Research and Development for Thai Youth on Appropriate Consumption Behavior[1]

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Introduction

At the present, the Thai society faces many crises derived from the 1996 - 1997 economic failure. Currently, the number of unemployed is increasing and wages are decreasing for some groups of private employees. One way to help this situation is to adjust people's consumption behaviors, for example, reducing luxurious spending, and providing more of social benefits.

The economy of Thailand had boomed for some years. There was a belief at that time, that the economy was good but there were nevertheless, many individual and collective social problems. Taking into consideration these problems, the government drew up the Eighth Plan for National Economic and Social Development (1997 - 2001) with an emphasis on human development. Until 1996, the country was definitely in a situation of economic crisis. Then it was realized that the good - looking situation was in fact due to a bubble economy. This bubble collapsed in 1997 and Thailand had to borrow money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The causes of the economic crises came from both outside and inside the country. The outside factors were uncontrollable. The inside factors included individuals such as businessmen, politicians, and the general populace; and relevant sectors such as finance and the government. These inside factors should be analyzed and understood to insure the country's economic safety in the future.

The inside factors mentioned ealier can be seen as cultural disparity (Smelser, 1998, p.385-387; Gelles and Levine, 1995, p.104). This phenomenon happens when the material culture (technological innovation) changes more rapidly than the non-material one (belief and value in social institutions). When the two cultures change at a different rate, problems occur. For example, accelerated free trade and financial systems lead to the flow of goods and money into the country. However, the government does not prepare an appropriate receiving system and the Thai people are not prepared to face this free trade system. Many Thai people are not well adjusted. They become lovers of consumption. The people consume with greed and with no consideration of real needs. The gradual increase of materialism led the country to its economic fall.

A consumer society occurs when producers and service providers manage to stimulate e.g. by advertising through mass media, people until they cannot refrain from desiring more and more (Baudrillard, 1998). This builds up new social divisions by using goods, such as watches, handbags, clothes, and cars, as symbols indicating new statuses in the society. The real function of a watch is to tell the time, not to indicate social status. Such

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discriminations may even be based on brands and prices. The same is true for other goods. This means that the people in this kind of society emphasize false values of accessories rather than true values. (Prathepwetee, 1992, p. 79-81)

The researchers consider this continuing crisis situation as being a good opportunity to introduce new beliefs and values with an emphasis on appropriate consumption. This means developing a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions in consuming so that wisdom rather than greed prevail. Therefore, this study works on developing a mental culture for Thai people so that they have a good and sustainable quality of life, and be readied for rapid changes in material culture.

Objectives

This study aims to restore the country from the lesson resulting from the 1997 economic crisis, by developing a sustainable quality of life, that will become a kind of immunity for the Thai society and prevent its collapse in the future. To be more specific, the followings are the objectives of this study:

1. To analyze the relationships among important variables and an appropriate consumption behavior in order to find the probable variables facilitating or obstructing such behavior.

2. To develop Thai youth thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to responsible consumption.

Significance of the study

When this study has been done, Thai youth and involved people will receive the following benefits.

1. The thought patterns, mindsets or feelings, and behaviors related to consumption of Thai youth will be developed.

2. Training packages for development of the youth in appropriate consumption behaviors will be available for use.

3. The youth developers and related organizations can use these packages for the development of youth, for a higher quality of life. This builds up immunity in the youth for the future.

Important Factors Supporting or Impeding a Person's Appropriate Consumption Behavior

From a literature review, we identified 4 groups of factors that support or impede a person's appropriate consumption behavior (BEH). These are 1) analytical thinking, 2) self-control, 3) social responsibility, and 4) situation, for example, a role model in the family and friends. The fourth variable comes from outside and is difficult to control for. The remaining 3 variables can be enhanced within the person and lead to self-control behavior. Therefore, the first three variables were selected for training in this research.

After thorough analyses and syntheses of theses and previous research studies, the researchers decided to use the following variables in the survey stage: Analytical thinking (YONI), Self-control (SC), Attitude toward appropriate consumption behavior (ATT), Social responsibility (MOR), Experience from family (FAM), and Relationship with friend (FRI)

Definition and Measure

1. Appropriate consumption behavior (BEH) means a person's selection, through analytical thinking and decision-making, of using personal accessories, money, time, and public facilities or natural resources, to develop quality of life in the individual and in society. This variable is measured by the 27 rating scale items, with an alpha coefficient of .76 for the whole scale.

