

**PREDICTING MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' INTENT TO PURSUE RETAILING CAREER: APPLICABILITY OF THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR**

<sup>A</sup>Safiek Mokhlis, <sup>B</sup>Nik Syuhailah Nik Hussin, <sup>C</sup>Nurul Zarirah Nizam, <sup>D</sup>Nor Azila Mohd Noor, <sup>E</sup>Noor Awanis Muslim 

ARTICLE INFO	<u>ABSTRACT</u>
<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p>Received 01 July 2021</p> <p>Accepted 26 October 2021</p>	<p><b>Purpose:</b> The retail industry offers diverse and unique career paths. However, despite the high demand for new graduates to fill managerial positions in the retail sector, their reluctance to pursue a retail career remain. This study aims to investigate the antecedents that predict retail career intention of Malaysian undergraduate business students.</p> <p><b>Theoretical framework:</b> Using Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the underpinning theoretical framework, this study hypothesized that students' intent to pursue a career in retailing are influenced by the three independent variables in TPB (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) and the additional variable of knowledge.</p> <p><b>Methodology:</b> Data were collected via an online survey among a sample of 316 undergraduate business students from three public universities in Malaysia. Structural equation modelling approach was used to assess the strength of the hypothesized relationships of the proposed model simultaneously via the two-stage model building process.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> Results indicate that students' attitude, subjective norm, and knowledge significantly predicted students' intent to pursue a career in retailing, but perceived behavioral control surprisingly did not. All the four explanatory variables in TPB explained about 76 percent of the variance in behavioral intention to pursue a retail career.</p> <p><b>Research, Practical &amp; Social implications:</b> Findings of this study clearly supports the applicability of the TPB in predicting students' intent to pursue a career in retailing. Results obtained can serve as a basis for future works in this area. This study also offers implications for educators and industry practitioners to foster retail career intentions among students.</p> <p><b>Originality:</b> This study is a pioneering attempt to test the applicability of the TPB as a theoretical framework to predict university students' retail career intention.</p> <p>Doi: <a href="https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2022.v7i1.277">https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2022.v7i1.277</a></p>
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<sup>A</sup> PhD at the University of Stirling, Scotland. He is currently associate professor at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. **Email:** [safiek@umt.edu.my](mailto:safiek@umt.edu.my)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1216-3232>

<sup>B</sup> PhD from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu. Being a lecturer marketing at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. **Email:** [niksyuhailah@umk.edu.my](mailto:niksyuhailah@umk.edu.my)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9055-6787>

<sup>C</sup> Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Technology Management and Technopreneurship, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka. She received her PhD in Business Administration (Green Marketing and Retailing) from Aichi University, Japan. **Email:** [zarirah@utem.edu.my](mailto:zarirah@utem.edu.my)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6559-2962>

<sup>D</sup> Professor in Marketing at School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia. She is currently serves as a Director of Institute for Business Competitiveness, Standards & Sustainability Initiative (IBCSI), School of Business Management, Universiti Utara Malaysia. **Email:** [azila@uum.edu.my](mailto:azila@uum.edu.my)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4570-6800>

<sup>E</sup> Senior lecturer at College of Accounting and Business Management, Universiti Tenaga Nasional. She received her PhD from Lincoln University, New Zealand. **Email:** [awanis@uniten.edu.my](mailto:awanis@uniten.edu.my)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8200-4835>

## PREDICCIÓN DE LA INTENCIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS MALASIOS DE SEGUIR LA CARRERA DE COMERCIANTES MINORISTAS: APLICABILIDAD DE LA TEORÍA DEL COMPORTAMIENTO PLANIFICADO

**Objetivo:** La industria del comercio minorista ofrece trayectorias profesionales diversas y únicas. Sin embargo, a pesar de la gran demanda de nuevos graduados para ocupar puestos gerenciales en el sector comercio minorista, prevalece una reticencia a seguir una carrera en el comercio minorista. Este estudio tiene como objetivo investigar los antecedentes que predicen la intención de los estudiantes de licenciatura en negocios de Malasia de seguir la carrera de comercio minorista.

**Marco teórico:** Utilizando la Teoría del Comportamiento Planificado (TCP) de Ajzen (1991) como marco teórico subyacente, este estudio plantea la hipótesis de que la intención de los estudiantes de seguir una carrera en el comercio minorista está influenciada por las tres variables independientes en TCP (actitud, norma subjetiva y control del comportamiento percibido) y la variable adicional de conocimiento.

**Metodología:** Los datos se recopilaron mediante una encuesta en línea a una muestra de 316 estudiantes de negocios de licenciatura de tres universidades públicas de Malasia. Se utilizó el enfoque de modelado de ecuaciones estructurales para evaluar la fortaleza de las relaciones hipotéticas del modelo propuesto simultáneamente a través del proceso de construcción del modelo de dos etapas.

**Hallazgos:** Los resultados indican que la actitud, la norma subjetiva y el conocimiento de los estudiantes, predijeron significativamente la intención de los estudiantes de seguir una carrera en el comercio minorista, pero el control de comportamiento percibido sorprendentemente no lo hizo. Las cuatro variables explicativas en la TCP explicaron alrededor del 76 por ciento de la variación en la intención de comportamiento para seguir una carrera en el comercio minorista.

