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INFLUENCES ON MALAYSIAN BUSINESS STUDENTS' RETAILING CAREER PREFERENCES

This study reveals the factors influencing college students' preferences regarding retailing career. A self-administered questionnaire was used in this cross-sectional study to collect data from final year business students (n = 172) at two public universities in Malaysia. The results indicate that students' likelihood of pursuit of various retail career paths may be driven primarily by career information sources and work choice reasons. Implications for educators and retail recruiters are discussed.

Keywords: college students; career choice; retailing.

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ЧИННИКИ ВПЛИВУ НА ВИБІР КАР'ЄРИ В РІТЕЙЛІ МАЛАЙЗІЙСЬКИМИ СТУДЕНТАМИ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТІ «БІЗНЕС»

У статті виявлено чинники впливу на вибір місця для початку власної кар'єри студентами бізнес-коледжів Малайзії. Проведено анкетування 172 студентів останнього року навчання в університеті на спеціальності «бізнес» двох державних університетів Малайзії. Результати аналізу даних анкетування показали, що всі причини вибору кар'єри в ритейлі можна поділити на дві великі групи – поінформованість про такий варіант початку кар'єри та причини, що мають безпосереднє відношення до переваг такої роботи. За результатами аналізу розроблено рекомендації як для співробітників університетів, так і для рекрутерів, що працюють на сектор ритейлу.

Ключові слова: студенти коледжу; кар'єрний вибір; ритейл.

Табл. 3. Літ. 18.

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ФАКТОРЫ ВЛИЯНИЯ НА ВЫБОР КАРЬЕРЫ В РИТЕЙЛЕ МАЛАЙЗИЙСКИМИ СТУДЕНТАМИ СПЕЦИАЛЬНОСТИ «БИЗНЕС»

В статье выявлены факторы влияния на выбор места для начала карьерного роста студентами бизнес-колледжей Малайзии. Проведено анкетирование 172 студентов последнего года обучения в университете на специальности «бизнес» в двух государственных университетах Малайзии. Результаты анализа данных анкетирования показали, что все причины выбора карьеры в ритейле можно разделить на две большие группы – информированность о таком варианте начале карьеры и причины, касающиеся непосредственно преимуществ работы. По результатам анализа разработаны рекомендации как для сотрудников университетов, так и для рекрутеров, работающих на сектор ритейла.

Ключевые слова: студенты колледжа; карьерный выбор; ритейл.

Introduction. Malaysia's retail landscape has undergone much change over the past two decades as a result of its economic growth and social change. Globalization, technological advancements, the emergence of new retail formats and fierce competition are just a few of the advances in the industry. To manage in this climate, retailers need to attract and recruit the most talented employees who can demonstrate high level of competency and hence, give themselves a competitive advantage over their rivals (Leng, 2013). Many sources of prospective employees exist, including internal sources (company's own employees) and external sources (competitors, suppliers, customers, ads, employment agencies etc.). While all these sources are rele-

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vant, colleges have been identified as the prime sources of prospective employees that can fill the available posts in retail. College campuses are a logical place for recruiting for retail positions because these institutions produce individuals who are intelligent, motivated, have a capacity for learning, and because such individuals are seeking employment immediately upon graduation (Mokhlis, 2014c). Unfortunately, retailing is not generally viewed by many college students as an attractive career option and a retail job is often seen as an occupation of last resort (Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard, Langrehr and Smith, 1991; Akehurst and Alexander, 1995; Broadbridge, Maxwell and Oden, 2009). There also exists a "pecking order" by college students themselves of preferred retail companies and sectors to work for (Goldsberry, Gehrt, Sun and Shim, 1999; Broadbridge, 2003a). Consequently, attracting college students to careers in retailing is often difficult (Broadbridge, 2003a; Rahim, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to determine apparent influences on students' anticipation of pursuing specific retail career paths. Understanding how these future managers come to choose retailing as a career is of critical importance to the profession and may be used to inform future recruitment and retention strategies. Such an understanding is also beneficial for marketing educators as they prepare students for retailing careers and help them formulate their career expectation (Knight, Crutsinger and Kim, 2006).

