashion knowledge and overall response towards fashion adoption. NFU was operationalised based on the five-item scale by Tian et al. (2001) that indicates an individual's consumption of unique and rare clothing. The perception towards fashion advertisement was then measured based on a six-item scale by Inoni (2017), which covered an individual's perceptions towards the information, content, importance and appeal of clothing advertisements.

Next, the measurement scale for SMM was adapted from Yadav and Rahman (2017) in measuring an individual's response towards the trendiness, interactivity, personalisation, informativeness and word-of-mouth by the fashion brand's social media sites. Lumpkin's (1985) scale was used to measure clothing interest in term of an individual's response

towards their preferences on appearance enhancement though clothing, favourite activity in clothing and expenses on clothing. Self-confidence was measured based on the five-items from Jürgensen and Guesalaga (2018) and Yaoyuneyong *et al.* (2018) that reflect an individual's overall confidence in selecting and purchasing their clothing products. Cox and Cox's (2002) six semantic differential scales were used to measure product attitude, which measured an individual's attitude towards fashion items as anchored by not stylish–stylish, unattractive–attractive, unpleasant–pleasant, bad–good, not likable–likable and unflattering–flattering. Purchase intention was adopted from the studies by Cham *et al.* (2018) and Kumar *et al.* (2009) concerning the respondents' intention to purchase clothing. All the measurement items as currently used are tabulated in the Appendix.

All the items were measured based on a six-point Likert scale (where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 6 indicates strongly agree). To establish the face validity for this study, the questionnaire had been pre-tested on a panel of 14 experts from the retail and marketing background. Subsequently, the questionnaire was further pilot tested among 65 Generation Y shoppers prior to the actual data collection. Pre-test was hereby conducted to ensure the appropriate use of words, sequential arrangement and clarity of asked questions, while unveiling any need for addition and removal of questions, as well as transparency and adequacy of instructions (Kumar *et al.*, 2013). Whereas pilot testing was conducted in confirming the sufficiency of included instruments, compatibility upon actual data collection, sensibility and feasibility of undertaken procedure, robustness of used sampling approach, as well as to gather preliminary data and disclose existence of problems within aspects of operation and coordination (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002).

While the used measurement instruments were adopted form previous literature, such condition does not exempt the need for pre-testing pending the progression to full-scale data collection (Kumar *et al.*, 2013; Memon *et al.*, 2017). Drawing from the suggestion by Saunders *et al.* (2012), 50 respondents (i.e. Gen Y shoppers) had been involved in the pilot test through using purposive sampling. The obtained outcome further confirmed the feasibility of the current study protocol, with all the variables demonstrated sufficient reliability scores (Cronbach's α) and no issue was encountered during the data analysis. With this, the outcome from the pre-test and pilot test has shown that all the questions are relevant, precise, clear and well-understood by the respondents, without the need for further changes.

3.3 Common method variance

Common method variance (CMV) is a methodological issue which occurs when a respondent answers all the items in the questionnaire at a particular time (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). CMV was argued to either deflate or inflate the relationships between constructs, further affects the reliability and validity of the measures. According to MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012), CMV can be curbed with the use of procedural and statistical remedy. For procedural remedy, past literature have suggested the inclusion of a detail research information coversheet to the questionnaire with the objective of enhancing the questionnaire's clarity and accuracy (Cham *et al.*, 2020; MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012). Moreover, pre-test and pilot-test as highlighted above are also required to alleviate any uncertainty associated with the questionnaire. Harman's single factor test was also statistically used to examine the CMV. According to Fuller *et al.* (2016) and Malhotra *et al.* (2006), CMV is negligible if the first and largest variance explained is less than 40% from the factor analysis, while the hypothesised model (that modelled all the items as a single factor) is not fit. Current model has indicated the largest factor explains at 29.45 (< 40%) of the total variance and all the items modelled into a single factor was not fit; thus, suggesting that CMV is negligible for this study.

4. Data analysis and findings

4.1 Sample characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the present study. As shown in Table 1, the respondents consisted of 51.0% female and 49.0% male and majority of them are married (55.1%). In addition, majority of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree (57.2%), while being used as full-time workers (64.7%). The respondents are relatively equal in nationality distributions between Malaysians and Thais, and about half of them shop for clothing between 1 and 6 times a month (64.9%).

4.2 Measurement model assessment

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the validity of the measurement items for the constructs. CFA examined the model fit of the measurement model and addressed the mater of convergent and discriminant validity for the constructs. As suggested by Hair *et al.* (2010), the model fit for the research model are determined based on various indices including the normed Chi-square (χ^2/df), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), goodness of fit (GFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) and parsimony normed fit index (PNFI). With this, a model is considered fit when χ^2/df is less than 3, RMSEA is less than 0.08, GFI is more than or equal to 0.90, TLI is greater than or equal to 0.90 and PNFI is more than 0.50. Assessment made towards the measurement model has found that χ^2/df = 1.933, GFI = 0.851, RMSEA = 0.048, TLI = 0.923 and PNFI = 0.783. Although the obtained GFI is slightly lower than the threshold value, other indices which fulfilled the requirements have, thus, concluded the model to be relatively fit.