**Contribuciones teóricas/metodológicas:** Los hallazgos de este estudio respaldan claramente la aplicabilidad de la TCP para predecir la intención de los estudiantes de seguir una carrera en el comercio minorista. Los resultados obtenidos pueden servir de base para futuros trabajos en esta área. Este estudio también ofrece implicaciones para que los educadores y los profesionales de la industria fomenten las intenciones de una carrera en el comercio minorista entre los estudiantes.

**Originalidad:** Este estudio es un intento pionero de probar la aplicabilidad de la TCP como marco teórico para predecir la intención de los estudiantes universitarios de seguir una carrera en el comercio minorista.

**Palabras clave:** Intención de una carrera, Comercio minorista, Teoría del comportamiento planificado (TCP), Estudiantes universitarios.

### INTRODUCTION

Over the recent years, retail businesses have grown in size and complexity, and now they require personnel with higher-level skills more than ever. To obtain qualified and skilled personnel, retail businesses must recruit suitable candidates and retain them. According to Oh, Weitz, and Lim (2016), recruiting and retaining “top talents” in retailing has become more significant due to several factors, including the increasing use of sophisticated technology in retailing, the competitive and quickly changing retail environment, and the placement of profit and loss responsibilities on frontline managers. Surely, having talented employees who can respond and adapt effectively to current trends and advances in retailing management methods will help retail businesses gain an advantage over their rivals in the marketplace and thus earn higher returns. Arguably,

recruiting high caliber personnel is most critical to any retail businesses' future success (Leng, 2013). For these reasons, retail businesses consider the search for "top talents" as a high priority.

In an increasingly competitive labor market, recruiting quality employees is a challenge due to the presence of the "war for talents" that is ever intensifying (Leng, 2013). Since having talented employees is viewed as one of human resource strategies for retailers to stay competitive in today's rapidly changing retail landscape, many of them have focused their efforts on recruiting university graduates (Leng, 2013). In fact, some retailers have gone even further by actively collaborating with universities to develop retail education programs that are more relevant to the industry's needs including offering internship programs (Hurst & Good, 2010) and setting up retail laboratories on campus (Franco Valdez & Valdez Cervantes, 2018). University graduates are considered attractive candidates for many retail positions, mainly due to the belief that they are knowledgeable, trainable and talented (Broadbridge, Maxwell, & Ogden, 2009; Gunn, Cappuccitti, & Lee, 2020). As Gunn et al. (2020) have aptly pointed out, selecting university graduates to become new retail managers is a logical choice for recruiters, given that retail management posts are becoming more professional and beginning to involve bigger responsibilities. For example, retail managers are increasingly required to make more operational decisions, understand buyer behavior, manage employees, develop sales forecasts, implement financial and logistical systems, raise capital, gather information and market analysis, and implement technological innovations (Merkel, Jackson, & Pick, 2006; Broadbridge, Maxwell, & Ogden, 2007; Smith & Elliott, 2012; Zairis, 2013). Thus, like in other professions, for individuals to assume management level positions in retailing, they are required to possess higher education credentials.

However, despite the high demand for them as retail professionals, university students' desire to pursue careers in retailing has remained low, mainly due to their negative perception. This issue has been highlighted by scholars since the early 1980s, and it has persisted for decades. As reported in prior studies conducted in the US, UK, Malaysia, and South Africa, students tend to associate working in retailing with store-based activities, low training needs, long work hours, being people oriented, low compensation, dull and boring work content, poor work-life balance, and limited career progression (Swinyard, 1981; Broadbridge, 2003a; Mokhlis, 2014a, 2014b; Heidig, Dobbstein, Mason, & Jooste, 2017). Their negative perception may have been based on their part-time retail work experiences (Broadbridge, 2003b; Knight, Crutsinger, & Kim,

2006; Broadbridge et al., 2007; Gunn, Lee, Cappuccitti, & Taylor, 2017). Furthermore, the widespread of these “retailing myths” may be attributed to poor efforts by the retail industry to communicate the truth about retail careers to students (Broadbridge et al., 2009). Consequently, retailing is regarded as an “accidental career” by those unable to find any other jobs (Gunn et al., 2017) and often viewed as an occupation of last resort rather than a professional career option (Leng, 2013). These issues more than justify the need for marketing educators and the industry to adopt tactics and strategies to ensure that these potential retail managers, i.e., university students, will be inclined to enter the industry upon completing their studies. To this end, it is vital to understand what factors influence their intent to pursue careers in retailing.

A coherent and generally applicable theoretical framework for understanding and predicting career intention is the theory of planned behavior (TPB). Developed by Ajzen (1991), the theory takes into account not only personal but also social factors. Ajzen (1991) argues that individuals' likelihood of performing different kinds of behaviors can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (PBC). In previous career-related studies involving TPB, the framework's applicability and robustness was confirmed when it was able to predict students' intent to pursue careers in accounting (Wen, Yang, Bu, Diers, & Wang, 2018), entrepreneurship (Farani, Karimi, & Motaghd, 2017; Song, Thominathan, & Khalid, 2021), teaching (Evers & Sieverding, 2015), nursing (Arnold, Loan-Clarke, Coombs, Wilkinson, Park, & Preston, 2006), hospitality (Wen, Leung, Li, & Kwon, 2018), and military (Gibson, Griepentrog, & Marsh, 2007). However, despite considerable empirical evidence that the theory can be used as the framework to effectively predict career intention, there is still a paucity of studies applying TPB to examine business students' intention regarding a career in retailing.

