



# Assessment of Consumers' Religiosity Consciousness of Malaysian Green Personal Care Products

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## Abstract

Local green products are still very new for Malaysian businesses; therefore, there are only few studies that focus on consumer' purchase intention of green products. Green products are made from extracts of herbs as the main ingredient, and as such Muslim consumers have a high tendency to buy them because of their green content. Although studies have recognized religiosity consciousness as an important factor that affects the Muslims' behaviour, there is less information about its effect on the consumers' decision in buying green products. The objective of this study is to investigate the relative importance of religiosity consciousness on purchase intention of green products as religiosity consciousness has not yet been extensively investigated in explaining the consumers' intention and behaviour towards buying green products. A self-administered survey was conducted in the form of a mall intercept with 250 female consumers. This study contributes to the improvement of our understanding of consumers' green decision making and the relevant marketing strategy for the local companies in the market. Surprisingly, the results shows insignificant relationships. The finding provides evidence that consumers' buying decision of green products is not influenced by religiosity consciousness. This article also includes discussion of theoretical and management implications.

**Keywords:** Purchase Intention; Religiosity Consciousness; Organic Personal Care Products

## 1. Introduction

Recent years have observed a flourishing evolvement of organic or green products in the industry which is going to continue into the next century. This undeniable continuing innovation and creation of organic products in the personal care market has led to more and more products to be produced in this multi-million dollar beauty industry. Many of the conventional personal care products contain ingredients that have harmful effects to the skin due to some preservatives which have been proven to put the consumers in risk to get cancer and even increase pollution to the environment (1-8). The consumers who take preference over this conventional products in their purchase decision realize that they have a role to play in sustaining the environment which indicates that they are organic consumers or purchasers (9-12). Through past research, consumer personality such as religion has come between the consumers' ethical beliefs and green buying behaviour (13, 14). Religiosity is an important part of life to many individuals because the effect of religion is pronounced in their daily decision making and this affects the consumers' behavior. Religiosity, which comes under culture, has been highlighted as the core outer feature that outlines the consumption behavior of an individual (15). Many of the past literatures focused on religiosity conscious towards food rather than non-food products (16-18). Advanced researches have acknowledged that religiosity consciousness affects the consumers' decision making in shaping the kind of product and services that they consume (19-26). Religion affects the consumers' behaviour through four dimensions which are their beliefs, rituals, values and community. Religion is able to mould the consumers' values, habits and attitudes toward the product when they do purchase (27-30). There are many literatures about how religion

affects the consumer behavior (31-35). As such, no literature highlights the relationship between religiosity consciousness and purchase intention towards organic personal care product. Therefore, this novelty study is essential to examine whether religiosity consciousness could be used to further increase the ethical consumption among the Muslim and Non-Muslim consumers toward purchasing organic products produced in Malaysia.

In developing countries, studies on green products are focused more on the consumers' perception as to compare with in developed countries (36-41). Culture is an important factor affecting why and how a consumer makes a decision to purchase anything. The fact that marketing practitioners and scholars have put religion as a significant factor that can influence consumers' consumption behavior implies that marketers could then incorporate this factor when designing their marketing strategies to achieve their marketing objectives (26, 42, 43). Hence, this study aims to examine the role of religiosity consciousness in affecting the attitude of the consumers towards organic products. Empirical results of this study fill the gap in the existing literature concerning the role of religiosity consciousness on organic personal care products consumed in Asia. This would pose a new motivation to the previous findings and highlighted the organic industry on the attitudinal profiles.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Religiosity Consciousness

It has been a challenge to the scholars in defining the concept of religiosity (Guthrie, 1996) and its role (44). In this study, religiosity consciousness refers to the consumers' consciousness as to

whether the products that they buy meet their religiosity requirement. Religiosity influences the consumers' values, habits and attitudes towards a product (45). The element of religion has played an important role as a mediator in the relationship between contextual variables and the Muslim buyers' behaviours (46). The implication of this is that a company must not recklessly avoid the element of religiosity in their marketing activities and buying intentions (47), particularly when developing a product.