Career perceptions and influences. In a recent study on student perceptions of retail employment in Malaysia, Mokhlis (2014a) found that many marketing students were somewhat polarized in their opinions about a career in retailing. About 13.7% regard retailing as a very appealing career opportunity, while further 32.5% consider it somewhat appealing. In contrast, another 2.6% view it as a very unappealing career option with further 18.5% considering it an unappealing opportunity. About 32.8% of students remained ambivalent to the appeal of retailing as a future career option. Of the opinions students generally held about a career in retailing, some regarded it as challenging, interesting and having a good salary, while others considered it to be routine, boring, mundane, having poor working hours, poor salary, lacking prestige and poor advancement opportunities (Mokhlis, 2014a). These negative results mirrored those by Swinyard (1981), Swinyard et al. (1991) and Broadbridge (2003a) who found that the appeal of retailing was influenced more by associated characteristics of the job than by functional aspects of jobs. The most frequently cited attributes associated with a career in retailing (consumer oriented, people oriented, poor salary, limited advancement, poor working hours) found by Mokhlis (2014a) did not compare favorably to those associated with their preferred career (interesting, opportunities for advancement, challenging, rewarding, satisfying).

Past career-related studies have identified various sources of influence affecting students' career decision. Parental influence, depending upon social status, establishes context in which certain occupational choices are encouraged and others discouraged (Kohn, 1977). A study by Hoffman, Hofacker, and Goldsmith (1992) on parental influence on business college students' career choices showed that the type of parental occupation has influence on the type of a career a child chooses later in life. Shim et al. (1999) indicated that students who had parents or other family members in retailing were more likely to perceive pay and benefits of retailing career as substandard, while viewing the lifestyle flexibility favorably. Anderson, Stanley and

Parker (1992) found that students with retail manager parents were more likely to pursue a career in sales.

Research also indicates that students who had completed a retail course were significantly more likely to be favorable in their descriptions of retailing as a career (Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard et al., 1991; Broadbridge, 2003b; Mokhlis, 2014a). These students saw retailing as a more dynamic and challenging industry with opportunities for career advancement. Studies also indicated that students who had taken retail course were significantly more likely to rate the appeal of retailing as a career favorably than those who had not (Swinyard et al., 1991; Broadbridge, 2003b; Mokhlis, 2014a). In fact, Mokhlis (2014c) found that students who had taken a retailing course were more likely to pursue a career in this sector after graduation.

Shim et al. (1999) found a positive influence of retail work experience on the intrinsic aspects of a retail career. Knight et al. (2006) found a significant relationship between work experience and retail career intention. The study by Broadbridge (2003a) indicated that personal work experience was rated as the most important factor in assisting students' career choices. Her study showed that work experience was instrumental in determining retail career decisions of students enrolled in business and marketing courses. Positive work experience had, at least for some students, increased their awareness of career opportunities in the industry.

One small sample size study inquired into the "work choice reason descriptive" of students enrolled in retailing classes at two universities (Anderson et al., 1992). The study found that students identified academic sources as the major influence on career decisions, followed by personal and professional sources. Advancement was the primary reason for choosing a career, followed by interesting work, work environment, benefits, security and challenge.

Methodology. Questionnaire items were developed from a detailed review of variables and factors used in the previous studies. In total, 15 statements were developed to measure students' perceived importance of career information sources (Anderson et al., 1992; Broadbridge, 2003a; Mokhlis, 2014c). The statements were measured with reference to the seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = not important at all; 7 = extremely important). Work choice reasons (decision criteria in choosing any type of job) were measured by a series of 19 items by the seven-point scale too (1 = not important at all, 7 = extremely important). These items were adopted from Anderson et al. (1992), Shim et al. (1999) and Knight et al. (2006). Perceived prestige of a retailing career (Anderson et al. 1992) was measured on the 7-point scale (1 = no prestige at all, 7 = extremely prestigious). The likelihood of pursuit of 7 retail career paths were evaluated on the seven-point scale where 1 = extremely unlikely, and 7 = extremely likely (Anderson et al. 1992).

In this cross-sectional study, data were collected from senior (final year) students enrolled in business degree programs at two public universities in Malaysia. The sample was restricted to seniors to identify more accurately and evaluate the factors influencing the likelihood of retailing career pursuit. In addition, the previous research looked at business students in general (Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard et al., 1991; Broadbridge, 2003a, 2003b; Mokhlis, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), yet recruiters are predominately interested in seniors. Therefore, it is important to limit this sample to senior business students.