Therefore, this study aimed to fill the void in the literature. It drew on TPB to investigate the antecedents of retail career intention of undergraduate business students in Malaysia. A TPB model was developed, with the component knowledge also added, and the model was tested using a structural equation modeling framework. Results of the test would determine whether it can be concluded that TPB is a useful theory for describing the motivational processes underlying students' retail career intention. In addition, the estimates of the model may reveal the factors that influence retail career intention, which may be used by educators and the retail industry to advise future retail professionals.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Researchers have examined a number of variables to understand students' career intention. To identify key cognitive determinants of students' career decision and behavior, researchers have applied intentional models of social cognition. One particularly well-researched model utilized within this context is TPB, originally developed by Ajzen (1991). As illustrated in Figure 1, TPB is an extended version of Ajzen and Fishbein's (1977) theory of reasoned action (TRA), which is premised on the notion that any human behavior is influenced by attitude and subjective norm. While TRA concentrates on volitional personal/social factors when explaining the formation of an individual's intention, Ajzen's (1991) TPB also considers an individual's perceived behavioral control (PBC) to allow for more accurate predictions of intention and behavior. Since its inception, TPB has been the dominant theoretical model to predict a variety of intentions and behaviors. To date, research utilizing TPB has demonstrated that intention is a strong predictor of human social behavior. This research covered areas as diverse as health-related behavior, voting behavior, blood donation, consumption behavior, leisure activity, and job seeking (for a review, see Armitage & Conner, 2001).

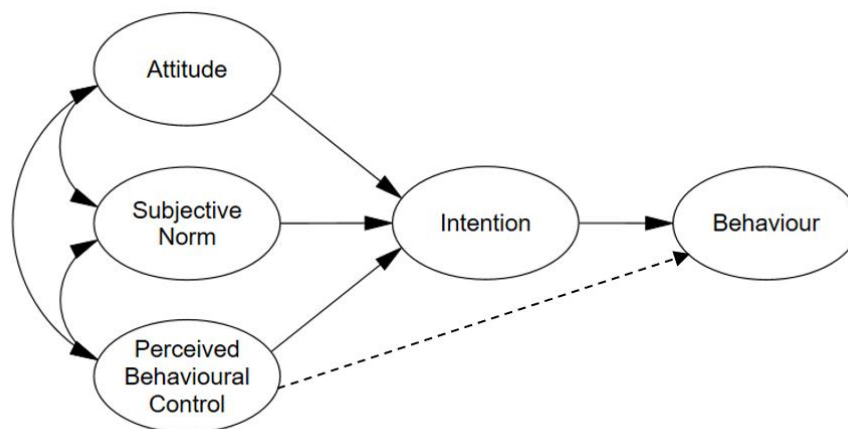


Figure 1. Theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991)

TPB is based on the basic assumption that behavioral intention is contingent upon attitude, subjective norm, and PBC. Intention, along with PBC, then determine actual

behavior. To sum up, the more positive the attitude and subjective norm related to a behavior and the greater the PBC, the stronger the individual intention to perform the behavior. It must be noted, however, that the relative importance of these factors in the prediction of intention “is expected to vary across behaviors and situations” (Ajzen, 1991; p. 188). Furthermore, TPB can be expanded through inclusions of additional constructs, after the theory’s original components have been taken into consideration, to enhance the framework’s predictive power (Ajzen, 1991). To this end, researchers have made suggestions regarding additional variables to include. One promising suggestion is to integrate into TPB the knowledge variable (Farani et al., 2017). Knowledge is an important predictor because it is commonly viewed as a prerequisite to volitional action (Frick, Kaiser, & Wilson, 2004). Without possessing relevant knowledge, individuals are unlikely to care about the career and to deliberately act to pursue that career. Simply put, the more individuals think they know about a particular career, the more likely they are to act. Based on this argument, knowledge was added to the study’s proposed conceptual model as one of the constructs predicting students’ retail career intention. The model is shown in Figure 2. The model’s hypotheses to be tested were developed in light of previous research findings on factors influencing students’ career decision.

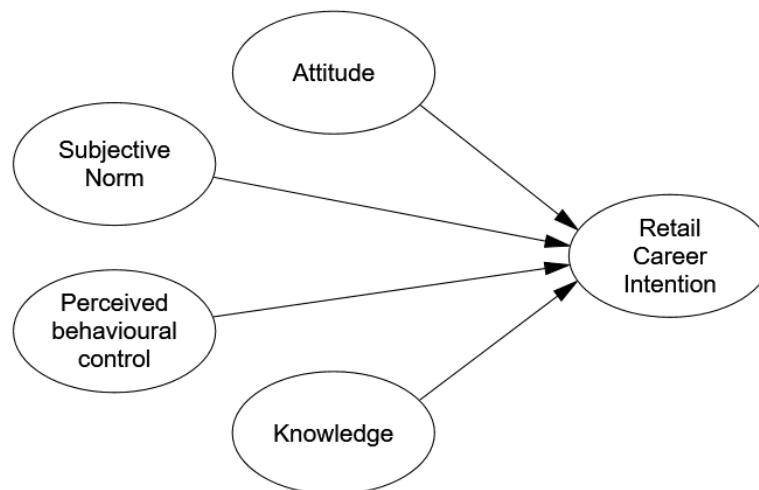


Figure 2. Proposed conceptual model

The first component of TPB is attitude. It is defined as an individual’s subjective assessment of the consequences of performing a certain behavior, which determines whether an individual likes or dislikes some particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudes develop reasonably from the beliefs people hold about the objects of the attitudes

(Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). “In the case of attitude towards a behavior, each belief links the behavior to a certain outcome, or to some other attribute such as the cost incurred by performing the behavior” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 191). In this study, attitude was defined as the extent to which a student makes a negative and positive evaluation of a retailing career. As has been documented in previous studies, attitude significantly determines career intention. For example, Hsu (2012) notes that there was a positive effect of internship attitude on career planning intention among hospitality management students. Wen et al. (2018) indicate that students' intentions to pursue careers in the hospitality industry were positively influenced by their attitudes. In a study involving undergraduate students in the US, Shim, Warrington, and Goldsberry (1999) found that the intrinsic aspect of retail career attitude had the greatest effect on expected retail career choice, followed by the extrinsic and lifestyle flexibility aspects of retail career attitude. Similarly, in a study conducted in Malaysia, Mokhlis (2014c) found that there was an influence of intrinsic enjoyment and lifestyle flexibility on students' intent to pursue a retail career. Based on the literature, this study postulated the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 1: Attitude positively predicts students' intent to pursue a career in retailing.***

The second component of TPB underpinning intention is subjective norm. It is defined as “the person's perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behavior in question” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 302). TPB asserts that decision makers are subject to social pressures when making important decisions, particularly when pressure comes from the people they care about. This is even more pronounced in a society characterized by a strong collectivist culture. In such society, people from birth onwards are always integrated into strong and cohesive groups, and as a result, they would pay much attention to the opinions of other group members (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, they are more likely to follow the wishes or desires of people they consider important to them (Wen, Hao, & Bu, 2015; Madhavan, Venugopalan & Sisodia, 2019). Prior studies involving subjective norm have documented significant influence of educators, parents, friends, and professionals on students' career decision (Zondag & Brink, 2017; Owen, Poynton, & Moore, 2020; Chin, Cohen, & Hora, 2020). In particular, Madhavan et al. (2019) identified the pressure and approval from family members as well as the influence of people around individuals as factors that may influence their career choice decisions. Hatane, Setiono, Setiawan, Samuel, and

Mangoting (2020) indicated the importance of learning environment which includes educators and friends in significantly influencing Indonesian students' career decision. Similarly, studies in the UK (Broadbridge, 2003b) and Malaysia (Mokhlis, 2014c) demonstrated the importance of parents, friends, or relatives working in the field, in their role as personal sources of information, in affecting students' career choice decisions. A study by Mokhlis (2015) highlighted the influence of personal referents on retail career preferences among business students. Thus, the following hypothesis was put forth:

***Hypothesis 2: Subjective norms positively predicts students' intent to pursue a career in retailing.***

The third TPB component, perceived behavioral control (PBC), is the extent to which people judge their ability to act upon a particular behavior and the various beliefs associated with the presence of factors that can either nurture or hinder the effect of this behavior (Ajzen, 1991). TPB posits that PBC plays a dual role, first shaping intentions and then, once these intentions are formed, interacting with them to jointly affect behavior. However, one's ability to perform specific behavior and to control its consequences may be affected by one's actual and perceived personal inadequacies as well as external obstacles. Thus, individuals typically choose to perform behaviors that they believe they will be able to control and master. As indicated in many previous studies, PBC can have a significant impact on career intention. For example, Wen et al. (2018) found that PBC positively affect students' career intentions in accounting. Hsu (2012) notes the positive effect of internship PBC on career planning intention among hospitality management students in Taiwan. Similar results were also found in a study by Wen, Leung, Li, and Kwon (2018) among hospitality students in China. Therefore, applying TPB in the career choice context, H3 was proposed as follows:

***Hypothesis 3: Perceived behavioral control positively predicts students' intent to pursue a career in retailing.***

TPB assumes that people make informed, considered decisions in regard to targeted behavior, which are influenced by various antecedents. One important antecedent is the level of knowledge that people have about the targeted behavior, as knowledge is needed to make truly informed decisions. In general, greater knowledge will directly provide a greater awareness about the existence of such a professional career choice, making the students' intention to pursue a career in retailing more credible. A



direct relationship between knowledge and career intentions has been indicated in previous empirical studies. For instance, Yusoff, Omar, Awang, Yusoff, and Jusoff (2011) found a significant relationship between knowledge about professional accounting background and students' career choice to become public accountants. Farani et al. (2017) demonstrate the influence of entrepreneurial knowledge on Iranian students' career intentions to start new digital businesses. In the field of marketing, studies indicate that students who had completed a retail course were significantly more likely to be favorable towards retailing as a career (Swinyard, 1981; Swinyard et al., 1991; Broadbridge, 2003a; Mokhlis, 2014d). These students perceived retailing as a more dynamic and challenging profession, with opportunities for career advancement. Studies also reported 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, 2003a; Mokhlis, 2014d). Mokhlis (2014a) notes that students who took a retail course were more likely to pursue a career in the retail sector after graduation. Specifically, among the students who had taken a retail course, 49.4% reported that they intended to pursue a career in retailing. In contrast, only 29.5% of students who had not taken a retail course reported likewise. Therefore, retail knowledge can be said to have a direct relationship with students' intention to pursue a career in retailing. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was proposed:

