

THE FACTORS INFLUENCING YOUNG ADULTS' PREFERENCE FOR ONLINE OVER PHYSICAL SHOPPING IN MALAYSIA: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Aervina Misron^{1*}, Sharfika Raime², Tan Dick Wei¹, Yong Khai Lik¹, Moke Yi Theng¹, Goh Sook Ying¹, Foh Zhi Xin¹

¹Faculty of Business and Management, Quest International University, Perak, Malaysia

²City Graduate School, City University Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: aervina.misron@qiu.edu.my

Abstract: In Malaysia, young adults are increasingly turning away from traditional retail methods of purchasing and toward e-commerce, which is growing at a significant rate. This research examines the main determinants of why young adults are choosing to shop online. The research looks at the perceived ease of use of e-commerce platforms, the perceived usefulness of those platforms, and prior experience shopping online to determine the main factors affecting the online shopping preference of young adults. Based on the Technology Acceptance Model, this study demonstrates how the cognitive beliefs and experiential aspects of a consumer influence the manner in which the consumer decides to purchase goods digitally in Malaysia. The results from the study demonstrate that usability, functional benefits, and the cumulative experience of shopping online greatly influence young adults in their inclination toward online shopping. As a result, this research enhances theoretical knowledge of e-commerce by utilising the Technology Acceptance Model by incorporating experiential element, while also providing significant and practical information for retailers and policymakers to improve strategies for e-retailing and to increase consumer awareness and involvement in the rapidly developing e-commerce market within Malaysia.

Keyword: Young Adults, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Past Online Shopping Experience, Shopping Preference, Technology Acceptance Model

INTRODUCTION

E-commerce has changed how consumers worldwide behave, including in Malaysia. For example, Shopee, Lazada and TikTok Shop have quickly become the main way that consumers look up product information, compare items and complete their purchases. In recent news reports for Southeast Asia, there are clear signs that more and more consumers throughout the region are turning to digital channels when making everyday purchases, due to the convenience of shopping via their smartphones and the competitive prices offered by e-commerce platforms (Zalora Group, 2024). The largest section of the transformation is seen amongst young adults, who are primarily digital natives and are able to more seamlessly incorporate online shopping into their daily lives than individuals from older generations. In Malaysia, young adults are considered to be persons who are aged between 18 and 30 years of age, as defined by the Malaysian Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, 2015), and they typically possess a high level of digital literacy, engage significantly with the internet and other digital platforms, and have demonstrated an increase in financial independence. The definition

of young adults in this way has been adopted by many researchers in Malaysia for use in studies focused on online retailing behaviours (e.g. Ithnin et al., 2022).

There have been numerous studies that indicate that perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, convenience and social influences are key factors in motivating young consumers to shop online (Rahlin et al., 2024). Conversely, some of the processes that young adults go through when developing a preference for online shopping over physical retail are not yet fully developed conceptually. Most existing studies either focus solely on individuals' intention to make purchases or on their general online shopping behaviour; there is a lack of explicit channel preference, and the majority of existing studies utilise Technology Acceptance Model constructs but do not systematically incorporate experiential factors into their analysis. Additionally, Malaysian consumers are continuing to experience issues with respect to online fraud, the veracity of product information, delivery delays and after-sales service issues (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024). Despite of these shortcomings, young adults in Malaysia are still using online channels more than any other channel, suggesting that the cognitive evaluations of e-commerce platforms and the experiences that young adults have developed using these platforms together create a strong, lasting preference for shopping online. Hence, this study aims to establish a conceptual framework that explains how young adults' perceptions of ease of use, usefulness and past experiences shape their preference for online shopping in Malaysia and to provide testable hypotheses for future empirical research.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH GAP

The fast-paced digital transformation of Malaysia's economy has changed how consumers seek information, evaluate choices, and purchase products. E-commerce platforms are now integrated into daily life through mobile applications and online marketplaces, making it easy for consumers to access products and services. Recent estimates show that up to half of Malaysians shop online, with an increasing number doing so because of the convenience of electronic payments, price comparisons, and the time it takes to shop using a digital platform (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024). Although e-commerce has grown exponentially in Malaysia due to convenience, digital payment technologies, and product comparison by consumers via the Internet, little has been researched about how this shift influences how shoppers find information, evaluate their choice of goods, and ultimately purchase products through an online market.