300 questionnaires were distributed during regularly scheduled classes in 2 public universities in May 2014. Students were informed in writing that completing the questionnaire was anonymous, voluntary, and that there were no penalties for not participating. Of the 300 questionnaires distributed to collaborating faculty, there were 172 useable surveys returned from both universities together. Of these, 116 (67.4%) were from University A, and 56 (32.6%) from University B. The sample was primarily female (78.5%) and Malay ethnically (79.1%). Students ranged from 22–28 years, with the average age of 23 (standard deviation +0.94). 73.3% of the respondents were Marketing specialization, with the remaining 26.7% of respondents specializing in Finance or Operation Management.

Results. Adopting the approach taken by Anderson et al. (1992), the principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation and eigenvalues of one or greater was conducted on the 15 items of career information sources. The items with factor loadings of .50 or more on only one factor were retained. Based on these criteria, a four-factor solution for career information scale was identified (Table 1). The resulting factors were labeled Personal, Impersonal, Academic, and Experience. The total variance explained was 63.58% and the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .54 to .77.

Table 1. Factor analysis of career information sources, authors’

| Scale items | Factor loading | | | |
|----------------------------------------|----------------|------------|----------|------------|
| | Personal | Impersonal | Academic | Experience |
| Siblings | .813 | | | |
| Friends/relatives working in the field | .804 | | | |
| Friends | .755 | | | |
| Parents | .578 | | | |
| Company’s brochure | | .723 | | |
| Company’s website | | .677 | | |
| Exposures to firms on campus | | .620 | | |
| Degree-related/curriculum materials | | | .758 | |
| Career advisor | | | .688 | |
| Academic advisor | | | .668 | |
| Personal work experience | | | | .751 |
| Internship experience | | | | .700 |
| Explained variance (%) | 20.62 | 15.6 | 15.16 | 12.2 |
| Cronbach’s Alpha | .77 | .63 | .64 | .54 |

The principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation and eigenvalues of one or greater was conducted on the 19 aspects of work choice reasons scale. Items with factor loadings of .50 or more on only one factor were retained. Based on these criteria, the four-factor solution was deemed most appropriate (Table 2). The resulting 4 factors were labeled Intrinsic Enjoyment, Opportunity, Lifestyle Flexibility, and Extrinsic Compensation. These dimensions accounted for 59% of the variance. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .53 to .72.

7 stepwise regressions were performed using the likelihood of choosing a specific retailing career path as the criterion (dependent) variable. The predictor (independent) variables were the 4 subscales of Career Information Sources, the 4 subscales of Work Choice Reasons, Major, Retail Course, Retail Work Experience, Prestige,

Gender, Ethnicity, and Academic Performance. The magnitude of each variable was examined by its beta weight whereas the strength of the regression model was assessed by the percentage of explained variance attributed to the predictor variables (R^2).

Table 2. Factor analysis of work choice reasons, authors'

| Scale items | Factor loading | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| | Intrinsic Enjoyment | Opportunity | Lifestyle Flexibility | Extrinsic Compensation |
| Variety of job responsibility | .739 | | | |
| Opportunities to contribute to company success | .735 | | | |
| High prestige of career field | .619 | | | |
| Intellectual stimulation and challenge | .599 | | | |
| Fit of job to personality | | .769 | | |
| Opportunities to learn new things | | .757 | | |
| Opportunities to make a contribution to society | | .537 | | |
| Preferred geographic location | | | .761 | |
| Flexible working hours | | | .580 | |
| Sufficient time to engage in leisure activities | | | .545 | |
| Receiving good benefits | | | | .747 |
| Job security/stability | | | | .745 |
| Receiving good pay | | | | .613 |
| Explained variance (%) | 16.01 | 15.53 | 14.34 | 13.08 |
| Cronbach's Alpha | .66 | .72 | .53 | .61 |

The 7 regression equation models significantly explained the likelihood of pursuing careers in merchandising ($F = 14.342$, $p < .001$), store management ($F = 9.496$, $p < .001$), retail promotion ($F = 11.18$, $p < .001$), data processing ($F = 10.152$, $p < .001$), store operations ($F = 8.424$, $p < .001$), accounting ($F = 8.043$, $p < .001$) and personnel management ($F = 10.719$, $p < .001$). R^2 ranged from .096 to .278 (Table 3). Impersonal information was a significant predictor of pursuit of specific retail career paths in merchandising and personnel management. Personal information was significant in predicting the likelihood in pursuing careers in accounting and personnel management, whilst academic and experience were included in the predictive models for store operations and retail promotion, respectively. With respect to the influence of Work Choice Reasons, Intrinsic Enjoyment and Lifestyle Flexibility were significant in predicting pursuit of a career in store management. Students' likelihood of pursuing a career in data processing was significantly predicted by Intrinsic Enjoyment. Perceived Prestige of a retail career was included in the predictive models for merchandising, retail promotion and store operations. Demographic variables were only moderately related to retailing careers. Malay students had a higher likelihood than non-Malay students towards pursuing careers in store management, retail promotion, data processing and accounting. Students majoring in Marketing tended to pursue careers in store management and retail promotion. More academically able students were more likely to pursue a career in retail promotion than those with lower grades.