***Hypothesis 4: Knowledge positively predicts students' intent to pursue a career in retailing.***

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Instrument**

To validate the proposed conceptual model and test the hypothetical paths, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire was designed using multi-item scale to enable measurement of all relevant domains of the constructs. The final version, created using Google Form to enable online access, consisted of 28 questions, mostly adopted and adapted from previous studies to ensure proper alignment of the questionnaire and the context of retail career intention. Section A of the questionnaire requested respondents to furnish information regarding their demographic characteristics (gender, age, race, major, year of study, current CGPA and retail work experience). Section B asked for respondents' perceptions concerning aspects of knowledge (5 items), subjective norm (4

items), and PBC (5 items). Section C measured respondents' attitudes towards retail careers (8 items), while Section D measured respondents' intent to pursue retail careers upon graduation (5 items). All items except in Section A were measured using a six-point Likert scale. The even-point scale was used because it is known to offer the advantage of improving reliability and discrimination (Chomeya, 2010), and eliminate participants' tendency to choose the midpoint, which is only possible for them with odd-number options (Chang, 1994). The sources of measurement items are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sources of measurement items

Construct	Sample item (No. of item)	Source
Knowledge	I have got enough education in retailing for my career. (5)	Karakaya et al. (2011), Peltier et al. (2014), Cummins & Peltier, (2020), Yusoff et al. (2011)
Subjective norm	My family would think that I should pursue a career in retailing. (4)	Joshi & Kuhn (2011)
Perceived behavioral control	It's completely up to me to decide whether I will work in the retailing industry after graduation. (5)	Wen, Leung, Li, & Kwon (2018)
Attitude	Boring – Stimulating (8)	Broadbridge (2003b)
Career intention	I am determined to obtain a position in retail careers. (5)	Mbawuni & Nimako (2015), Cummins & Peltier (2020)

### Sample and Data Collection

The study's respondents comprised senior undergraduate students (in their third or fourth year of studies) enrolled in business degree programs, selected using purposive sampling method. Senior students were chosen because they were expected to relate better to the process of vocational choice. Compared to their junior counterparts, senior students would have had the most exposure to various business courses and would therefore possess a broad spectrum of intentions and attitudes towards certain careers, including those in retailing; as such, they could provide the most accurate data on their likely career choices and the factors influencing the likelihood (Mokhlis, 2014c, 2015).

Data were collected via an online survey, whereby respondents were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire created using Google Form. An invitation to participate in the survey together with the link to the online questionnaire was sent out via the WhatsApp application to students across three public universities in Malaysia. The survey was conducted over a three-week period during April 2021. Student participation in the survey was voluntary and no identifying information was collected. At the completion of the survey, a total of 316 usable responses were obtained.

## Data Analysis

The collected data were coded, then entered into the IBM SPSS version 26. The measurement and structural components of the model were examined using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) software AMOS, version 24. SEM appeared to be the best available statistical technique for testing the hypotheses, since constructs of TPB were theorized to have causal links (e.g., attitude → intention), and SEM could help examine if, and by how much, TPB exogenous variables (attitude, subjective norm, PBC and knowledge) predict TPB endogenous variable (career intention). Following the recommendation of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a sequential testing procedure was used to ensure that the measures of all constructs were valid and reliable before drawing conclusions on the relationships between these constructs. First, the measurement model was estimated by performing a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a maximum likelihood, which determined whether the manifested variables reflected the hypothesized latent variables. Then, the structural model was estimated to examine the causal relationships among the hypothesized constructs.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The summary of respondents' demographic profile is as shown in Table 2. A majority of respondents were female (76.9%). Their mean age was 23.1. They were mostly Malays (83.2%), followed by Chinese (8.9%) and Indians (4.1%). The largest number of them was enrolled in non-marketing business degree programs (63%). In terms of current academic achievement, slightly more than half of the respondents had a CGPA of between 3.00 and 3.49 (55.7%). About half of the respondents had work experience in the retail industry (50.3%).

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	73	23.1
	Female	243	76.9
Race	Malay	263	83.2
	Chinese	28	8.9
	Indian	13	4.1
	Other	12	3.8
Specialization	Marketing	117	37.0
	Non-marketing	199	63.0
CGPA	Below 2.49	6	1.9
	2.50 – 2.99	45	14.2
	3.00 – 3.49	176	55.7
	Above 3.50	89	28.2
Retail work experience	No	157	49.7
	Yes	159	50.3

### Validating the Measurement Model

To validate all measures for the structural model, a measurement model was estimated using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The 28 items developed for measurement were subjected to a CFA. The initial result revealed that some of fit indices were below the recommended threshold values. In order to improve the model's fit, the model was modified based on modification indices (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). To limit the complexity of the model, only five error terms were allowed to correlate, but within the same factor (Byrne, 2001). In addition, four of the 28 items were deleted because of low factor loadings. The results of CFA on the remaining 24 items showed acceptable fit to the data:  $\chi^2/df = 1.64$  (criteria < 3.0), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.045 (criteria < 0.05), goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.907 (criteria > 0.90), adjusted GFI (AGFI) = 0.882 (criteria > 0.80), normed fit index (NFI) = 0.933 (criteria > 0.90), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.968 (criteria > 0.90), and comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.972 (criteria > 0.90). Thus, the model had an acceptable fit to the data. The fit indices for the measurement model are as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Fit indices for the measurement model

Type of fit evaluation	Fit Index	Benchmark	Initial Model	Modified Model
Parsimonious fit	Chisq / df	< 3.0 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985)	2.131	1.640
	Absolute fit			
Incremental fit	RMSEA	< 0.05 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993)	0.060	0.045
	GFI	> 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019)	0.852	0.907
	AGFI	> 0.80 (Cole, 1987)	0.824	0.882
	NFI	> 0.90 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980)	0.896	0.933
	TLI	> 0.90 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2012)	0.935	0.968
	CFI	> 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019)	0.941	0.972

### Convergent Validity

Convergent validity shows the extent to which the indicators of a specific construct converge or share a high proportion of variance in common (Hair et al., 2019). In the current study, this validity was measured using standardized factor loadings. The significance of the standardized regression weight (standardized factor loading) estimate signified that the indicator variables were significant and representative of their latent variable. The result of CFA (Table 4) showed that the factor loadings of all the observed variables or items were adequate and corresponded to their constructs, with the values ranging from 0.640 to 0.90, well above the threshold value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019).