The convergent validity for the constructs was addressed based on the criteria as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2010). These criteria are as follows:

Table 1	Respondents' demographic profile	
Variables	*Descriptions*	*(%)*
Gender	Female	51.0
	Male	49.0
Marital status	Married	55.1
	Single	42.3
	Divorced	1.6
	Widowed	0.2
	Others	0.8
Educational level	Primary school	1.5
	Secondary school	4.6
	Diploma/higher diploma	15.9
	Bachelor's degree	57.2
	Master's degree	20.2
	Doctorate degree	0.6
Employment status	Full-time worker	64.7
	Part-time worker/freelancer	20.5
	Self-employed	14.4
	Unemployed	0.4
Monthly frequency in shopping for cloths	1 – 3 times	22.9
	4 – 6 times	42.0
	7 – 9 times	18.3
	More than 10 times	16.8
Nationality	Malaysian	49.0
	Thais	51.0

- the value of factor loadings for the measurement items of all the constructs must exceed 0.60;

- the value of composite reliability for each of the constructs must be equal or larger than 0.70; and

- the value of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the constructs is larger than 0.50.

In this case, an item for fashion advertisement, self-confidence and product attitude had been removed because of its low loading (i.e. less than 0.60). After the removal of these items, the findings as illustrated in Table 2 have indicated that the measurement model fulfilled the requirements of the convergent validity. Hence, it can be concluded that the convergent validity of the data for this study was established.

Furthermore, the discriminant validity for this study was assessed based on the guideline suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) through comparing the values of AVE to the variance and maximum shared variance (MSV) of the constructs. Discriminant validity would be established if the values of the square root of AVE is greater than the variance shared between any two constructs, and the values of MSV is smaller than the respective AVE for all the constructs. The findings in Table 2 have indicated that the values of correlation (off-diagonal entries in italic) is smaller than the values of squared root of AVE (diagonal entries in bold). Besides, the values of MSV for all the constructs are smaller than the values of AVE of its own. Based on the findings above, the discriminant validity of the data for this study was established. Having addressed the requirements of the measurement model, the results of structural model and hypotheses assessment were presented in the following section.

4.3 Structural model and hypotheses assessment

The structural model for this study was assessed using the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique. According to Hair et al. (2010), SEM is a common method used by researchers to assess the overall model fit and to examine the individual causal paths underlying the structural model. As such, Hair et al. (2010) have suggested the model fit of the structural model to be assessed prior testing of the hypothesized causal paths (e.g. hypotheses). The analysis of the structural model has found that χ^2/df = 2.150, GFI = 0.835, RMSEA = 0.054, TLI = 0.905 and PNFI = 0.834, which suggesting that the model is reasonably fit. The causal paths for the structural model was subsequently tested using the path analysis and the results are further tabulated in Table 3. Herewith, all the hypotheses (e.g. *H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, H8, H9, H11 and H12*) were found to be significant and

Table 2	The result of convergent and discriminant validity													
	Items	*FL*	*AVE*	*CR*	*MSV*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*
Self-confidence	4	0.654 – 0.871	0.623	0.867	0.308	*0.789*[a]									
Fashion advertisement	5	0.629 – 0.814	0.515	0.840	0.399	*0.460*[b]	*0.717*								
Self-concept	5	0.654 – 0.913	0.644	0.899	0.045	*0.127*	*0.186*	*0.802*							
Fashion consciousness	5	0.808 – 0.899	0.751	0.938	0.129	*0.109*	*0.206*	*0.085*	*0.867*						
Fashion innovativeness	6	0.648 – 0.833	0.528	0.870	0.338	*0.427*	*0.297*	*0.100*	*0.205*	*0.727*					
NFU	5	0.719 – 0.801	0.559	0.863	0.521	*0.424*	*0.359*	*0.102*	*0.084*	*0.397*	*0.748*				
Clothing interest	3	0.740 – 0.832	0.621	0.831	0.352	*0.298*	*0.394*	*0.213*	*0.293*	*0.370*	*0.380*	*0.788*			
Purchase intention	3	0.764 – 0.831	0.632	0.837	0.437	*0.423*	*0.281*	*0.100*	*0.359*	*0.581*	*0.399*	*0.463*	*0.795*		
Product attitude	5	0.671 – 0.852	0.547	0.857	0.437	*0.396*	*0.377*	*0.107*	*0.205*	*0.511*	*0.387*	*0.457*	*0.661*	*0.740*	
SMM	15	0.660 – 0.846	0.645	0.901	0.521	*0.555*	*0.632*	*0.180*	*0.269*	*0.499*	*0.722*	*0.593*	*0.522*	*0.513*	*0.803*