Religion shapes an individual's moral system and the society's ethical structures. Religiosity involves religious commitment. Religious commitment is capable of influencing the individual cognitive thinking and behavioral actions (27, 48, 49).

Customer personality, which includes demographic traits such as age, gender, religion and education, has been found to significantly affect consumers' ethical beliefs. This indicates that some dimensions of the consumers' ethical beliefs significantly predict their intention to buy green products (13). The effect of religion is not only towards buying product, but also rendering services. Religion can have a significant impact on the consumers' choice even when purchasing an indemnity service such as a car insurance (19) and a Takaful scheme (50, 51) (52, 53).

## 2.2. Organic Product

The term organic products refers to products that do not utilize pesticides or fertilizers in their production (54). There is exact definition for the word defined by the Food and Drug Association, (55), as various countries have different standards for foods to be considered as organic.

The labeling information has been given considerable attention in the marketing literature due to increasing consumer interest in health and related matters (56, 57). The word organic is described as "food guaranteed to have been produced, stored, and processed without adding synthetic fertilizers and chemicals" ((58). Products that are listed as organic are produced in line with standard rights in all areas of production and are awarded a certificate by an industrial body.

A consumer behavior theory would be a basis to help a marketers to understand how consumers make their decision-making process. A theory on consumer behavior will help the marketers to make decision on what they should do to function as effective marketers. Consumer response or feedback is very beneficial because consumers are now getting more and more complex every day.

The National Organic Program USDA (2002) defined cosmetics as follows,

"cosmetics are any substance or preparation intended to be placed in contact with various external parts of human body and with the teeth or mucous membranes of the oral cavity with a view exclusively or mainly to cleaning them, perfuming them, changing their appearance and/or for protecting them or keeping them in a good conditions."

According to the National Organic Program USDA (2002), any personal care product that is sold in the market do not to go through any test, this is because in ensuring that the personal care product and cosmetic is the responsibility of the manufacturer. This means that the products do not need to be tested by some organization. The manufacturer of the cosmetic and personal care products have the role to ensure that the products and the ingredients use in the product are safe for the consumers' use. Theory of planned behavior (TPB) is used as an underlying guide in this study. Ajzen developed this theory in 1991. This theory explains that an individual's specific behavior is determined by his or her intention. According to TPB, the consumers' behavioral intention can be predicted by their attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral controls. This study instead focuses on how religiosity consciousness affects the attitudes of consumers towards organic products.

## 2.1.1. Religiosity Consciousness in Consumer Behaviour

The influence of religion and consumer behavior, as well as consumer intention has been validated in various studies (59-62). Islam is a practical religion which has received increasing importance in today's global economy. Previous studies indicate that religion has a significant impact on attitudes and lifestyles, which later affect the consumers' decision-making behavior(63, 64). Due to past literature, which have argued about the strength of religion matters related to individual decision making, this study focuses on its effects on organic personal care products. The consumers' religious commitments and beliefs have evidently affected their feelings and attitudes towards consumption (65, 66).

## 2.1.2. Attitude and Purchase Intention

One's attitude is only one of the many factors that determine one's behaviour. This shows that attitude is important. According to Fishbein & Ajzen,(1975) a single behaviour is determined by the intention to perform the behavior in question. The person's intention is in turn a function of his attitude in performing the behaviour and of his subjective norm. Therefore, a single act is predictable from the attitude toward that act, provided that there is a high correlation between the intention and the behavior of the individual. This shows that a person's actions are systematically related to their attitudes.

A person's attitude represents his evaluation of the entity in question whether it is a person, object, behavior or a policy. Behaviour consists of one or more observable action performed by the individual either in using a product, buying a product, attending an event and so forth. In doing the behaviour, it is impossible to obtain direct measure of the behaviour in question if it is due to the individual's commitment that is they are doing it for themselves (self-report behavior).

Self-image is positively related to how consumers evaluate a product. Self-image is related to having favourable self-concepts. It will help the consumers to have an attitude formation about the products related to his or her self-image. The attitude of a person can be used to reflect one self-image about an individual (67).