To assess the inter-item consistency of measurement items, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. As depicted in Table 4, all alpha values surpassed the minimum threshold value of 0.70 as suggested by Hair et al. (2019). Another measure of convergent validity is composite reliability (CR). It offers a more retrospective approach of overall reliability and estimates the consistency of the construct itself, including the stability and equivalence of the construct (Hair et al., 2019). As recommended by Hair et al. (2019), a good scale reliability is indicated by a value of 0.70 or greater. As shown in Table 4, all CR values were greater than 0.70, indicating the internal consistency of the construct.

Convergent validity can also be assessed through average variance extracted (AVE). As discussed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE assesses the amount of variance that is captured by an underlying factor in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error. The cut-off value most often used for AVE is 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019), but there are also cases where a more lenient restriction of 0.40 was suggested (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). In the current study, as shown in Table 4, AVE coefficients were above the recommended value of 0.50, except in the case of PBC. However, it is necessary to point out that AVE is quite conservative, and very often the estimates will be below 0.5 even when reliabilities are acceptable (Jiang,

Klein, & Carr, 2002). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), “on the basis of  $p_n$  (composite reliability) alone, the researcher may conclude that the convergent validity of the construct is adequate, even though more than 50% of the variance is due to error” (p. 46). Thus, on the basis that the CR of PBC was above 0.70, it can safely be concluded that the construct had adequate convergent validity.

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis

Model construct	Measurement item	Standardized loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Retail career intention (RC)	RC1	0.827	0.936	0.935	0.742
	RC2	0.852			
	RC3	0.878			
	RC4	0.879			
	RC5	0.870			
Attitude (AT)	AT1	0.783	0.923	0.920	0.658
	AT2	0.796			
	AT4	0.859			
	AT5	0.860			
	AT7	0.802			
Subjective norm (SN)	AT8	0.762	0.895	0.891	0.672
	SN1	0.753			
	SN2	0.807			
	SN3	0.811			
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	SN4	0.900	0.757	0.756	0.437
	PBC1	0.680			
	PBC2	0.653			
	PBC3	0.671			
Knowledge (KN)	PBC4	0.640	0.896	0.895	0.631
	KN1	0.765			
	KN2	0.738			
	KN3	0.854			
	KN4	0.860			
	KN6	0.747			

**Note:** Composite reliability (CA) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings) / {(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}

Average of variance extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings) / {(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}

### Discriminant Validity

The correlation matrix for the constructs is as shown in Table 5. Since all of the correlations between variables in the current study were less than 0.85, multicollinearity did not pose a problem (Kline, 2005). The diagonal elements in the correlation matrix were replaced by the square roots of the AVE. For discriminant validity to be considered adequate, these diagonal elements should be greater than the off-diagonal elements in the corresponding rows and columns (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The discriminant validity was satisfactory at the construct level in the case of all constructs, indicating that each

construct shared more variance with its items than it did with other constructs. Having achieved discriminant validity at both the item and construct levels, the constructs in the proposed research model were deemed to be adequate; thus, discriminant validity was supported.

Table 5. Discriminant validity

Construct	RC	AT	SN	PBC	KN
Retail career intention (RC)	<b>0.861</b>				
Attitude (AT)	0.769	<b>0.811</b>			
Subjective norm (SN)	0.733	0.592	<b>0.820</b>		
Perceived behavioral control (PBC)	0.486	0.601	0.425	<b>0.661</b>	
Knowledge (KN)	0.664	0.642	0.645	0.531	<b>0.794</b>

**Note:** Diagonal elements (bold) are the square roots of the AVE of each construct in the structural model. Values below the diagonal are correlation estimates.

### Testing the Structural Model

Following the validity assessment of the measurement model, the hypothesized relationships in the structural model were tested. The parameters of the structural model were estimated using SEM, and standardized solutions were produced by AMOS maximum-likelihood method, as shown in Table 6. The model was evaluated by inspecting the path coefficients ( $\beta$  weights) which outline the quality of association among the constructs. In the model, the first hypothesis (H1) predicted that attitude positively influences career intention, and the hypothesis was supported ( $\beta = 0.519$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The second hypothesis predicted that subjective norm positively influences career intention (H2), and this hypothesis was supported ( $\beta = 0.336$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). H3 predicted that PBC positively influence career intention. However, based on the results, this hypothesis was not supported ( $\beta = -0.095$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Finally, H4 predicted that knowledge has a positive influence on career intention, and this hypothesis was supported ( $\beta = 0.385$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, only H1, H2 and H4 were supported while H3 was not. As for the relative significance of each exogenous construct in predicting retail career intention, the results indicate that the most significant was attitude, followed by subjective norm and knowledge. The independent (exogenous) factors explained a large percentage of the variance in the dependent factor. This was indicated by the career intention (endogenous) variable's  $R^2$  value of 0.76

Table 6. Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path weight ( $\beta$ )	Critical Ratio	p	Result
H1	AT $\rightarrow$ RC	0.519	6.951	< 0.001	Supported
H2	SN $\rightarrow$ RC	0.336	5.481	< 0.001	Supported
H3	PBC $\rightarrow$ RC	-0.095	-1.337	n.s.	Not supported
H4	KN $\rightarrow$ RC	0.385	5.816	< 0.001	Supported

Note: AT: Attitude; SN: Subjective Norm; PBC: Perceived Behavioral Control; KN: Knowledge; RC: Retail Career Intention.