Notes: FL = Factor loadings; AVE = Average variance extracted; CR = Compostite relaibility; MSV = Maximum shared variance; [a]The diagonal entries (in bold) represent the squared root AVE by the construct; [b]The off-diagonal entries (in italics) represent the variance shared between constructs

Table 3 Result of path analysis

Hypothesised path	Standardized estimate (β)	Critical ratio	Hypothesis
H1: Fashion innovativeness → Clothing interest	0.129	2.921**	Yes
H2: Self-concept → Clothing interest	0.113	2.889*	Yes
H3: Fashion consciousness → Clothing interest	0.157	3.896**	Yes
H4: NFU → Clothing interest	0.116	2.375*	Yes
H5: SMM → Clothing interest	0.299	5.651**	Yes
H6: Fashion advertisement → Clothing interest	0.452	3.246**	Yes
H7: Clothing interest → Purchase intention	0.183	4.553**	Yes
H8: Clothing interest → Product attitude	0.421	12.195**	Yes
H9: Product attitude → Purchase intention	0.387	15.317**	Yes
H11: Clothing interest → Self-confidence	0.343	7.302**	Yes
H12: Self-confidence → Purchase intention	0.164	4.707**	Yes

Note: **and *Denote significant at 99% and 95% confidence level, respectively

supported. Both the psychological (e.g. fashion innovativeness, self-concept, fashion consciousness and NFU) and marketing (e.g. SMM and fashion advertisement) factors were found to have significant positive impact on clothing interest among Generation Y consumers, which in turn influences their purchase intention (β = 0.183, p < 0.001), product attitude (β = 0.421, p < 0.001) and self-confidence (β = 0.343, p < 0.001). Moreover, both product attitude (β = 0.387, p < 0.001) and self-confidence (β = 0.164, p < 0.001) were also found to positively influence purchase intention.

For *H10* and *H13*, the mediation effect of product attitude and self-confidence on the relationship between clothing interest and purchase intention was addressed using the bootstrap technique in AMOS. The results as presented in Table 4 show that clothing interest have indirect effects on purchase intention via product attitude and self-confidence. This has been confirmed with the bias-corrected bootstrapping technique on 1,000 bootstrap samples. It was found that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for product attitude (lower level 0.307; upper level 0.508) and self-confidence (lower level 0.033; upper level 0.137) does not straddle a zero in between. In addition, product attitude was recognized as the leading indirect decisive factor of purchase intention with an indirect effect of 0.386, followed by self-confidence with an indirect effect of 0.071.

4.4 Multiple group analysis

Multiple group analysis (MGA) was used to examine the differences between Generation Y consumers of dissimilar nationalities (e.g. Malaysian and Thais) in relation to their perception towards the paths underlying the structural model. MGA analysis was hereby conducted based on the four steps guideline as suggested by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993). First, the data was segregated into two clusters, namely, Malaysians and Thais. Second, path analysis was performed on the structural model with all the causal paths fixed with equal regression weight for both clusters. Third, another path analysis was conducted without imposing any constraints for the causal paths in which they were freely estimated.

Table 4 Result of mediation analysis

Indirect Paths	Indirect	C.Interval lower bound	upper bound	p-value
H10: Cint → Att → PI	0.386	0.307	0.508	0.001
H13: Cint → Conf → PI	0.071	0.033	0.137	0.001

Notes: Cint = Clothing interest; PI = Purchase intention; Att = Product attitude; Conf = Self-confidence; C.Interval = Confidence intervals at 95%

Finally, significance of the moderating effect for Malaysians and Thais clusters was tested with the use of the chi-square difference test. Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993) further iterated that the moderating effect of nationality is evidenced if the critical value is greater than 3.841 at a 95% confidence level.

As highlighted in Table 5, the chi-square difference test between the unconstraint model and the constraint model was found to be significant with the p-value of 0.000. This suggested differing causal paths (e.g. $H14a$–$H14l$) in the structural model between the Malaysian and Thais respondents. Out of all the causal paths, Table 6 further indicated that only two paths were found to be significant (e.g. $H14e$ to $H14k$). The p-value of 0.023 for the chi-square difference tests shows that the direct path of SMM → clothing interest is significantly different between the Malaysian and Thais Generation Y consumers. Specifically, it was found that SMM has a significant positive impact on clothing interest, with the Thais group (β = 0.629, p-value < 0.001) overpowering their Malaysian counterpart (β = 0.585, p-value < 0.001). Also, the p-value of 0.044 for the chi-square difference tests has indicated difference between Malaysian and Thais Generation Y consumers on the relationship between self-confidence and purchase intention. In particular, the relationship between self-confidence and purchase intention is only significant to the Thais group (β = 0.414, p-value < 0.001), while being insignificant to the Malaysians. The summary of MGA is as presented in Table 6.

