INDIVIDUAL GREEN CONSIDERATION MODEL: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT
The need for green marketing arises due to the concerns of the adverse effects on the environment caused by conventional consumption. However, there is a lack of related green underline models and theories which can be used to study the green consumer behavior exclusively. Thus, this study proposed an individual green consideration model comprising of a green element to understand the consumer green behavior better. A total of four primary sub-constructs were introduced in the model. Namely, personal attitude, perceived social pressure, perceived autonomy, and perceived green trust. Besides, greenwashing was incorporated into the model to examine the potential moderator effects of negativity towards green product purchase intention. Organic food products were purposely selected as the study instead of green products in general so that a thorough understanding of the model could be developed. The proposed model can be used to assist in better development of the green markets in the country.
Key words: Green marketing, Green consideration model, Green trust, Greenwashing, and Organic food


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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aimed to group critical variables which could affect green consumer decision into an ordinary model of green consumption. The relevancy of the constructs was to be grouped according to an extensive literature and well-established theories analysis associated with consumer purchase behavior. The proposed model can be used in studies related to green consumerism, green marketing, and green products, where environmental considerations are vital elements in the decision process. Organic food products were purposely chosen as the study context, instead of green products in general, which comprise various products and services. So, a thorough understanding of the model could be developed.

A huge sum that should instead be used for the community development initiatives needs to be allocated for solid waste handling yearly. The total global solid waste generation is expected to be doubled from 3.5 million tons per day in the year 2010 to 6.0 million per day in the year 2025, incurring an increase of 375 billion US Dollars in handling costs (1). A conventional consumption of food products causes a gigantic deteriorating of the environment as well as critical resources. A high amount of ecological price needs to be paid by the business due to the rapid economic growth which jeopardizes the environment (2). Hence, an individual role in preserving and protecting the environment from further life-threatening devastation is vital.

Green marketing has been introduced as early as 1970 to reduce the negative environmental impacts caused by unintentional marketing activities that promote unsustainable consumption (3). Green marketing, concern with all related activities which have served to help the cause of the environmental problems and which may serve to provide a remedy for the ecological issues (4,5).

The environmental problem has resulted in the rise of eco-consumerism that can be seen through increased consumption of green products and services yearly, including organic food (6,7). Indeed, more and more consumers are concerned about the issues of food safety, nutrition, additives contained in food, and the environmental sustainability issue (8,9). However, the organic food industry in Asia, such as Malaysia, is still in its infancy, and it remains a niche market (1,10). Although many Asian countries are producers and exporters of organic food for the global market, their local consumption has been very low compared to the global trend and demand for organic food (11). The lack of information about local consumer perception and purchase behavior (12), could potentially undermine market attractiveness due to business risk, profitability, and sustainability factors (1). Hence, the organic food market becomes less attractive compared to the conventional food market among local market players. This is further worsened by the limited information on how to capture and promote the organic food market, which hampers the growth of this market (1).

Therefore, it is critical to understand consumer green consideration that could potentially influence purchase intention of organic food in terms of adapting and responding to green consumerism, based on well-established theories. The objectives of this conceptual study are as follows.
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- To identify related constructs of individual green consideration.
- To develop a model to be applied in a consumer green-related study.

2. RESEARCH ISSUE
Previous studies related to green consumer behavior mainly focused on the general theories (such as theory of planned behavior (TPB), and theory of reasoned action (TRA)) to explain the relationships of green consumerism behavior. The general nature of these theories has made it challenging to predict green consumer behavior optimally. General measurement tools are probably unable to tap and identify valuable relationships in the green consumerism aspect that will lead to a general conclusion being made alike conventional consumerism.