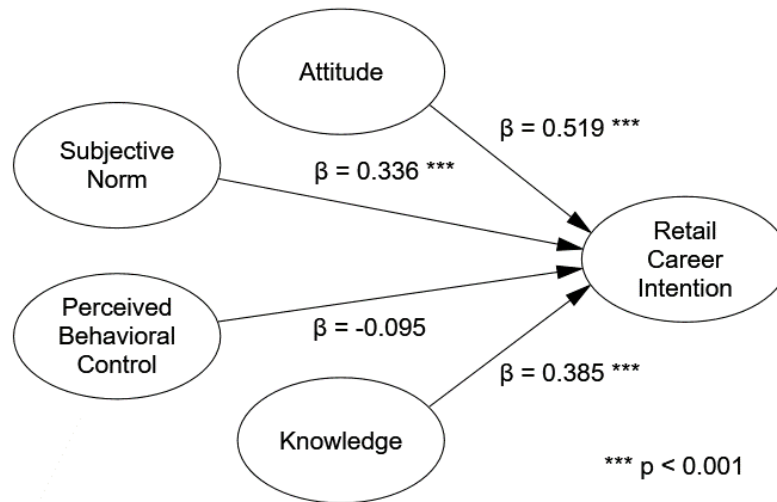


Figure 3. Path model estimates for the hypothesized relationship

## DISCUSSION

Despite considerable studies having been conducted to understand students' perceptions and expectations of retail careers, to the best of our knowledge, none of these studies whether in Malaysia or other countries has applied the TPB model for the purpose. Therefore, this paper aimed to fill the void by applying TPB to examine the key predictors underlying Malaysian students' intention to pursue a career in retailing. The data were collected from a sample of 316 senior business students at three public universities in Malaysia and analyzed using AMOS SEM. The results showed that the key predictors are attitude (H1), subjective norm (H2), and knowledge (H4), as they significantly influenced behavioral intention to pursue a retail career. Meanwhile, PBC (H3) had no influence and thus is not considered as predictor. Overall, the four exogenous variables contributed about 76 percent of the variance in career intention, higher than the range explained by similar variables in most TPB studies (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Based on this study,



TPB has demonstrated its potential usefulness as a career-choice model to explain and predict students' intent to pursue retail careers.

It has been understood from the findings that the utmost predictor of students' intent to pursue a retail career is attitude. As revealed by the examination of path coefficient, attitude influenced students' intention to pursue retail career the most. This finding corroborates those of Shim et al. (1999) and Mokhlis (2014c), indicating that students' attitudes are one of the major factors affecting their retail career choice. Those with high positive attitudes regarding a career in retailing tend to have greater intent to pursue such career.

Next, the finding provides important evidence that subjective norm also predicts retail career intention. Based on the examination of path coefficient, subjective norm's impact on retail career intention was moderate. This finding is inconsistent with that by Armitage and Conner (2001), who reported that subjective norm was most often the weakest construct among TPB's original constructs responsible for supporting variations in behavioral intention. This finding can be attributed to the characteristic of the study sample, which comprised Malaysians, who are basically collectivists in terms of their social relations. In a collectivistic culture, people have a tendency to see themselves as interdependent with their group and tend to strive for in-group rather than personal goals. Hence, great importance is attached to the views of significant figures and people pay little attention to their own abilities (Husted & Allen, 2008). This cultural characteristic transfers into their career decision-making, reflecting their reliance on referral groups for social support and structured guidance to navigate career options.

Furthermore, this study also found significant relationship between knowledge and retail career intention, which is consistent with the argument of Yusoff et.al (2011) regarding the role of knowledge in career choice decisions. The result implies that students possessing retail-related knowledge are more inclined to pursue a career in retailing. Awareness of the occupational roles and knowledge associated with the intended career has significant influence on students' career aspirations. As shown in previous studies, students with retail knowledge and skills, primarily gained through undertaking a retail course, were significantly more likely to rate the appeal of retailing as a career favorably (Swinyard et al., 1991; Broadbridge, 2003a; Mokhlis, 2014d) and have greater intention to pursue a career in retailing than those without (Mokhlis, 2014a).