According to data provided by Kadence International (2025), there is also a generational gap, with younger adults having an affinity for online shopping based on their familiarity with technology. Malaysian consumers still experience barriers to online shopping that can erode their trust and satisfaction with online retailers. Some of the barriers to online shopping for Malaysian consumers include order shipping delays, inaccurate or incomplete product descriptions, privacy issues, fraud, and lack of support after purchase (Krishnan et al., 2024; Wong et al., 2023). Despite these obstacles, young adults express a strong interest and preference for shopping

online. The paradox of desiring to shop online despite the risk suggests that additional psychological and experiential factors are influencing this trend.

Even with this trend, there are gaps in our understanding of consumers' behavioural processes and preferences for shopping online versus in person. Current research identifies multiple variables influencing consumers' online shopping behaviour, including perceived convenience, price advantages, product diversity, and promotions (Nuralam et al., 2024). However, past studies tend to view consumers as logical decision-makers who base purchases primarily on functional value, and not on cognitive evaluations of the technology they use or their previous experiences with an e-commerce platform.

Historically, the majority of research conducted regarding online purchasing intentions has used the Technology Acceptance Model to investigate this area of research; however, the majority of these studies have focused on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Handoyo, 2024), while ignoring many of the experiential aspects of purchasing online. In addition, in many instances, past experiences (positive or negative) with online shopping have been treated simply as control variables, when in fact, research has shown a strong connection between consumers' prior experiences, level of satisfaction, level of perceived risk, level of trust, and long-term purchasing behaviour (Ma et al., 2022). For young adults who are developing their digital habits, and due to their increasing numbers, who are familiar with various websites and platforms, the practice of experiential learning about shopping has become a key driver of their preferences for shopping.

Also, existing research studies in Malaysia often focus on the same general set of demographics throughout their samples, with the majority of research studies included in this body of literature being focused upon the purchasing intentions of consumers as a whole rather than young adults (Wang et al., 2024). As different segments of the population (including young adults) differ, the literature has overlooked these differences as they relate specifically to the experiences of young adults, including digital literacy, lifestyle demands, and technology adoption patterns.

In addition, most studies that utilise the Technology Acceptance Model have focused mainly on measuring the intention of young adults to utilise online purchasing platforms versus purchasing from physical retail stores, rather than the way in which they weigh both shopping channels against each other for each specific purchase decision (Akbar & Manalu, 2023). In addition, while there are studies that extend the Technology Acceptance Model with additional constructs (e.g. trust, perceived risk, and lifestyle), these studies remain somewhat disconnected, and do not provide an integrated theoretical view that combines the consumers' cognitive evaluations and the consumers' experiential factors. In addressing both of these gaps, this conceptual paper will present a new model that provides an integrative perspective on the prediction of young adults' preferences for shopping using online channels versus traditional retail channels in Malaysia grounded by the Technology Acceptance Model.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the background of this study, together with the identified issues and research gaps, this study aims to address the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: What is the relationship between perceived ease of use and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping?
- RQ2: What is the relationship between perceived usefulness and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping?
- RQ3: What is the relationship between past online shopping experience and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In line with the research questions, this study formulates both general and specific research objectives (RO), as follows:

General Objective

The general objective of this study is to analyse the determinants that influence Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping over physical shopping. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how technological factors such as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, as well as behavioural aspects like past online shopping experience, shape consumer decision-making in the digital retail environment, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive Malaysian young adults to favor online platforms over traditional brick-and-mortar stores.