5. Discussion

5.1 Psychological and marketing factors

Both the investigated psychological and marketing variables have demonstrated a direct significant influence towards the clothing interest among Generation Y consumers. The findings hereby offered reinforced support on earlier literature which investigate the

Table 5	Measurement of invariance of cultures		
Model Fit	$\chi^2(df)$	$\Delta \chi^2(\Delta\,df)$	p-value
Unconstraint model	422.436 (38)	34.228(11)	0.000
Constraint model	456.664 (49)		

Table 6	Results of multiple group analysis				
Hypothesis/Path	Malaysian (β)	Thais (β)	Difference in β	p-value	Significant
$H14a$: FI → Cint	0.133*	0.159**	−0.026	0.669	No
$H14b$: SC → Cint	0.236*	0.319**	−0.083	0.382	No
$H14c$: FC → Cint	0.132*	0.171*	−0.039	0.131	No
$H14d$: NFU → Cint	0.140*	0.143*	−0.003	0.563	No
$H14e$: SMM → Cint	0.585**	0.629**	−0.044	0.023	Yes
$H14f$: FAds → Cint	0.138*	0.110*	0.028	0.834	No
$H14g$: Cint → PI (without mediator)	0.411**	0.601**	−0.190	0.119	No
$H14h$: Cint → Att	0.586**	0.409**	0.177	0.511	No
$H14i$: Att → PI	0.163*	0.152*	0.011	0.418	No
$H14j$: Cint → Conf	0.208**	0.171*	0.037	0.567	No
$H14k$: Conf → PI	0.298^{ns}	0.414**	−0.116	0.044	Yes
$H14l$: Cint → PI (with mediators)	0.384**	0.568**	0.037	0.231	No
Indirect effect (Cint → Att → PI)	0.289**	0.387**	−0.098		
Indirect effect (Cint → Conf → PI)	0.095*	0.181*	−0.086		

Notes: FI = Fashion innovativeness; SC = Self-concept; FC = Fashion consciousness; NFU = Need for uniqueness; SMM = Social media marketing; Fads = Fashion advertisement; Cint = Clothing interest; PI = Purchase intention; Att = Product attitude; Conf = Self-confidence, ns = not significant; **and *denote significant at 99% and 95% confidence level, respectively

dimensions of fashion innovativeness (Park *et al.*, 2007; Rahman *et al.*, 2014), self-concept (Bahri-Ammari *et al.*, 2020; Nyadzayo *et al.*, 2020), fashion consciousness (Khan *et al.*, 2019; Wiranata and Hananto, 2020), NFU (Latter *et al.*, 2010; Workman and Caldwell, 2007), SMM (Scuotto *et al.*, 2017) and fashion advertisement (Chu *et al.*, 2019) in affecting market consumption. However, researchers including Park and Noh (2011) have suggested a contradicted view following the absent of direct causation between fashion innovativeness and creativity of advertised message on consumption intention. Martín-Consuegra *et al.* (2018) have also proposed a negative influence of brand integrity on consumption intention within the context of SMM. Accounting for previous results, current discovery has, therefore, prevailed as a part of the broader fashion industry.

While obtained findings have provided founding knowledge in understanding the predictive antecedents of clothing interest, consumers' personality traits should not be overlooked. According to Workman and Kidd (2000), fashion leaders (e.g. early adopters, social influencers and opinion leaders) and fashion followers possess deviating significance towards the NFU in purchasing fashion products. Yet, a study by Workman and Johnson (1993) shows similar impact of fashion innovativeness on fashion generated excitements between both fashion leaders and followers, even when fashion leaders hold greater aspirations for a wider range of apparel. Stanforth (1995) then proposed an opposing view by recognizing dissimilar magnitude in both fashion-generated excitements and apparel adoption for self-expression between both fashion innovators, adopters and laggards. With this, subgroups are deviated upon the aspect of hedonism, with innovators expressing a greater tendency towards shopping-for-pleasure (Astuti, 2016). Fashion leaders are often self-proclaimed to uphold the traits of complacent, amiable, updated, explicit, vibrant and egotistic, in differentiating them from the fashion followers (Goldsmith *et al.*, 1999). Based on the above discussion, the relationships as proven within the current study would represent the general market, whilst suggested limited revelation on the personal level.

Despite multiple research have independently examined both psychological and marketing factors (Kim *et al.*, 2018; Kaur and Anand, 2018), the current study hereby offers a comprehensive outlook of both variables in a combined framework. In fact, the impact of both the psychological and marketing factors had been assessed within numerous studies that partially identified with the current framework, which include consumers' fashion involvement on the perceived trustworthiness of fashion advertisement (Kim and Lee., 2008), and the congruency of fashion advertising on individual status and self-concept (Ono *et al.*, 2020). The findings hereby offer insights on the importance of both psychological (consumer-oriented) and practical (organization-generated) domains as an integrated antecedent towards developing marketplace interest. Specifically, SMM (β = 0.299, p > 0.01) and fashion advertising (β = 0.452, p > 0.01) are the greatest influencers of clothing interest among Generation Y consumers. Marketing factors are, therefore, validated to overshadow psychological factors in affecting millennials' perceptions and consumption interest within the clothing industry.

