

THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-ESTEEM AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS TOWARDS THE DEBT BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Debt culture is considered synonym amongst the low income household group. There are researches that indicate that loans amongst the low income household group, is not only with the purpose of fulfilling basic needs, but also for higher needs. If we explored from the hierarchy needs that introduced by Maslow (1954), there are five levels of needs required to be fulfilled, including social needs and self-esteem. According to the Maslow theory, individuals who can fulfil all of their needs is considered a healthy person, whereas those who are unable to fulfil their needs is at risk of being unhealthy or maybe sick in the human dimension. Therefore, humans in their effort to fulfil needs and desire would always find the best solution, even if they have to be in debt. Due to the passing of time, being in debt to fulfil a higher need is considered to be fair. Therefore, this research is conducted to observe the influence of social relationships and self-esteem towards the purchase of non-essential needs and the intention to add more debt among low-income groups in the plantation sector in Sabah. The word *tahsiniyyat* used in this study refer to non-basic expenses which is a requirement of the form of comfort and beauty. By using a questionnaire, we get 378 responses from low-income household individuals. The data analysis was carried out through Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) techniques by using the SmartPLS 2.0 M3 software. The results were statistically demonstrated their positive significant relationships between social relationships and self-esteem towards debt spending of *tahsiniyyat* needs and debt intention. This research is very beneficial in predicting debt behaviour among low-income group and useful to the monetary policy maker in order to implement the policy and assist this group. A few policy implications as well as suggestions were also discussed in this research.

Keyword: *social relationships, self-esteem, tahsiniyyat goods, debt intention, low-income group.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the public dependency towards debt is worrisome (Nurshahirah et al., 2013). According to Nik et al. (2012), debt has become synonym with the present day, from those who

with low income, till middle class and elite. “Utusan Online” dated 4 March 2016 reported that Manulife Index Sentiment Investors (MISI) research found that 68 percent of Malaysians are burdened with debt, the highest value among eight areas that are explored in Asia and more than 2 times more than the regional average by 33 percent.

Estimated average of debt in Malaysia is RM56, 000 which is 10 times higher than the average individual personal income. This scenario is proven based on the Bank Negara (BNM, 2010) Report that records the ratio debt of a household to the country’s income which increased dramatically to 76.6 percent in the year 2009 and this number has put Malaysia as a country with the highest percentage in Asia (not including Japan). In the meantime, the ratio of household debt towards an individual net income was 140.40% in the year 2009, which is higher than Singapore (105.3%) and U.S.A (123.3%) (S.M. Mohamed, 2011).

The rising trend of household debt in Malaysia has shown the traits or characteristics of the public which prefers to have debts instead of paying by cash. There are a lot factors which leads to the rise of household debt (Barba & Pivetti, 2008). Amongst the factors why individuals like to be in debt is because they do not need to take out any money from their savings other than to free themselves from the poverty of life (Hodari et al., 2014; Syahnaz, 2011). Besides that, Maslow Theory (1954) can be individual’s motivation to be in debt. Maslow (1954) opinion is that there are five needs that should be fulfilled by every human which starts from the most basic needs to a much higher need such as self-esteem. Therefore, in order to clarify the debt issue among low-income individuals today, this research took an initiative to explore whether there is any relation between level of social relations and self-esteem with the behaviour of purchasing tahsiniyyat (non-essential) items and behaviour of debt in the plantation sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Debt Behaviour

The group that has the most difficulties to fulfil basic needs are the poor, and it is reasonable that they are connected to debt (Lea et al., 1995). The research done by Batty & Flint (2010) also found out that low income household will be involved with debt. According to Lea et al. (1995), household with low income are frequently associated with debt. Bank Negara Malaysia report shows that the average of Malaysians that are included in the 40 percent poorest category (B40) are actually in debt 14 times more than their annual income. It is common that the B40 household group usually borrow, in order to fulfil the basic needs and for security in their lives (Barba & Pivetti, 2008). However research done by Azrina & Siti (2010) found that debts among Malaysians generally does not only focus on basic needs, but they also owe money to obtain non-essential needs and added value in themselves such as education and comfort in their lives.