2. Appropriate consumption behavior intention (BINT) means the readiness or intention of a person to consume appropriately. This variable is measured by the 10 rating scale items, and the coefficient α is .79 for the whole scale.

3. Analytical thinking or Yonisomanasikarn (YONI) means thinking in analytic, systematic, and right way, not viewing things only at their surface. This variable is measured by the 30 multiple choice items, and the whole scale has $\alpha = .57$.

4. Self-control (SC) means a person's ability to control his/her thinking, feeling, and action (or action tendency) so as to go in a desirable direction, with the realization of consequences to oneself, society, and the nation. This variable is measured by 16 rating scale items, and the whole scale has $\alpha = .73$.

5. Attitude towards appropriate consumption behavior (ATT) means a person's perception, thought, and evaluation of consuming things. It is measured by 15 items, and the whole scale has $\alpha = .74$.

6. Social responsibility (MOR) means a person's intention to do something for the public interest. This variable is measured by using Moral Reasoning Scale that has α coefficient of .70.

7. Experience from family (FAM) means consumption socialization from his/her family. This variable is measured by a 20-item scale that has $\alpha = .79$.

8. Friend influence (FRI) means the extent to which friends can dominate the youth's appropriate consumption behavior. This variable is measured by using a 14-item scale that has $\alpha = .73$.

Method

Procedure. The first stage of research was an investigation of the relationships between the selected variables, and then an examination of factors that tend to support or impede appropriate consumption behavior. The second stage was an experiment to test the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables. There were 2 experimental factors (independent variables), namely attitude and thinking training and self-control training. The appropriate consumption behavior and the intention to appropriately consume were the two dependent variables that were expected to be affected by the experimental treatment.

Participants. There were two sample groups in this study, one for each stage of the research. The first group used for the investigation consisted of 686 undergraduate university students. The second group, used for the experiment, consisted of 41 first year university students.

Measures. Eight scales measuring the eight variables mentioned above were used, the participants biographic data were also collected

Analysis. The survey data were analyzed by using Pearson Product Moment correlation and Multiple Regression. The experimental data were analyzed by using MANCOVA and repeated measure MANOVA.

Results

The Investigation Survey

Of 686 students that were investigated, 370 students were from 3 public universities and 316 students were from 3 private universities. Two hundred and ten students (30.6 %) were male, 476 (69.4 %) were female. The average age was 20.82 years and their average grade was 2.82.

The places where the students live are ranked from most to least: 366 students (49.0 %) lived with parents, 157 students (22.9 %) lived in a dormitory, 132 students (19.2 %) lived in a condominium or an apartment, 55 students (8.0 %) lived with relatives, and 4 students (0.6) lived in houses with friends. There were 2 missing values.

From the responses, it appears that there were a variety of sources for the money that the students received. These were; from parents, other guardians, their own work, and government loans. The average spending money in one month ranged from approximately Baht 3,000 to Baht14,000.

To the question that if the money received in each month is enough, 465 students (67.8 %) answered yes, 123 students said no, and 9 students did not answer this item.

As for the prediction of the BEH, the 6 variables that were used as independent (or predictor) variables. They were YONI, SC, ATT, MOR, FAM, and FRI.

It is clearly found that the FRI ($r = .595^{**}$), SC ($r = .573^{**}$), and ATT ($r = .537^{**}$) correlated highly with the BEH. The rest of the variables correlated moderately with the BEH: FAM ($r = .481^{**}$), YONI ($r = .400^{**}$) and MOR ($r = .152^{**}$)

In addition, among the 6 predictors, SC is the most important ($\beta = .326$), and FRI is the second in importance. Since the SC can be manipulated in an experiment, FRI depends on the situation in real life, the SC was included in the second phase of the study as an independent variable or a treatment factor.

The Experimental Stage

The variables. There were two treatments (independent variables) in this experiment: The self-control training and the attitude and thinking training. Each of the treatments was divided into two levels: training and no training. The content of the second factor consisted of two main elements: attitude change and training for analytical thinking or Yonisomanasikarn.

The dependent variables were the appropriate consumption behavior (BEH) and the intention of the behavior (BINT).

The experimental design. The experiment was 2×2 completely randomized factorial design. The 60 volunteer students were randomly assigned to each of the four treatment groups (cells).