A specific construct to examine green consumerism in the area of consumer behavior study is vital as it is related to a different underlying antecedent. Indeed, to tap into the green market, the critical development of an appropriate model is required to assist in marketing research to understand the green behavior perspective thoroughly. As the green consumerism subject is relatively new, especially in non-Europe countries such as Asia and Africa continents, a specific model comprising relevant constructs based on previous well-established theories will be very helpful for a marketing campaign and communication purposes. This is supported by recent studies on green consumer behavior (13,14). The lack of information about consumer perception and green food purchase behavior (14), which has resulted in market attractiveness being undermined due to business risk, profitability, and sustainability factors (1), has made this present study even more urgent to be conducted.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW
3.1. Underpinning Theory
TPB was originated from TRA, and it is used to guide in understanding consumer behavior structure and the potential element of the variables that may have effects on the causal relationship between attitude, subjective norm, and purchase behavior (13). It applies a concept of behavioral disposition, including social attitude, in an attempt to predict and justify human behavior as humans, typically and sensibly, taking into consideration the information as well as the consequence of the behavior to be made (15,16). TPB is more comprehensive as it takes into consideration individual personal factor and the control he or she has in terms of self-evidence, including resources, available opportunities as well as obstacles. The tendency of specific behavior to be taken will increase with a positively perceived behavioral control factor. However, to contribute towards more accuracy in predicting potential variables affecting consumer behavior in the green marketing field, a new model and a new theory should be developed by taking into account green factors, as supported by previous researchers (13,14).

3.2. Individual Green Consideration Construct
3.2.1 Personal Attitude
Personal attitude is defined as an individual psychological state of evaluating, which will draw individual favorable and unfavorable judgments. It is formed over a specific belief of the individual mind about the possible actions to be performed (17). Attitudes of individuals vary, according to the factors shaping the attitudes, including personal values, experiences, and personalities. Therefore, personal attitude is the strongest individual control factor of specific decisions to be performed as it is associated with the behavior or outcomes of an individual with reasoning towards the particular actions taken.
Attitude is the most reliable antecedent towards buying intention as the consumers are well exposed with the necessary information, besides having a previous positive experience (18,19). The finding is also in agreement with those of other researchers, where consumers’ positive attitude towards organic food consumption has significant impacts on the buying intention of organic food (6,19,20). Moreover, the trustworthiness of individuals on organic food is influenced by their positive attitude as they categorize themselves as organic consumers (7,21).

The finding supported the hypothesis of the newly-developed model that, the personal attitude has a positive relationship with purchase intention. In this model, the personal attitude was used as a variable, although previous studies regularly used attitude in general on organic food behavior studies (6,7,20). A specific dimension of attitude was suggested to be used to decisively predict a specific behavior since a general attitude is generally unable to do this (22,23).

3.2.2. Perceived Social Pressure

Perceived social pressure is the pressure which an individual feels caused by the society that affects his or her judgment to perform or not to perform a specific action. The behavioral intention of an individual is not merely shaped by the attitude and belief, but also by the perceived social pressure that reflects a social influence determinant of intention (17). The intention to perform will be higher if the perceived social pressure is higher and vice versa. Besides, the cultural effect of society largely affects the perceived social pressure (19). The conformity factor will somehow affect the degree of perceived social pressure of an individual, especially in a country with a robust social setting. Individuals are considered to be socially desirable, and they would like to have a positive impact on their social identity to society. Thus, buying intention can function as a latent variable and enhance the process of predicting the real purchase behavior of consumers from a perceived social pressure viewpoint (6).

Previous studies found a significant relationship between subjective norm and buying intention of organic food (6,9,19,24). However, another study on predicting green product consumption found a contradicting finding. There was no significant relationship between subjective norm and buying intention of green products, although attitude and perceived behavioral were significant (25).

Besides, the demographic factor of the respondents, including age, educational background, income, and urbanization, also affects the relationship between subjective norm and purchase intention. The points highlighted before, theoretically explains the insignificant finding of the previous study, conducted in a country with a collectivist culture (25). Somehow, purchasing organic food is more related to individual choice rather than the adopted social norm (26). Beyond any doubt, perceived social pressure is a crucial factor to study, because it is associated with the influence of others on individual behavior.