5.2 Relevance of clothing interest

Obtained findings further demonstrate significance in the direct and indirect influence of clothing interest among Generation Y consumers. On one hand, clothing interest prevailed as the direct antecedent to purchase intention of fashion products. This finding resonated the studies by Patrick *et al.* (2016), Rac *et al.* (2019) concerning the significance of preference formation and product-related assessments (i.e. product characteristics, offered value and exchanged gain) upon apparel consumption. Patrick *et al.* (2016) then offers a grounded reflection on the essential role of preference based on country of origin, culture and individual traits as key consideration in managing market expectation of apparel products. In understanding the correlation between appraisal of available market information and consumers' future fashion consumption, the study by Silva *et al.* (2019) has

further validated the importance of clothing interest in generating purchase intention within the fashion industry. Unlike Pool *et al.* (2017) who examine both interest and purchase intention as separate dependent variables, this study hereby reinvestigated both factors under a causal relationship.

On the other hand, clothing interest is shown to bridge the indirect causal relationships of the investigated psychological and marketing factors on both product attitude and self-confidence. This finding is supported by Min *et al.* (2017) who proposed notable impact of fashion-oriented preference on consumers' evaluation of fashion brands and products, which eventually entails the development of positive perceptions. Besides, the study by Lee and Hwang (2019) has also offered consistent results on a direct association between one's self-consciousness and self-determination. However, attention is brought to the relevance of consumers' apparel-related knowledge and sense of control towards generating a positive self-assurance. Herewith, obtained results have merely demonstrated partial support to the study by Singh (2016), with noting buyers' value- and quality-based apparel purchases that emphasize product characteristics (quality, design and style) and identification, whilst contradicting the insignificant impact of marketing efforts on fashion preference.

5.3 Mediating roles of product attitude and self-confidence

The mediating effect of both product attitude and self-confidence is further confirmed between clothing interest and purchase intentions among Generation Y consumers. As such, attitude has been similarly demonstrated in multiple studies as the intermediate variable that develops the indirect relationship towards consumption intention (von Sikorski and Müller, 2018; Vidyanata *et al.*, 2018). According to O'Cass and Choy (2008), attitude and perception on brand prestige possess compelling repercussion in converting fashion involvement to consumers' purchase intention under premium pricing. Similarly, Rahpeima *et al.* (2014) have also proposed product attitude as the direct consequent of self-fulfilment, personal virtue and confirmative consumption, which leads to purchase intention, whereas advertisement and brand attitude have been evidenced in mediating the relationship between value and purchase intention (Lee *et al.*, 2016). Previous findings have partially reflected the current results in view of academic deficiency that investigates product attitude in translating preference to consumption intention. This relationship is, therefore, emphasized within the current study.

The mediating role of self-confidence has further provided fundamental support to the study by Al-Zu'bi (2015). Unlike the framework by Kang and Johnson (2013) where self-confidence was studied as an independent variable that indirectly influences apparel consumption through positive trustworthiness, self-confidence is hereby identified in the role of an intermediate factor. The finding contradicts Park and Choo (2012) who demonstrated self-confidence as a direct predictor to attitude and an indirect predictor to purchase intention. Nonetheless, the current finding is in-line to the results of Amatulli and Guido (2011) in acknowledging self-confidence and individual fulfilment as the dimensions that entail the luxurious consumption. The willingness in patronizing a fashion brand is largely related to one's apparel motivation, perceptions on nominal and cognitive standards, perceived functionality, and perceived monetary pertinence (Li *et al.*, 2012). Justification is, thus, drawn to the proposition that fashion products are a form of status symbol and self-identification (Mainolfi, 2019). Consumers' preference would enhance product-related perception and compatibility, further motivate consumers towards actual fashion acquisition. Relatively, the mediating effect of both attitude and self-confidence has provided speculative outlook on consumers' fashion consumptions from both elements of emotional (perception on oneself) and utilitarian (perception on products).

5.4 Moderating role of nationality

Positive moderating effect of nationality has been determined on the relationships between SMM and clothing interest and self-confidence and purchase intention of apparel products. This has fundamentally supported the studies by Lu *et al*. (2018) and Youn *et al*. (2019). Reinforcing the findings by Iran *et al*. (2019), national citizenship is shown to regulate the intention for collaborative fashion consumption because of the differences in cultural belief and controllability. The exposition can then be explained under the circumstance of ethnocentrism, where consumption patterns are based off the largest ethnic group within a country (Lin and Sun, 2018; Yang *et al*., 2018). In both cases, Thais consumers have demonstrated greater susceptibility over Malaysians, specifically on the influence of SMM and self-confidence on their purchase intention. Recognizing the strategic differences between residents of both countries, locational closeness between neighbouring countries does not necessarily imply acculturations in consumption patterns (Dong *et al*., 2018; Han, 2017). The disparity goes beyond natural heritage to highlight the influence of cultural treatments and presentations, ideal concerning fashion standard and cohort-specified differences (Morris, 2017). Therefore, lifestyle, cultural background and environmental upbringings are essential determinants towards the effectiveness of SMM in generating fashion preference and self-fulfilment on purchase intention of apparel products.