Specific Objectives

Based on the research questions, the research objectives state the main goals and intentions of this study, which are specified as follows:

- RO1: To determine the relationship between perceived ease of use and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping.
- RO2: To evaluate the relationship between perceived usefulness and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping.
- RO3: To examine the relationship between past online shopping experience and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Based on the research objectives and the proposed conceptual framework, the following hypothesis are formulated:

- H1: There is a positive significant relationship between perceived ease of use and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping over physical shopping.
- H2: There is a positive significant relationship between perceived usefulness and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping over physical shopping.
- H3: There is a positive significant relationship between past online shopping experience and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping over physical shopping.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study carries both theoretical and practical significance:

Theoretical Significance

The study extends the Theory of Acceptance Model, which has traditionally relied on cognitive beliefs about technology, and integrated the use of experience from a user's prior uses of the system, along with the user's experience with the physical tools as another antecedent of preference. Integrating experiential factors within the model builds on a growing body of literature that has suggested the need to integrate experiential, contextual, and functional capabilities to further enhance our understanding of factors associated with adopting digital technologies. In addition, the study further defines the causal structure of the constructs within e-commerce environments and for young adults, where past empirical studies have demonstrated that one's perception of the ease of use of a technology and the ability to access information helps determine one's perception of its functionality and creates a level of comfort in forming behavioural intentions to engage in an online shopping activity (e.g., creating behaviours and developing attitudes). Therefore, by framing the concepts of ease of use, perceived usefulness and past online shopping experience as preference for shopping in a digital environment over shopping in a physical environment, the study has taken the foundational structures of Technology Acceptance Model from simple intentions to the context of choice between the two shopping channels. Thereby, this study presents a contextually-based contribution to understanding the development and operationalisation of the constructs within Technology Acceptance Model when applied to a growing market (e.g., the expanding e-commerce market) where young consumers are driving digital consumption.

Practical Significance

In terms of practical significance, the findings from the study have implications for understanding critical areas for increasing preference for online shopping, particularly for retailers and platform owners in improving ease of use of platforms, improving clarity in communicating functional benefits (value, convenience, information richness), and increasing the level of positive experiences on an ongoing basis. These findings are consistent with recent research that supports that creating user-friendly interfaces, (user experience) and delivering high-quality, consistent service are essential to maintaining e-commerce as an alternative shopping channel for consumers in highly competitive e-commerce marketplaces. In addition, for governmental and industry organisations, the findings may point out the importance of enacting consumer protection policies and industry standards that enhance consumers' perceptions of value and decrease the potential for consumers to have negative experiences that can lead to erosion of trust. For future researchers, the study offers a comprehensive, testable framework that will be useful for additional research examining mediating (e.g., trust, satisfaction) and moderating (e.g., gender, income, product involvement) effects on empirically collected data.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is intended to explore and describe the relationship between an individual's preferences for e-commerce versus traditional retail. It is targeted at those in Malaysia between the ages of 18 and 30, who participate in online retailing, and who possess enough digital literacy to make informed decisions about which channel they prefer between the two shopping options (i.e., online versus traditional). The framework identifies the three core independent variables (perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and past online shopping experience) that are posited to affect the dependent variable (the preference for e-commerce). The framework focuses on the behaviour and attitudes of consumers; it is not intended to discuss the technical aspects of how platforms are designed, nor does it attempt to differentiate between specific e-commerce providers or business models. As a conceptual paper, no data or empirical evidence has been included and, thus, it has not included any sampling or statistical analyses or correlations. It is a theoretical development only, providing a framework and hypotheses to direct future empirical investigations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Shopping Among Malaysian Young Adults

Research indicates that online shopping is now a way of life in Malaysia and has become an entrenched consumer behaviour primarily within younger demographics, specifically Gen Y, and Gen Z online shoppers. According to Ithnin et al. (2022), young adults in Malaysia utilise e-commerce platforms for the convenience of shopping and comparison pricing, but are also using these platforms to explore product variety and to have entertainment value. According to more recent research in Malaysia, the perceived ease of using and the

perceived usefulness of e-commerce are major factors that are determining the likelihood of a young adult making a purchase online, therefore indicating that Technology Acceptance Model constructs are still a key factor in determining purchase behaviours amongst this demographic group (Yee et al., 2023). Additionally, there are many research supports the idea that the trustworthiness of e-commerce platforms, as well as the safety and satisfaction of online shopping experiences, is additional factors in determining purchase behaviours by Malaysian Gen Y and Gen Z consumers (Tan et al., 2024). A study by Salamat et al. (2024) stated that young Malaysian adults are more likely to purchase goods from an e-commerce platform rather than from a brick-and-mortar store, when they believe the platform is easy to use, useful, and have had positive online shopping experiences.