3.2.3. Perceived Autonomy

Perceived autonomy is the extension to predict behavior more accurately based on the human states, which somehow have limited control. It is known as an incomplete volitional control, comparable with the perceived behavioral control in TPB. Perceived autonomy is the degree of how individuals feel that they are capable of performing a specific behavior with necessary skills as well as having a control (autonomy) over themselves. Individual performance of the behavior, to some extent, is influenced by the non-motivational factors, such as the availability of resources and opportunities, including the exogenous variables that have direct and indirect effects on the actual behavior (27). The execution of specific behavior
collectively depends on intention (motivation), and the behavioral control (individual autonomy factors), as suggested by social perception and phenomenal causality theory (28).

Previous studies found a significant relationship between perceived autonomy and purchase intention of organic food (6,7,19,29). Indeed, perceived autonomy is mainly caused by individual rather than societal factors. The more autonomy an individual has on his or her decision, the more likely he or she will have an intention to purchase organic food. However, there is a contradiction highlighted from a study in Pakistan, which found an insignificant relationship between perceived behavioral control and purchase intention of organic food (30). The finding is somewhat unexpected as the attitude and subjective norm variables of the study were found to be significant. However, the study setting and respondents theoretically justify the result as the majority of the respondents were students with limited purchasing power.

Moreover, external factors, including availability, visibility, and accessibility of organic food, may also potentially influence the relationship between perceived autonomy and purchase intention. Thus, it should be considered intensively. This is supported by a previous study that showed a significant correlation between the availability of organic food and the willingness to pay for organic food (31). In conclusion, it is crucial for individual control factors such as perceived autonomy to be studied as it influences the intention and real control of a consumer over himself or herself, which may affect the performance of behavior (16,17,23)

3.2.4. Perceived Green Trust

Trust is considered as a predictive element that explains individual purchase intention and behavior (32). Green personal trust is mainly focused on the individual perspective rather than system trust (external element of trust from the suppliers, marketers, or organizations). Green personal trust is a willingness of an individual to depend on the product or service based on the belief in its credibility, performance, and ability in protecting the environment (33). Trust has an important role that influences the consumer decision-making process on food purchase (34). Perceived risk is a critical element that influences consumer trust, and it is always associated with consumer motivation in decision-making he or she is trying to reduce risks to maximize utilities in the purchase process (35). Thus, trust has an important role that influences the consumer decision-making process on food purchase (34).

A study conducted on intrinsic and extrinsic factors on green customers’ loyalty found that trust affects consumer attitude and loyalty. The positive attitude derived from a trust will have a positive impact on consumer purchase decisions and loyalty on green products (36). Indeed, loyalty is critical for the sustainability of the institution (37). Greener products are insufficient to guarantee sales even during the green era (35). Thus, trust among consumers will increase purchase intention and substantially overcome consumer confusion that forms a good relationship with the brand and fosters the development of the industry (34). Trust probably related to the self-efficacy of individuals that could influence the individual decision positively (38), and will also result in reduced perceived skepticism, thus promoting the food purchase decision (32).

3.2.5. Perceived Greenwashing

Greenwashing is purposely practiced by unethical companies to attract green consumers by highlighting the message in communication that sounds environmentally friendly but is actually ambiguous or untrue (39). Moreover, such misleading advertisement or commercial information are only meant to grab the attention of specific groups of customers seeking the benefits of consuming a particular product or service. Greenwashing is not merely on the
product image or promotion; it also includes goals, policies, philosophy, and practices of the company (40).

Greenwashing context has turned out to be a widespread phenomenon among industry players because of the potential effects on the customer purchase decision on the products. The consumer purchase decision could be affected if the consumer is aware of the existence of untrue statements or practices of irresponsible companies (41). Indeed, the greenwashing practices, undermine consumer trust and affect the attitude and brand image (42). Thus, once the consumers become aware of the greenwashing practices by irresponsible companies, their trust will be lost, potentially affecting their purchase decision and intention (41).

As the consumer skepticism is one of the negative effects of greenwashing (43), it potentially affects purchase intention and decision of the consumer. The previous study mainly focuses on direct relationships between greenwashing and purchase behavior. Studies that examined greenwashing, especially in terms of its potential moderating effect between relationships related to purchase behavior, are low in number (44).