Table 3. Stepwise regression results: Likelihood of retailing career pursuit, authors'

| Dependent Variable | Beta Coefficient | Independent Variable | F | p (F) | R ² | Adj. R ² |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|----------------|---------------------|
| Merchandising | .300 | Impersonal Prestige | 14.342 | <.001 | .161 | .149 |
| | .231 | | | | | |
| Store Management | .300 | Ethnicity Intrinsic Enjoyment Major Lifestyle Flexibility | 9.496 | <.001 | .202 | .181 |
| | .185 | | | | | |
| | .248 .191 | | | | | |
| Retail Promotion | .285 | Experience Major Ethnicity Prestige Academic Performance | 11.18 | <.001 | .278 | .253 |
| | .365 | | | | | |
| | .278 | | | | | |
| | .205 | | | | | |
| | .178 | | | | | |
| Data Processing | .237 | Intrinsic Enjoyment Ethnicity | 10.152 | <.001 | .122 | .110 |
| | .210 | | | | | |
| Store Operations | .243 | Academic Prestige | 8.424 | <.001 | .10 | .088 |
| | .199 | | | | | |
| Accounting | .202 | Ethnicity Personal | 8.043 | <.001 | .096 | .084 |
| | .179 | | | | | |
| Personnel Management | .250 | Impersonal Personal | 10.719 | <.001 | .124 | .112 |
| | .170 | | | | | |

Coding as follows:

Ethnicity: 0 = Other (Non-Malay), 1 = Malay.

Major: 0 = Other, 1 = Marketing.

Academic performance: 0 = CGPA below 2.99, 1 = CGPA 3.00 and above.

Conclusion. College students' desire and intention to pursue a career in retailing continue to lag behind the industry demand for retail professionals (Swinyard et al., 1991; Broadbridge, 2003a; Mokhlis, 2014a). Although retailing can offer a rewarding and fulfilling career, many students – potential graduate entrants to the industry – have a negative impression of retailing. This exploratory study was interested in learning about the influences on students' intent to pursue careers in retailing. Regression analysis results suggest that students' likelihood of pursuit of various retail career paths may be driven primarily by career information sources and work choice reasons. This finding supports the findings of previous studies regarding the role of information sources and career expectation on retail career intention (Anderson et al., 1992; Shim et al., 1999; Knight et al. 2006; Mokhlis, 2014c). On the basis of these findings, the following strategies are suggested to educators and retail recruiters:

1. Educators and retailers should work together to enhance the desirability of a retailing career by providing career information through personal interaction, emphasizing the merits (advantages) of such a profession, including intrinsic rewards and lifestyle flexibility.

2. An advisory board should be formed to create meaningful interchange between retail professionals and the faculty. This will help creating reciprocal programs between the two entities. It will also encourage communication between faculty and industry.

3. Students should be encouraged and assisted in obtaining internships as a means of gaining hands-on experiences that can lead to later employment in retail upon graduation.

4. Experiential types of learning should be planned in collaboration with the industry to provide an opportunity for students to better understand the nature of a retailing career.

5. Students should be provided with appropriate field trips and professional guest speakers. Such experiences will ensure another important dimension in keeping courses current and realistic.

Certain limitations in the design of this study should be recognized in order to guide future exploration of this topic. For instance, a limitation of the study was identified by the low R-square value of the regression model. This result however was similar to past research on retail career preference and choice (Anderson et al., 1992; Goldsberry et al., 1999). The low R-square values suggest the need to identify additional predictor variables. It is possible that respondents would have identified additional and important influences if they had been given the opportunity to do so. The incorporation of open-ended responses would allow future research participants to add sources and types of perceived influence not considered a priori. The second limitation was the demographic profile. Being primarily female and Malay the sample from the two universities is not representative of the general student population in the country. Further research should consist of obtaining a more representative sample.

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