Perceived Ease of Use and Preference for Online Over Physical Shopping

Perceived ease of use as defined in Technology Acceptance Model refers to an individual's belief regarding the amount of effort required to use a specific platform (Davis, 1989). There is considerable evidence from various studies of consumers throughout Malaysia and other developing nations to support the findings of perceived ease of use having an impact on young adults' preference towards shopping online and their subsequent purchase intention. Since Davis first developed the concept of perceived ease of use, other researches have replicated the results, concluding that perceived ease of use is one of the main antecedents of technology use intentions (Hairani et al., 2025). In terms of how simple it is for users to find products, navigate menus, filter their options, manage shopping carts, complete checkout processes, and track shipments, perceived ease of use deals with the ease with which a user can use each of these functions in e-commerce (Yee et al., 2023). In addition, when the interface of websites is easy to navigate, has minimal obstacles in the process, users of online shopping have less mental strain and this increases user's satisfaction and encourages users of online shopping to continually use that channel for future purchases, rather than drive to their local retail stores. Perceived ease of use is especially important for young adults who are juggling multiple responsibilities (school, work and social) and expect digital services to be quick and simple to use. The convenience of payments and ease of use of the website interfaces are the two primary predictors of positive attitude towards e-commerce shopping of young people renewing the importance of perceived ease of use within the evolving digital marketplace (Yee et al, 2023). Hence, the study proposed that:

H1: There is a positive significant relationship between perceived ease of use and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping over physical shopping.

Perceived Usefulness and Preference for Online Over Physical Shopping

Perceived Usefulness is defined as the degree to which a person thinks using an electronic system will be beneficial in his or her work or other areas of life (Davis, 1989). In terms of online shopping, while there are some variations in the way these benefits are defined and presented, many of the perceived benefits include the potential savings of time, convenience of shopping, large amounts of available information, large selections of

products, and often, the availability of review and price comparison websites (Ithnin et al., 2022). An increasing number of studies support the idea that perceived usefulness is one of the most important factors influencing how people intend to shop online and use e-commerce sites over time (Ithnin et al., 2022; Salamat et al., 2024; Yee et al., 2023). Perceived usefulness to young people in Malaysia, for example, is associated with their ability to shop anytime and anywhere, to avoid traffic jams and lines, also helps young Malaysians find lower prices for the items they want than they would pay in a physical store (Ithnin et al., 2022). A study of young adults' satisfaction with online shopping indicates that the saving of time and the variety of items available online significantly affect positive evaluations of the online retailer (Salamat et al., 2024). In addition, the study also reveals that when users perceive an online marketplace to be useful, it leads to increased intentions to purchase and often, reinstating the product. Tan et al. (2024) shows that perceived usefulness positively influences the preferences of young adults towards online shopping, indicating that when online shopping is perceived to be more time-efficient than in-store shopping, it will ultimately become the default method of purchasing for many consumers. Therefore, this study postulate that:

H2: *There is a positive significant relationship between perceived usefulness and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping over physical shopping.*