Self-esteem

According to Coppersmith (1967), individuals with high self-esteem or self-worth are said to be more strict, independent, creative, more flexible, imaginative and can afford to solve problems. Rosenberg (1965) explained that individuals with low self-esteem often experience depression and not happy, easily anxious, possess signs of easily aggressive, hot tempered and holds grudges, and often suffers because being dissatisfied with everyday life. There are research which states that when self-esteem is low, it causes the individual not being able to accept his own condition and will distance himself from social interaction (Burn, 1979).

Individuals that are motivated by extrinsic goals such as wealth, properties, image and status for self-affirmation and searching for compensation for low self-esteem, may be trapped with materialism. On the other hand, there are individuals who purchase luxurious things, just for the sake of upgrading their self-esteem or self-worth. Truong & McColl (2011) found that there is a close relation between the usage of luxurious items and self-esteem. The research also suggests that individuals are able to maintain or increase their self-esteem through the purchase of luxurious items. This finding is supported by Hudders (2015) that shows that many women admit that the purchase of items are to increase self-esteem. A vast development in the luxurious culture has been supported by a broad access to credit and convenience (Alidaniah et al., 2015). Therefore, few previous research clearly shows that the luxurious lifestyle and increase on the cost of living influenced them to be in debt, to the extent of spending luxuriously exceeding what they can afford in order to enjoy a more comfortable life.

Recent theory statement has suggest that properties is one aspect of identity (Shrum et al., 2013). Vice versa, Richins and Dawson (1992) consider materialism as a value or goal that reflects how much individuals believe that gaining money or property is important. It also presented the effort for those materials that is related to an attractive image and status, high popularity, both objects are seldom mentioned through currency and properties (Kasser, 2016).

Social Relationships

Humans need love, belonging and affection (Maslow, 1954). Relationships such as friendship, romantic bonding and family helps to fulfil the need of friendship and acceptance, such as involvement in social public, community or religious group (Zakaria & Malek, 2014). Social needs has a relation that involves 'the desire to feel the interactions with someone else' (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which is to be closer to other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The need to be loved causes individuals to feel afraid to be abandoned and is willing to do anything to be loved (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Research findings by Mohammad Abu Bakar (2011) on teens, found that with the existence of peers as replacement, individuals are most certainly be easily influenced by their peers compared to the teachings from parents.

According to Ilhaamie (2005), the relationship with colleagues is one of the main factors to influence employee satisfaction. A good social relationship within organization employees whether it's between the employer and the employee or amongst employees themselves is crucial in an organization. With the existence of positive relationship among employees, it will increase respondent's motivation to work with high commitment in order to achieve excellent performance, not only for the individual themselves, but also for the organization. A close social relationship can also trigger negative activities. Research by Suari & Yahaya (2006) on teens, found that they are willing to do anything as long as their partners are happy. Opinions like this is what causes many individuals to get thrown into unhealthy activities such as addicts, breaking school rules, involved in promiscuity and so on. Therefore it is no suprise that a person is willing to be in debt for the sake of maintaining friendship.

Ismail et al. (2016) found that social network and belief are characteristics included in the social modal. Social network covers individual involvement and relationship in a certain association, club or organization. Reliability on the other hand, is relationship between family, relatives, friend or acquaintance, religion or culture (Seligman, 1997). The influence of social relationship is really strong as research done by Mohammad Abu Bakar (2011) on teens, found that parents, teachers and peers are individuals which are close to students in shaping their individual characteristic and lifestyle.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

According to the Self-Affirmation Theory (Steele, 1988), individuals that feels that their self-esteem in threatened has the tendency to improve themselves to balance out the feeling of low self-esteem (Crocker & Park, 2004). In this case, gaining rewards and status can improve oneself and increase self-worth for individuals that feels that their self-worth is low (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). Besides that, there are two approaches that are seen done by someone with the purpose of increasing self-esteem or self-worth, be it in from the positive or negative aspect. Recent theoretical statement suggests that materialism is one identity aspect (Shrum et al., 2013). Research shows that materialism can be used to balance out self-esteem which is threatened (Shrum et al., 2013; Jiang et al., 2015) and can possibly trigger unethical behaviour (Gino and Mogilner, 2014) and individuals involvement in debt.

Many research also found that the level of social relationship influences someone’s action whether towards positivity or negativity. According to Noh (2006), social power such as relationship with friends has influenced individuals since childhood. Research by Casale & Fioravanti (2015) found that social need (need to belong) relates positively with negative behaviour such as problematic internet usage. Research by Suari &Yahaya (2006) on teens, they are willing to sacrifice anything as long as their partner is happy.