Surprisingly, PBC was not a significant predictor of retail career intention, as was initially expected. This could be attributed to PBC's inability to motivate students to

pursue a retail career on its own. In previous studies, findings regarding the influence of PBC on career intention have been conflicting. While PBC has been reported to significantly influence students' intent to pursue careers in accounting (Wen et al., 2015), hospitality (Wen, Leung, Li, & Kwon, 2018), and entrepreneurship (Farani et al., 2017; Song et al., 2021), it failed to do likewise in a number of other studies (e.g., Ferreira, Raposo, Rodrigues, Dinis, & do Paço, 2012; Agu, 2021). One possible explanation for the conflicting results across studies is that the underlying TPB model performs differently depending on the population being studied, the setting, and how constructs are measured. This is in line with the assertions of Ajzen (2005) who argue that the antecedents of behavior can vary considerably and sometimes even be non-significant depending on situational context. According to Ajzen (2005), there is nothing to suggest that all three components in TPB will make strong, or indeed significant, contributions to prediction of intention, and the relative importance of the three factors is likely to vary across behaviors and populations. Even if the factors were measured with high and equal reliability, they may still end up being low predictors of a particular behavior for a particular population being studied (Ajzen, 2005). This means that there are certain contexts, such as in this study, where attitude and subjective norms were powerful predictors of career intention, but PBC was not.

Another plausible explanation for lack of PBC influence in this study is related to students' perceptions of personal control over their career choice. Students' perceived inability to handle situations of potential barriers, such as job market and economic condition, might contribute to their uncertainty about their future career in retail sector. Most likely, their uncertainty was at its highest at the time data for this study were collected, which was during the COVID-19 crisis and mandatory nationwide lockdown. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has been very profound, causing sudden disruptions or temporary closures of many parts of the service sector, the hotel and restaurant sector, the tourism sector, and most of the retail sector. As young adults are known to be more anxious about their careers (Campagna & Curtis, 2007; Mojgan, Kadir, Noah, Hassan, & Soheil, 2011), the unpredictable future of many business sectors caused by COVID-19 crisis, to some extent, may result in a 'career shock' among students (Akkermans, Richardson, & Kraimer, 2020), weakening their perceived ability to control their future career plans. Simply put, under conditions of high uncertainty where future environment is unpredictable and everything is in a state of flux, PBC exerts little influence on career intention.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND THE RETAIL INDUSTRY

This study enables educators and industry practitioners to have a clearer understanding of factors influencing students' intent to pursue retail career. Based on the findings, educators and the retail industry can develop more effective activities focusing on the key factors.

1. Educators can better manage and stabilize students' positive attitudes by providing additional learning support material, online forums, and interesting videos to help explain retailing concepts. Their efforts are likely to succeed as educators are perceived as the social group students refer to most often in shaping their attitudes toward the career in retailing.
2. Educators can also invite successful alumni currently working in the retail sector to share with students their working experience, the benefits of working in retailing, and the usefulness of having a strong marketing foundation as they progress into more challenging future retail careers. The role of alumni is important, as this study has revealed that friends and classmates are the social group students refer to the most when deciding to pursue a career in retailing.
3. Educators can adopt active learning approaches in the classroom, such as role-playing or case analysis, to develop job-specific competencies. In addition, educators can introduce experiential learning in the forms of fieldtrips and guest presentations by retail managers, which can assist in helping students visualize the relevance of retail knowledge in an actual environment.
4. Industry professionals can work with educators to provide students with industry-mentoring support. Mentoring programs prove helpful to students when they need professional opinions regarding their career planning processes (Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor, & Detwiler, 2014). Through this program, students can get up-to-date career information, by developing and maintaining industry relationships. At the same time, educators may advise students to sign up for a university/faculty internship program at the retail environments to keep abreast of the constantly evolving industry.
5. Retail recruiters can influence students' aspirations by explaining realistic job responsibilities and career opportunities to students at career fairs (networking events), campus visits, and interviews. This information may help students learn

more about the working environment in the industry and therefore form better perceptions of retailing careers.

## LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Despite producing favorable findings, this study had several limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, this study utilized the basic TPB model, with three original constructs plus knowledge included as additional construct, to predict students' retail career intention. Although the four exogenous variables in combination accounted for a considerable portion of variance in intention to pursue a retail career, there was still variance left unexplained. This indicates the possibility that there are other factors beside the TPB variables that predict retail career intention. Thus, future studies are encouraged to include additional explanatory variables as well as explore specific underlying contributors in each factor.

Second, this study was limited to only measuring students' intent to pursue a retail career, not the actual behavior. Although past findings have confirmed that intention to act is positively associated with behavior, and behavioral intentions can thus be used as proxy measures of behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001), future studies should incorporate longitudinal investigation in order to establish the empirical link between students' retail career intention and their actual behavior (i.e., working and staying in the retailing industry after graduation).

Third, this study's respondents were undergraduate business students who were purposively selected from three public universities in Malaysia; as such, generalizability of the results is limited. Given that Malaysia has twenty public universities, polytechnics, and many private higher educational institutions, the results are only applicable to those students in business studies. To increase generalizability, future studies may wish to include students from a diverse array of majors across the country.

Finally, this study's data were collected during the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Studies conducted during pandemic, according to Fell et al. (2020), may be vulnerable to threats to internal and external validity. Furthermore, these studies may not be able to precisely apply and measure the employed theories. Therefore, to overcome these issues, future studies may need to replicate the current study in post pandemic times. To begin with, successful replications increase the power to create precision in the application and measurement of the theory, allowing researchers to continue to trust the

replicated theory as a reasonable explanation of behavior or to further develop theory in a meaningful way (Morrison, Matuszek, & Self, 2010). Thus, a replication of the current study in a different circumstance may allow the TPB model to be applied and measured more precisely. Next, a replication of the current study allows the robustness of the findings over time to be demonstrated. The extent to which the findings of the replicated study have changed may indicate whether or not students' intention to pursue a retail career is more or less affected by the pandemic, and the different findings may be calibrated to obtain a truer picture of the research outcome (Fell et al., 2020).

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