Past Online Shopping Experience and Preference for Online Over Physical Shopping

Users' past experience with shopping on the internet includes all interactions with e-commerce sites such as searching for products, making payments, receiving packages and contacting customer service if help is needed. Prior research in various domains has found that good online shopping experience, such as timely delivery of goods purchased, have been found to increase the likelihood of repurchasing again from the same e-commerce platform, or displaying loyalty towards that e-commerce platform. Other research has also found that if a consumer experiences poor online shopping experience, such as poor customer service, the consumer tends to be more fearful of potential risks in making further purchases from an e-commerce platform (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024). Hence, those who have positive online shopping experiences will have developed an understanding of what constitutes safe shopping, developed trust in the retailer and developed expectations of customer service and product quality before making another attempt to make an online purchase. Experience has a greater impact on young consumers as they typically experiment with different e-commerce platforms and different product categories before developing a consistent habit. Past online shopping experience of a young consumer influences both their likelihood of repurchasing online, as well as their comfort with using digital interfaces when presenting themselves to an e-commerce platform, and how comfortable they are using online channels for more complex or high value transactions (Ngah et al., 2021). Research indicates that satisfaction with prior purchases, perceived safety of past transactions, understanding of how to deal with problems involving the e-commerce platform, as well as willingness to recommend online shopping to others all indicate that experience is a major factor in determining a consumer's preference for any given e-commerce platform (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024). Therefore, it is proposed that:

H3: *There is a positive significant relationship between past online shopping experience and Malaysian young adults' preference for online shopping over physical shopping.*

Preference for Online Over Physical Shopping

This conceptual paper is concerned with consumer preference to buy their items online instead of physically at a store. This tendency to shop online stems from the consumer's choice to utilise online channels rather than brick-and-mortar outlets for their purchases. Although most of the studies in the current literature have focused solely on "online purchase intention," a number of recent studies have emphasised that it is necessary to understand consumer channel preferences when consumers can choose between several different types of channels such as online marketplaces, brand websites, social commerce or physical stores, in an omnichannel environment (Hendricks & Mwapwele, 2024). According to studies conducted in Malaysia, factors affecting youth preference for online shopping include lifestyle compatibility, social media integration and flexibility with scheduling, satisfaction, convenience and time-saving, when comparing shopping from physical store to online platforms, have been found to be the main deciding factors for young consumers to choose online platforms for their shopping, even when the physical store is available (Ngah et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2024; Yee et al., 2023).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND UNDERPINNING THEORY

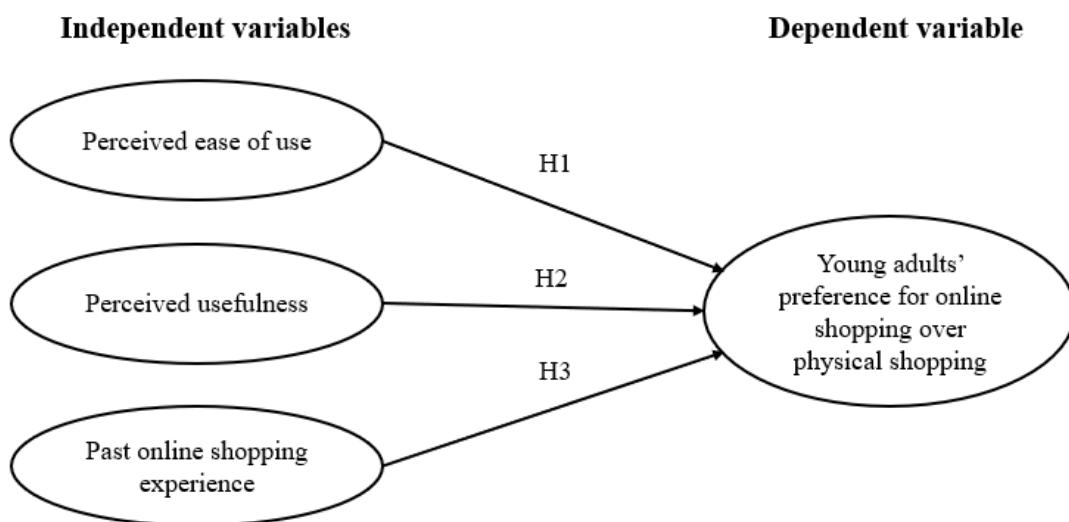
This study is grounded by the Technology Acceptance Model, which serves as a fundamental theory to explain how individuals form their attitudes towards and intention to adopt technology. Davis (1989) proposed Technology Acceptance Model, as a means of explaining that two core factors; the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of a technology, ultimately drive an individual's attitude toward that technology and their intent to adopt it. Technology Acceptance Model has been used extensively in technology and e-commerce for over 30 years and is supported through numerous systematic reviews of the literature which demonstrate its use as a strong theory, while at the same time providing suggestions for additional research to develop extensions of the model that include consideration of environmental and experiential impacts. In this regard, a number of studies conducted in Malaysia and other developing countries found perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness to be important influences on an individual's intent to purchase online, particularly among younger generations (Ngah et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2024; Yee et al., 2023). These two constructs impact the adoption of digital payments and overall attitudes toward e-commerce platforms. However, research in this area has indicated that because of the complexities of trust, risk, and previous experiences, this is not sufficient to explain adoption patterns and thus these factors should be incorporated into a theoretical framework.