However, nationality has presented indifferent impact on the other hypothesized relationships. This suggested the absent of cultural and lifestyle influence on the relationships between the investigated psychological factors and fashion advertisement on fashion interest, as well as the subsequent development of attitude towards purchase intention among Generation Y consumers in both countries. Mirroring the findings by Pongratz and Diehl (2017), consumption preference is shown to overshadow international citizenship in affecting consumption decision. Roy *et al*. (2018) further acknowledged the demand for social conformity, where consumers' perception towards both domestic and international acclimatization have been the factors that drive consumption patterns. In this regard, consumers' pursuits for domestic (i.e. fulfil local needs) and international (i.e. fulfil global needs) acclimatization would influence the significance of nationality as an active moderator. Acculturation that transcends mere cultural spill-over between different countries have, nonetheless, been illustrated.

6. Theoretical implication

Reflected on the obtained results, the current clothing landscape bears illustration to the theoretical foundation of the S-O-R paradigm. Having Generation Y as the primary subject, the stimulus as investigated within this study (i.e. self-concept, fashion innovativeness, fashion consciousness, NFU, fashion advertisement and SMM) have demonstrated noticeable influence towards consumers' perception, specifically in the form of clothing interest. Such establishment would subsequently affect their response in consumption intention. Notably, the proven model has reflected the frameworks by Arora *et al*. (2020) and Kühn and Petzer (2018) in identifying consumers' perception (i.e. clothing interest) in the "Organism" role. However, previous literature fails to account for the extensiveness of such concept. The current study has explored the multi-levelled relationships of cognitive development prior actual behavioural responses. While clothing interest is stimulated by the independent variables, it then acted as the stimuli that develops product attitude and self-confidence. Considering product attitude and self-confidence are both significant mediators, the concept of S-O-R is shown to shift in between the factors accounted within a consumer's decision-making process (e.g. SMM stimulates clothing interest, and clothing interest stimulates self-confidence). While multiple studies have supported single dimensional factors as direct stimulus that influence formed perception and purchase intention (Zhu *et al*., 2020), the representation is deemed overly simplified. As exemplified

through the moderating effect of nationality, cognitive apprehension among consumers would uniquely differentiate the path towards their consumption decision.

S-O-R paradigm has often placed emphasis on the impact of external stimulus in yielding potential response (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). However, psychological factors have been confirmed through the proven framework as potential stimulus that induce subsequent cognition among the consumers. With the studies by Bharathi and Sudha (2017), Cachero-Martínez and Vázquez-Casielles (2017), Luo *et al.* (2016) suggesting external factors as significant antecedents, internal factors have, nonetheless, been proposed towards affecting market consumption. Following two school of thoughts are prevalent in this regard:

■ the consumers' personalized cognitive process that guides their perceptions and purchasing decision, which supported the relevance and reliability of this research; and

■ the absent of traced reviews and outlook towards external stimulus that precede the investigated psychological factors.

As aspired from the first school of thought, the S-O-R model as proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) has overlooked individuals' initial cognitive well-being towards their behavioural response. On the other hand, the existence of other unexplored factors (e.g. information availability and personal experience) which stimulate such cognition should not be neglected. While the current study challenged applicability of the S-O-R paradigm in explaining the consumers' decision-making process, it falls short in exploring other potential variables that anticipate psychological factors and succeed purchase intention. The results, thus, offered a fundamental groundwork for extended studies on the adopted theory and the established interrelationships.

7. Practical implication

Obtained results have uncovered the importance of continuous innovation and targeted marketing strategies towards sustaining market interest. Key consideration is hereby placed on the comparison between consumers' definition of fashion and apparel products as offered within the marketplace. Sorensen and Jorgensen (2019) have, thus, distinguished millennials into four main categories, which include "trying the trend shoppers" who pursue the latest vogues for short-term identification, "quality seekers" who seek value-for-money, "environmental enthusiasts" who maximize apparel lifespan to minimize waste and "ethical believers" who look for ethical productions and wearers' well-being. In view of the cohort's widely diverged preferences, the need for segmentations is, therefore, highlighted among Generation Y consumers. Tee *et al.* (2013) have identified Generation Y as the cohort that holds profound acceptance to diverse cultures, whereas Harris *et al.* (2011) have classified this generation as the cohort that was born into a network-advanced technological society. As such, cultural upbringing and lifestyle would prevail as the considered factors by fashion organizations in confirming market segments. Additionally, brand, design, price and social identification are shown to directly predict purchase intention (Valaei and Nikhashemi, 2017). In the midst of product differentiation, current findings further established the need to understand market preferences by identifying apparel attributes that match the latest market trend towards generating greater consumers' interest and acceptance.