Chen et al., (2017) has widen literature regarding the relationship between brand-consumer by adding new views which is how consumers mould the relationship with a brand in the same way they build relationship with people. Chen et al. (2017) indicates, individuals who really need social relationship will have more tendencies to use certain brands that play certain roles to attract social attention, which is for certain individuals. However, because the B40 group does not have enough source of income, then it is reasonable that they are connected to debt (Lea et al., 1995; Perlo-Freeman & Webber, 2009). Therefore, hypothesis for this research are:

H₁: *There is a positive relationship between social relationships and debt spending of tahsiniyyat needs.*

H₂: *There is a positive relationship between social relationships and debt intention.*

H₃: *There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and the debt spending of tahsiniyyat needs.*

H₄: *There is a positive relationship between self-esteem and debt intention.*

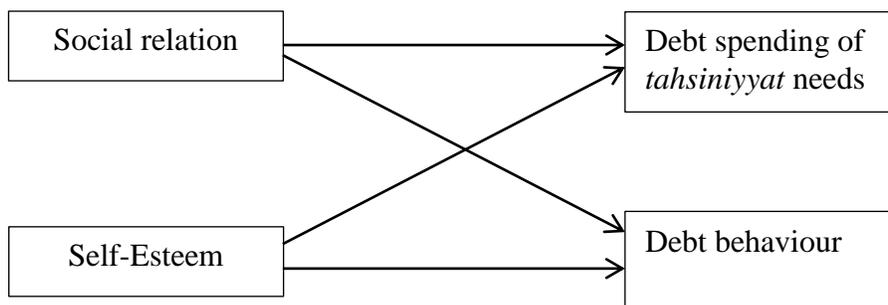


Figure 1: Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach and uses questionnaires as a research instrument. Cluster sampling was used in selecting the sample of the study according to the geographical location of settlements. A total of 378 low-income individuals or B40 out of 1,649 (Mahadir, 2014) in Felda Sabah were involved in this study. Sample size was determined by referring to Table Krejcie & Morgan (1970). The questionnaire in this study was divided into 4 main sections. The first part is a set of self-esteem questions adopted and adapted from Rosenberg (1965), Janis & Field (1959) and Taormina & Gao (2013) with cronbach alpha of 0.827. These items measure individual desires for recognition, awards, prestige and honor status (Maslow, 1954). The questionnaire in the second part is about the factors of debt consumption for the purpose of tahsiniyyat needs. This questions was adopted and adapted based on the study of Almenberg et al. (2016) that are identified in accordance with the expenditure towards tahsiniyyat needs with cronbach alpha of 0.891. The third part is questions related to the tendency to increase the loan built based on Ajzen's Theory, (1991) with cronbach alpha of 0.827. Measurements for social needs in this study were adopted and adapted from Cutrona and Russell (1987) and Taormina & Gao (2013) with cronbach alpha of 0.858. The questionnaire items for social needs in this study are aspects of social needs discussed by Maslow (1954) that all individuals need attention, intimacy, friendship and love among members in society. Exogenous and endogenous constructs were measured using 5-point Likert scale as the preventive measure for common method bias (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). The inference statistics were used to test the hypothesis of the study using the advanced analgesic technique of Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2017). The analysis of the study data was based on the reflective measurement model and the structure equation model.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	255	67.5
Female	123	32.5
Age		
25 and below	89	23.5
25-35	122	32.3
36-45	74	19.6
46-55	51	13.5
56-60	28	7.4
60 and above	14	3.7
Current source of financing		
Felda	174	27.6
Family	161	25.6
Friends	93	14.8
Employer	56	8.9
Islamic Bank	39	6.2
Conventional Bank	35	5.6
Money Lender	11	1.7
Cooperation	61	9.7

RESULTS

Figure 2 shows the results of the analysis of the hypothesis model that meets the criteria of measurement model evaluation based on the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis procedure based on the Smart-PLS 2.0 M3 software.