Through a current review of the literature on e-commerce adoption in developing countries, this study proposes an extension of the original Technology Acceptance Model to include the following three elements. First, the original outcome of Technology Acceptance Model (intention to use) is recast to focus on preference for online vs physical shopping. Thus, the outcome of the framework is now contextualised in terms of this channel selection, which more closely mirrors the behaviour of many younger consumers who often need to

decide whether to purchase online or in retail when making each individual purchase. Second, the proposed conceptual framework preserves the original causal structure of Technology Acceptance Model, stating that both perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness will have a positive effect on preference for online vs physical shopping. The third extension of Technology Acceptance Model is to incorporate past experience in online shopping as a precedent factor influencing preference. With the incorporation of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and past experience, this study seeks to understand how one's prior experience strengthens preference for online shopping, while also enhancing individuals' positive perceptions of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Ultimately, this new conceptual framework positions perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and past online shopping as independent variables on the preference for online or physical shopping among young adults. Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework of this study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The current study contributes to theory by developing and validating a theoretical model of how young adults in Malaysia make decisions about their preference for shopping online versus shopping in physical stores using the Technology Acceptance Model. This study expands upon Technology Acceptance Model by shifting the focus of intention to purchase to preferences for shopping via digital channels. It further addresses the recommendations from previous research to incorporate constructs from the context and experience of the consumer into the model to provide a more complete understanding of factors that influence consumers' decisions to use online shopping channels. In terms of practical implications, this study may benefit both online retailers and platform providers as they manage the three key levers identified in this model to better encourage

young consumers to prefer purchasing products through online channels. These three levers are ease of use, clearly expressed functional benefits, and consistently positive customer experiences over a period of time. By making their user interfaces as user-friendly as possible, by clearly communicating their functional benefits, and by ensuring positive customer experiences, retailers can help young consumers feel more comfortable with online channels of purchase. In addition, policymakers and regulators should be aware of the findings of the current study when considering policies that can help improve online shopping experiences for young consumers and encourage them to participate more fully in the digital economy, where secure payment systems, clear dispute resolution processes, and sufficient enforcement of consumer rights may enhance young consumers' experiences of online shopping.

CONCLUSION

This study builds on previous research to construct a Technology Acceptance Model extension and examine the reasons why young Malaysians generally choose to shop online. Based on an empirical study and a review of the current literature, this model will attempt to show that perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and previous experiences with online shopping are the most important elements in influencing young Malaysians' choice of shopping channels and, in particular, that perceived ease of use has a positive effect on perceived usefulness. The model fills an identified gap in the existing literature by adding experiential factor into the original Technology Acceptance Model, focuses on young adults in an emerging market, and shifts the focus from general online purchase intention to explicit channel preference. Future studies may extend the current model to include additional variables, such as trust, perceived risk, enjoyment, and social influence. Longitudinal studies will provide a unique opportunity to evaluate how channel preferences change for young adults as they gain additional online shopping experience, and how the increasing prevalence of such technologies as artificial intelligence and social commerce will influence changes in channel preference. Additionally, cross-national comparisons across nations may also produce findings related to cultural differences, differences in national online shopping infrastructures and regulations, and their impact on how young consumers choose shopping channels. In conclusion, the theoretical model focusing on the young adult consumer market in Malaysia provides an excellent starting point for future research and will support those wishing to create better methods of understanding and improving consumer preference for online shopping in an increasingly digital economy.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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ORCID

Aervina Misron ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5104-2800>

Sharfika Raime ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2649-0610>

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