Moreover, background differences between Malaysian and Thais millennials have demonstrated prevalent impact on the effectiveness of organizational and personal factors in developing product-related perception and behavioural intention. Despite the norms of globalization and acculturation, dissimilar consumption patterns between consumers of different nationality should not be overlooked (Schade *et al.*, 2016; Rahulan *et al.*, 2015). However, the adoption of a globalized strategy on both the Asia-Pacific region and its Western counterparts remains circumstantially feasible within both regions (e.g. Nike's Dri-Fit clothing lines for sport

enthusiasts, Ralph Lauren's assortment of Polo shirts and Victoria's Angels' runway performances). Such, nonetheless, does not overshadow the need for localization in meeting specific segments within a country (e.g. Pestle & Mortar as a Malaysian bazaar retailer for street wears, and PAINKILLER Atelier that turned Thailand-made fabrics into trending moderns). As acknowledged by Han (2017) and Zhang *et al.* (2013), consumers from neighbouring countries tend to possess apparent differences in their behaviour as affected by the cultural upbringing of each location. In this regard, fashion companies would maximize their market outreach through adopting the "glocalization" approach through developing country-specified advertisements and social media presences, as well as apparel design that embraces particular culture and preference in delivering the brand's core message and value.

All-in-all, this study has revealed definitive insights on the direct and indirect antecedents to consumption intention of apparel products. Specifically, millennials have been classified into voguish chasers (consumers who pursue the latest fashion trend), social conformists (consumers who follow the society's trend) and discrete innovators (consumers who have their own outlook on apparel). Put simply, Generation Y consumers are seeking the in-trend fashions that gain acceptance from their acquaintances, while able to reflect their own unique personality (e.g. dissimilar personalities as showcased through Skechers's collaboration with One Piece and Converse's collaboration with Hello Kitty). With this in mind, marketing efforts by fashion companies are required to be highly precise in targeting the segments within the generation. These include segment-specified promotional strategy based on both age group and upbringing, and product line that sufficiently realize consumers' desire for differentiation and self-expression. Notably, social media is determined as an essential supporting tool that enable both buzz marketing and virtual branding on the international scale, which raised the industry's market competitiveness.

8. Limitation and future direction

While obtained findings revealed numerous insights on the investigated relationships, several limitations have been determined. First, this study has exclusively examined the indirect influence of psychological and marketing variables on the behavioural intentions of millennials. The framework may have overlooked the potential existence of other predictors such as social pressure, financial ability and various unforeseen occurrences that possess greater influence towards the currently investigated consequent. Further exploration within the similar context would potentially enhance the reliability of used measurements, which contributes an invaluable groundwork that guides the operational undertakings among apparel marketers.

Second, the sample size for this research is proven to be an undisputed restrain. While locational factor has been accounted through the employment of quota sampling, shortcoming is reviewed in form of numerical representation, where 388 responses in representing the generational cohort of two countries would be insufficient in confirming the accuracy and validity of the obtained results. The data collection process which was undertaken within a single city of the respective country had also placed little concern on the background differences among millennials of other locations. Seeing that geographical segmentation is a recognized marketing strategy, variance in perceptions, preferences and financial ability is observable across different locations within a country. Proposition is hereby presented on a larger and more geographically diversified research sample to comprehensively gauge the perceptions and behavioural patterns across consumers from different upbringings.

Finally, this study's bottom-line interest in understanding the moderating tendency of nationality on fashion consumptions solely between Malaysia and Thailand is not generalizable to majority of countries within the Asia Pacific region or the world at large. Although practical revelations have particularly benefited apparel marketers who are operating in the respective communities, applicability of the results is doubtful for other unaccounted marketplaces because of the disparities in cultural and societal elements between different countries. With nationality being determined as a moderator that regulates consumers' interest and purchase

intentions, its significance would potentially extent to other cultures and societal standards. Similar investigation on different nationalities can, therefore, yield results of greater specifications, whilst generating more geographical and cultural targeted insights on the consumption patterns of apparel products among Generation Y consumers.

9. Conclusion

While the examined variables, in its totality, have demonstrated significance towards influencing the clothing interest among Generation Y consumers, scepticism persisted on balancing the impact of both psychological and marketing factors on consumers' decision-making process. Marketing factors are proven to be imperative within the apparel industry in reciprocating mass identification, attitude formation and consumption motivation through the conveyance of positive message. However, consumers' purchasing outlooks are mainly weighed on individualistic conceptions (i.e. perceived suitability of particular clothing) over external stimulus (i.e. advertised and promoted messages of a particular fashion or apparel piece). In this case, marketing efforts are secondary to psychological judgments in a consumer's decision-making process. The need for apprehending customer-originated information is, therefore, essential to apparel marketers in developing product lines and marketing strategies that meet the requirements of their targeted markets.