3.2.6. Green Purchase Intention

Behavioral intention can be interpreted as individual intention to attempt a specific behavior in mind (15,16). The intention will subsequently lead to the performing of real behavior. Purchase intention is generally influenced by attitude, society, and perceived behavioral control. The interrelations between all these decent variables will determine either the intention would be performed or otherwise (16). However, it is worth noted that the intention is not an accurate measurement of real behavior as it may change over time as a result of volatility control factors, as well as external influences, including information portrayed. However, the prediction under the conditions of personal belief, attitude, perceived social pressure, and perceived autonomy control merely reflects the reduction of the accuracy of intention measurement, and it does not pose challenges of the current assumption of the intention which will lead to a specific behavior (17).

3.3. Individual Green Consideration Model

Individual Green Consideration is a construct used to measure the consumer intention of the green product in the green consideration model. There are four underlining sub-constructs established the green consideration, namely personal attitude, perceived social pressure, perceived autonomy, and perceived green trust. The sub-constructs largely a positive construct in the green behavior field as underlined by a previous consumer behavior model. Yet, an additional sub-construct of perceived green trust is added to strengthen the model with an individual psychological latent influence that potentially affects the individual purchase decision. Perceived greenwashing, which may potentially affect direct relationships with purchase intention and behavior, also incorporate to develop a complete green consideration model to understand green consumerism purchase intention better. It is anticipated that the proposed conceptual model will be able to predict green consumption clearly and will be used for future studies related to green consumerism.
A study on individual purchase intention and behavior mainly relates to personal understanding and thinking; therefore, it is subject to personal perceptions that may be different between individuals (45). Thus, the ‘perceived’ terms used in the model are more accurate to be applied as the judgment of an individual heavily depends on the evaluation of the perceived quality and actual quality of products or services. Moreover, purchase intention is untainted compared to purchase behavior, and it will contribute toward better generalizability on the market for future predictions. Indeed, the real behavior stems from the intention to perform the behavior while intention might not be translated into behavior because of external and internal factors such as barriers and availability. Thus, the hypothesis development of the model as follows:

1) Individual green consideration has a significant relationship with consumer purchase intention

2) Perceived greenwashing moderates the relationships between individual green consideration and consumer green purchase intention negatively.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings made during the literature review, many studies have been conducted about green consumerism and products from a consumer behavior perspective. However, most of the studies used general consumer behavior theories, such as TRA and TPB. Whereas, green consumerism is not a conventional consumption that can be generalized. Green consumerism and green marketing involve a specific green and environmental element underlining the behavior and preferences of such intention and behavior. Currently, it is difficult to predict green consumer behavior optimally, as the general measurement tools or models are probably unable to tap and identify valuable relationships in the green consumerism aspect that will lead to a general conclusion, similarly like conventional consumerism. This is supported by a recent study on green consumer behavior (13,14). Furthermore, the lack of information about consumer perception and green food purchase behavior (12), which has resulted in undermined market attractiveness due to business risk, profitability and sustainability factors (1) has prompted for the need of this present study to be
expedited, especially in Asian and other non-Europe countries including Malaysia as the organic food industry is at the infancy stage.

Therefore, a specific conceptual model critical to be developed. The proposed individual green consideration model consists of one main construct named as the individual green consideration, comprising four subs constructs, namely personal attitude, perceived social pressure, perceived autonomy, and perceived green trust are to be tested for the purchase intention of green products. Besides, perceived greenwashing should be incorporated in the new model to fully understand the underlying reasons and potential effects in green consumerism behavior.

This conceptual model can be used for future research better to understand green consumerism behavior towards green products and services. Besides, other variables can be included to make the model more comprehensive. Individual lifestyle, such as diet style (Vegetarian, Lactose intolerance, diet, allergic, and others) and individual preferences, communication components, and other demographic variables, also should be factored in to get a more detailed overview from a consumer’s perspective. A broad understanding of a different market segment will assist in the decision-making of marketing function.

The proposed model can be used for better development of the green market in the country. It also will assist the marketers and related stakeholders in assessing risks, demand, and sustainability of the green market.

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