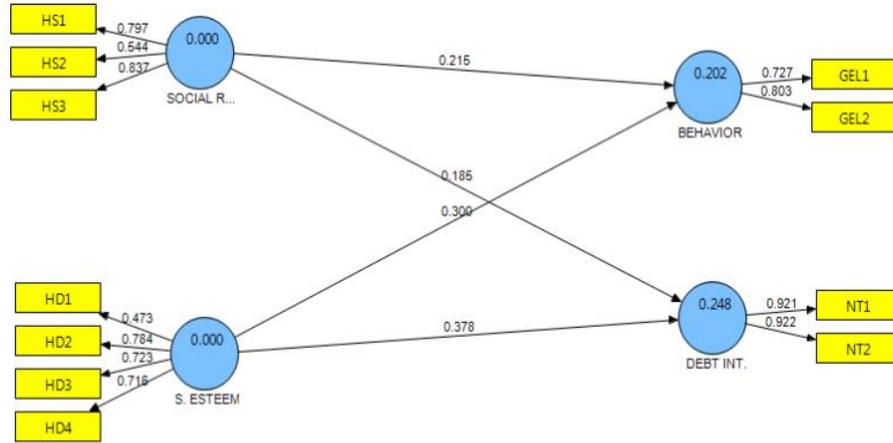


Figure 2: PLS-SEM MODEL

Table 2 shows the findings of the assessment of the measurement model evaluated from four aspects: (1) composite reliability (2) reliability of each indicator based on external load value, (3) convergence validity based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (4) discriminant validity based on cross loading value, Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Sarstedt et al., 2014).

Convergence validity assessment found that the AVE value for study constructs was Social Relationship (AVE = 0.544), Self-esteem (AVE = 0.468), debt spending of tahsiniyyat needs (AVE = 0.587) and debt intention (AVE = 0.849). Loading for all items exceeds recommended value 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). The factor loading is between 0.473 and 0.922. Table 1 shows the AVE value for each indicator referring to the latent construction. The AVE value should be greater than 0.50 for each construct (Barclay et al., 1995). The average variance that has been extracted is within 0.473 and 0.849. The value of AVE for Self-Esteem above 0.4 is still acceptable. If the AVE is less than 0.5, the composite reliability is higher than 0.6, the convergence of its construction is sufficient (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 Results of Measurement Model

LVs	Indicator	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Social Relationship	HS_1	0.797	0.544	0.776
	HS_2	0.544		
	HS_3	0.837		
Self-esteem	HD_1	0.473	0.468	0.773
	HD_2	0.784		
	HD_3	0.723		
	HD_4	0.716		
Debt spending - tahsiniyyat needs	GEL_1	0.803	0.587	0.739
	GEL_2	0.727		
Debt intention	NT_1	0.921	0.849	0.918
	NT_2	0.922		

Note: AVE – Average Variance Explained; CR – Composite Reliability

Furthermore, referring to Table 3, the discriminant validity was assessed using Fornel and Larcker (1971) by comparing the square root of each AVE in the diagonal with the correlation coefficients (off-diagonal) for each construct in the relevant rows and columns. The conditions for discriminant validity have been met where all the values for the diagonal are greater than the values below. Overall, discriminant validity can be accepted for this measurement model and supports the discriminant validity between the constructs.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	TN	SE	SR	INT
Purchasing Behaviour (TN)	0.766			
Self-esteem (SE)	0.409	0.684		
Social Relationship (SR)	0.366	0.505	0.737	
Intention (INT)	0.47	0.471	0.376	0.922

STRUCTURAL MODEL EVALUATION

Collinearity issue was first assessed in examining structural model. All the inner VIF value for the independent variable (1.343) is less than 5 and 3.3 which indicate collinearity is not a concern (Hair et al., 2017). The validity of hypotheses and structural models in this study is determined by evaluating path coefficients between one and two latent variables. Based on previous studies, coefficient path values need to be at the value of 0.1 to describe specific effects in the model (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Result
H ₁	SR ->TN	0.221	2.929	0.002	Supported
H ₂	SR ->INT	0.185	3.339	0.000	Supported
H ₃	SE -> TN	0.302	4.022	0.000	Supported
H ₄	SE ->INT	0.381	7.953	0.000	Supported

Based on the result Table 4, all hypotheses for direct relationships were supported. Result showed that self-esteem and social relationship positively influences the debt spending of tahsiniyyat needs with ($\beta=0.302, p<0.000$), ($\beta=0.221, p<0.002$) respectively. Subsequently, self-esteem and social relationship also showed positively influences the debt intention with ($\beta=0.381, p<0.000$), ($\beta=0.185, p<0.000$) respectively. In brief, from the results of this analysis, it can be concluded that all four hypotheses are supported at a significant level of 0.01.