Participants. The participants were the first year students in Srinakharinvirot University, at Ongkarak campus, who applied to the project. They were students from three faculties: Education (General Science), Social Science (Community Development), and Engineering. At the preparation stage, 60 students applied to project, but only 52 students came to participate. Only 41 students completed the activities of the project.

In the experimental group. The activities and the time of application are as follows.

1. The self-control training was given on one Sunday.
2. The attitude change and analytical thinking training sessions were given on the following Saturday and Sunday.

All activities were conducted at Ongkarak campus, where the students' dormitory was situated.

Experimental Training Package and administration. There were three training packages . The first one was the self-control training, the second was the attitude change training, and the third was the analytical thinking training.

The treatments were administered by the research team and student assistants on two consecutive weekends. After the treatments each student was given a self-record form for use in the one month self-practice period.

Activities in the control group. The recreation activities, both indoor and outdoor, were given to the control group students, in parallel to the experimental group. These activities were expected to develop group cooperation among the participants.

The Measurement of the variables. Three variables in this study were measured just before and immediately after the experiment. These are self-control (SC), attitude towards appropriate consumption behavior (ATT), and analytical thinking (YONI). The dependent variables, the appropriate consumption behavior (BEH) and the intention behavior of appropriate consumption (BINT), were measured after the self-practice period (one month after the experiment). Therefore the symbols POBEH and POBINT were used in the analysis.

Hypothesis. It was hypothesized that

(1) The participants who receive both trainings would have higher BEH and BINT than others.

(2) The posttest scores of the ATT, SC, and YONI variables, would be higher than the corresponding pretest scores.

Results of data analyses from the experiment

The experimental data were analyzed to answer two questions. The first question concerned the effect of the treatments on the appropriate consumption behavior (POBEH) and on the intention (POBINT). The second question was to test the treatment effect on the SC, ATT, and YONI, which were measured two times.

The data were analyzed by using 2×2 factorial multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) with POBEH and POBINT as dependent variables and PESC as the covariate.

The 2×2 factorial MANCOVA indicated that the interaction effect was significant at the .05 level. However, pairwise-comparisons, using Bryant-Paulson Simultaneous test (Kirk, 1995, p.735 ; Stevens, 1996, p.342) show no significant difference. The largest difference found between the control group that was in SC training and no SC training. The result does not confirm the hypothesis.

The repeated measure MANOVA revealed that the interaction effects were significant at the .05 level for the experimental and control groups that were measured at different times.

The computed confidence intervals indicated that, for the SC variable, the posttest score was significantly higher than the pretest score in the control group. Besides, the posttest score of SC in the control group was significantly higher than that of experimental group.

Conclusion and discussion

Conclusion. There was no significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, for both dependent variables - the appropriate consumption behavior (BEH) and the behavior intention (BINT). Interestingly, for the control group, the behavioral intention was clearly higher, but not significant, for the group that received the self-control training, compared to the group that received no training at all. Moreover, in the control group, it was found that only one repeated measure variable, SC had increased significantly , after the treatment. Also the SC score for the control group was significantly higher than that of the experimental group.

Discussion. The clear but not significant difference found, for the BINT variable, in the two sub-groups of the control group indicates that the behavior intention can be changed in a short time. However, actual behavior change needs a longer time. Although the BEH was measured one month after the treatment session, that the students were allowed self-practice in the meantime. There was no stimulating supportive activity during the self-practice period. The previous experimental research found significant effects on the cognitive-dependent variables, such as moral reasoning (Somsakun, 2000), and self-analysis (Buakien, 1997). The behavioral intention used in the current study is also a cognitive variable. On the other hand, a significant relationships between self-control and some specific behaviors have been found in the first phase of the current study and the other survey research, for example, Pichitanon, (2003).

This study shows the effectiveness of the self-control training towards the BINT variable. This training, in addition to suggesting ways for self-control, used the content and examples that concern the appropriate consumption. So it probably led to the students' thought of appropriate consumption. However, when both factors, the self-control training and the attitude and thinking training, were used in the experimental group, the reversed effect appeared. That is, the BINT score mean of the group that received both training sessions was lower than the group that received only the attitude and thinking training. This difference is almost at the significance level of .05. Further study is needed to confirm that one training session is more effective than two.

The final point of the results is that the SC score was increased significantly after all training sessions. This shows the effectiveness of both treatments and is in accordance with the previous research, such as that by Panjan (1998). The insignificant increment of the ATT variable may be caused by the rather high pretest scores of this variable.

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