

DIGITAL LIFESTYLES, WORKPLACE CONSIDERATIONS AND NORMATIVE SOCIO-CULTURAL EFFECTS ON WOMEN'S CHILDBEARING BEHAVIOR IN ASIA

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Asia represents a fascinating environment in which to study women consumers. On one hand, traditional Asian cultures appear to perpetrate gender inequality attitudes. According to the 2013 Institute on Asian Consumer Insight (ACI) Pan-Asian Wave Consumer Values Study, more than 58% of 6,873 respondents across 10 Asian countries either agreed or strongly agreed with statements that state that a woman should be subservient to her husband. On the other hand, women consumers represent one of the fastest growing markets across most Asian countries, as a result of not only greater labour participation and financial independence amongst women, but also the unique roles that women play in Asian societies as household financial controllers and decision-makers, as governors of family and social relationships, and as consumption opinion leaders.

Singapore, in particular, represents a microcosm of 'she-conomic development' throughout Asia as well as a baseline case for comparative studies of women consumer markets. In Singapore, as more women pursue careers (more than 70% of women already contribute to the workforce), they not only contribute to the economic value generated but also add to the total consumption of goods and services. At the same time, women's participation in the labour force has also resulted in changes to the social structure characterized by the problem of declining birth rates and an ageing population, both of which have implications for the gradual change in the basket of goods and services demanded. Women in Singapore are more likely than any other society in Asia to be an active participant of the workforce, and face demands from multiple roles in their professional and family context.

These trends are also underpinned by paradigm shifts in cultural values and beliefs across much of Asia. In many families, women are no longer seen as the primary caregiver, with the support of foreign domestic workers as well as more engaged spouses playing an active role and helping to care for children or parents. Given the many changes families face in Asia, this region provides a rich context for the study. We have selected Singapore as the main focal market to examine this phenomenon. There is also scope to select from and study other Asian countries which have large trade partnership with Singapore: China (Export: 4850.28 SGD Million, Import: 4482.86 SGD Million), Indonesia (Import: 1417.36 SGD Million) and Korea (Export: 1430.36 SGD Million, Import: 2070.07 SGD Million) (Tradingeconomics, 2016), plus regional countries which have tremendous growth potential in business dealings with Singapore such as India, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar.

The region is one of the fastest adopters of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the world, and also one of the most connected populations online. ICTs can be a powerful enabler in the sense that they can be used for civic participation, identity formation, telecommuting and online shopping. But it has also been argued that they pose some attendant risks, such as increased isolation, gaming addiction, and risky behaviours online. ICTs, in other words, are important platforms which can both facilitate or limit the roles that women perform, and have both positive and negative impacts.

The following are just some overarching research aims which will help guide the development of major objectives in the PhD thesis:

RO1: How are ICTs used in the contexts of health, expressions and self-identity, and the workforce participation of women in Asia?

RO2: What are the demographic, cultural and psycho-social drivers of female workforce participation, and their impacts on families in Asia?

RO3: How can findings from RO2-4 be used to develop relevant applications and policies?

SCOPE OF WORK FOR SELECTED PHD STUDENT

After literature review, the first phase of the research will involve the interviewing women of different age groups in each country. The candidate can use the existing qualitative raw data the supervisors have access to (from 5 Asian countries) and supplement with own qualitative interviews in Singapore and selected Asian neighbour.

The second phase of the project will include collection of quantitative data and subsequent analyses.

During the latter part of PhD, the student will undertake data analyses and write-up of the findings from the large data gathered.