Further attention is placed on the moderating effect of nationality on interest formation and behavioural intentions between millennials of neighbouring countries. Practicality wise, nationality is proven to moderate the impact of SMM and self-confidence on millennials' clothing interest and purchase intention. Obtained results hereby supported the use of generation cohort towards effective market segmentation by revealing upbringings and cultural encounters as a direct antecedent to consumption patterns. As such, individuals who share a single generation cohort would hold dissimilar consumption intentions in accordance to their prior experiences and life events in different geographical settings. Seeing that the current study is defined within the geographical context of Malaysia and Thailand, the importance of geographical and cultural (e.g. societal norms and country-specific events) segmentations has been reinforced. This offers far-reaching guidance concerning sustainable organizational operations across the portfolio containing multiple international marketplaces. Theoretical wise, the S-O-R model could potentially hold a wider outlook beyond simplicity of the investigated framework. While the theory explained both psychological and marketing factors as predictive stimulus that affect consumers' perception between different nationality, psychological factors can be potentially defined by other external stimulus prior affecting subsequent cognitive and behavioural responses (e.g. a country's information accessibility as the stimulus in affecting fashion consciousness). Above the ground of S-O-R, the current research framework, thus, introduced a contemporary direction towards expanded research within the similar area through retracing other stimulus or identifying other possible responses.

Understandably, the current findings hold limited applicability to represent the apparel industry in entirety. However, its relevance is showcased through the proven framework that holds extensive possibility for future research on the other prospective marketplaces, as well as the invaluable marketplace-specific insights that provide founding assistance on strategic pursuits among apparel marketers (i.e. image formation through social media and conventional marketing approaches).

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Appendix

Table A1	Measurement item of the variables in the study
Variables	Items
Fashion innovativeness	1. In general, I am among the first in my circle of friends to know the names of the latest fashions 2. In general, I am among the first in my circle of friends to buy a new fashion item when it appears in the market 3. As compared to my friends, I own many new fashion items 4. I know the names of new fashion designers before other people do 5. If I heard that a new fashion item is available in-store, I would be interested enough to buy it 6. I will buy a new fashion item even if I have not seen it before
Self-concept	1. I feel contented with my life The conditions of my life are superb 2. I am satisfied with my physical outlook 3. My actual self is close to my ideal self 4. I am satisfied with myself as an individual
Fashion consciousness	1. I usually have one or more outfits of the newest style 2. I keep my wardrobe up-to-date with the changing fashions 3. Fashionable and attractive styling is very important to me 4. To obtain fashion variations, I shop in different stores and choose different brands 5. It's fun to buy something new and exciting
NFU	1. Clothes I buy generate a rare personal image 2. I develop my personal uniqueness by purchasing special clothing 3. I purchase uncommon clothing to create a more unique individual image 4. I stop wearing fashion items when they have become widespread among the public 5. I avoid clothing that are bought by the average
SMM	1. Using the [fashion brand's] social media site(s) is really trendy 2. Anything trendy is available on the [fashion brand's] social media site(s) 3. Contents visible on the [fashion brand's] social media site(s) are the latest trend 4. The [fashion brand's] social media site(s) allows me to share and update existing contents 5. The [fashion brand's] social media site(s) interacts regularly with its followers and fans 6. The [fashion brand's] social media site(s) facilitates two-way interactions with family and friends 7. The [fashion brand's] social media site(s) offers accurate information on products 8. The [fashion brand's] social media site(s) offers useful information 9. The information provided by the [fashion brand's] social media site(s) is comprehensive 10. The [fashion brand's] social media site(s) makes purchase recommendations as per my requirements 11. I feel my needs are met by using [the fashion brand's] social media site(s) 12. The [fashion brand's] social media site(s) facilitates personalised information search 13. I would recommend my friends to visit the [fashion brand's] social media site(s) 14. I would encourage my friends and acquaintances to use the [fashion brand's] social media site(s) 15. I would like to share my purchase experiences with my friends and acquaintances on the [fashion brand's] social media site(s)
Fashion advertisement	1. I pay attention to the fashion advertisement 2. The fashion advertisement is important to me 3. The fashion advertisement provides me with useful information about clothing products 4. My preference towards clothing is influenced by fashion advertisement 5. The fashion advertisement has an influence on my purchase intention for clothing 6. I am easily attracted to the fashion advertisement *
Clothing interest	1. I like clothing so much that I spend more money than I should 2. Selecting my wardrobe is one of my favorite activities 3. I would rather spend my money on clothing than on anything else
Product attitude	The clothing that I am interested in are usually: 1. not stylish–stylish 2. unattractive–attractive 3. unpleasant–pleasant 4. bad–good 5. unlikable–likable 6. unflattering–flattering*

Table A1	
Variables	*Items*
Self-confidence	1. I am very confident in my ability to buy clothing
	2. I have the ability in choosing the right clothing for myself
	3. I have a high self-confidence in selecting clothing
	4. I am very good at choosing the right clothing for every occasion*
	5. I think I dress very well
Purchase intention	1. I intend to frequently purchase clothing of my preference frequently
	2. I plan to buy clothing of my preference regularly
	3. The probability that I will buy clothing of my preference is high
Note: *Represent items that have been dropped through CFA	

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