Next, Coefficient of Determination R² was examined. 20.2% (variance of the debt spending of tahsiniyyat needs) and 24.8% (variance of debt intentions) was jointly explained by self-esteem and social relationships. According to Cohen (1992) R-square value between 0.13 to 0.25 values indicate medium level. Therefore, as the R² values were above 0.19, substantial level of predictive accuracy was inferred. R-square as low as 10% is generally accepted for studies in the field of arts, humanities and social sciences because human behaviour cannot be accurately predicted, therefore, a low R-square is often not a problem in studies in the arts, humanities and social science field. This study further examined into the effect size using Cohen's (f²) (Cohen, 1988), with value of 0.35, 0.15, 0.02 indicate large, medium, and small effect size respectively. In explaining the debt spending of tahsiniyyat needs, self-esteem (0.043) and social relationships

(0.084) indicated small effect sizes, while in explaining debt intentions, self-esteem (0.034) and social relationship (1.141) also indicated small effect sizes.

Finally, predictive relevance (0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 for weak, moderate, strong) was evaluated using Stone-Geisser's Q^2 (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974). The Q^2 values for the debt spending of tahsiniyyat needs (0.112) and debt intention (0.203) were more than 0. Therefore, the model established sufficient predictive relevance.

DISCUSSION

The findings are consistent with studies (Han et al., 2010) who find the life goals of some individuals trying to get comfort-shaped products, is to increase self-esteem, to state one's identity, and status signals. This statement is supported by the studies that find people with low self-esteem do not have self-confidence to change the pattern of their original use to avoid discrimination and to be excluded because of their low status (Rudich et al., 2007). They are trying to get things belonging to others to avoid being excluded from other groups (Srisayekti & Setiady, 2015). Debt behaviour are influenced by individual characteristics, individual values, demographic characteristics and other economic resources, so when one decides to take debt choices then there are various factors that will influence each other and create complexity in debt decision making (Cosma & Pattarin, 2011).

Social relationship and self-esteem are very important need as explained in Theory Maslow (1954). There is no denying that many people try to cover their weaknesses with debt. Through this study, the initiatives can be taken by various parties to maintain social relationships. The local management and community have a particular role to promote social and spiritual programs that can help to enhance social relationships. Individuals with positive self-esteem can inhibit their love for possessions (Richins, 2001). The lack of self-esteem as discussed by previous studies invites bad results. There is no denying that there are many people try to cover their weaknesses with certain goods and debt. The R^2 value in this study is low as shown in is 0.202 and 0.248. This indicates debt-taking decisions have many factors besides social relationship factors and self-esteem.

IMPLICATIONS

This research extends social relationship and self-esteem study into debt field. This research provides empirical evidence that good relationship with other and self-esteem does not necessarily reduce the debt. Debt is not necessarily negative, but it can be utilized for social needs and self-esteem. Loans made depend on one's situation. In this regard, the problem of the lack of income sources of low-income group in plantation sector in Sabah supports the need for debt. However, this research also found that among the B40, self-esteem has a relationship to the behaviour of buying non-basic goods.

This research also shows the role of non-basic goods as a means of maintaining self-esteem as many researcher (Belk, 1985) supports that the ownership of certain goods such as branded or expensive is essential to maintaining self-concept and able to serve as an instrument to overcome doubts about the value or the self-efficacy (Chang et al., 2015). However, this situation needs to be improved so that they do not rely entirely on debt management for a long time. It can be concluded that this study proves that individual efforts to maintain, improve and protect self-esteem are a motivation that motivates individuals to get a loan.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that self-esteem and social relationships are an important needs that can influence one's tendency to indebted. In addition, self-esteem and social relationships factors are also found to affect their behaviour in the expenditure of non-basic items. The empirical outcomes of this research have practical implications to help low-income people reduce lending by helping them in the development of self-esteem through the role of employer support. In order to empower self-esteem and social relationships without relying on loans, this study suggests that the employers, especially top management and local communities have a role to implement and advocate spiritual and social programs that can help to increase their employees' self-esteem. Apart from the employer, the individual also needs to spend time to engage with such activities in order to develop their self-esteem. The implementation of the spiritual approach to the organization has the potential to make positive implications such as creating the highest self-esteem and self-confidence.

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