Characteristic of consumer personality is another factor that influences the attitude formation of the consumers. These characteristics include pro-environment behaviors, self-esteem, private self-conscious, openness and assumed risks. Personality types and traits have impacts on the consumers' interpretation or attitude towards a product. Personality has proven to be an important characteristic of attitude building and formation (68, 69). Traits and attitudes assuredly have a lasting role in the prediction and explanation of the social behavior.

## 2.1.3. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is defined as the prospect of a future purchasing decision (70). Purchase intention is the subjective inclination consumers have towards a certain product, and it has been confirmed as a key factor in predicting consumer behavior. Therefore, consumers with high intention are assumed to have high likelihood to purchase a product (71, 72).

Purchase intention tap on the motivation of the consumers to buy product. A study on purchase intention in important to reveal the reason consumers do not consume organic products. With the remarkable rise of global organic agricultural and environmentally friendly orientation products, a study of purchase intention for organic products is important for the organic product providers. The consumer trust toward the product is important especially for buying organic product(Tung, Shih, Wei, & Chen, 2012). This suggest that purchase intention is a very effective variable factor coming from the attitude and it is useful as a basis for constructing a framework for predicting consumers' attitude towards buying organic personal care products.

The increased attentiveness on the devastation of natural reserves has indeed made the consumers now more conscious about the

environment and it has also influences the consumers to buy environmental-friendly products. For organic product retailers and manufacturers, they should view this situation an opportunity. Changing positive attitudes towards buying organic should enable them to maintain their product care in order to gratify the beliefs of many more potential consumers. Therefore, a study on purchase intention, will eventually lead to more organic products being demanded in the market. Thus, the consumers will benefit, as using organic personal care products would offer them with less harmful exposure to chemicals in the long-term.

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1. Participants and Procedure

A quantitative research design was taken through the distribution of structured self-administered questionnaires. Out of 450 questionnaires distributed to the consumers in a mall in Malaysia, a total of 250 questionnaires were successfully collected using a convenience sample yielding an effective response rate of 55 per cent. This sampling method did not allow the researcher to have any control over the respondents. They answered the questionnaires voluntarily. The population of the study comprised of individuals who had used some of the brands specified in the questionnaires in the past 3 months. The survey was carried out on female consumers, in Malay language.

#### 3.2. Questionnaire Development and Instrument

The structured close-ended questionnaire contains three sections. The first part of the questionnaire comprises information regarding the respondents' demographic profiles. The second section collects information on the respondents' attitudes towards religiosity consciousness and purchase intention toward organic personal care products. The work of past researchers were adapted as the basis in constructing the religiosity items (73, 74);(75).The items were measured on Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

#### 3.3. Data Analysis Method

Descriptive analysis such as means and standard deviation were performed via Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS). The Partial Least Square – Structural Equation (PLS-SEM) approach was supported by Smart PLS 3.0.

PLS is the method chosen to analyze the data. The PLS technique is frequently used when the sample is small. However, this is not for the case in the present study because the sample was more than 200. In any case, we have followed the instruction of using PLS method prior to starting the analysis. This includes the examination of the relationship, the effect of the standard errors and the predictive power of the model to guarantee its validity.

Table 1 displays that the factor loading of items was near to 0.7, indicating that at least 50% of the construct's variance was reflected in the items. The composite reliability always exceeds 0.7, which fulfills the value required. The average variance extracted (AVE) by each construct from its indicators should be above 0.5 indicating that 50% or more of the variance of the indicators of the items is explained. Therefore, the condition is more than satisfied in this case (55, 76, 77). Factor loading on measured items indicate that they converge to one common point of the construct. For average variance extracted (AVE), the rule of thumb is the value must be more than 0.50, suggesting the convergence validity of the construct fulfilled.

## 4. Data analysis and result

### 4.1. Demographic profile

As for the demographic profile, the researchers had used SPSS Software to get the descriptive results of the all respondents. A substantial number of respondents belonged in the age group of between 20-30 years old (39.%), while some were below 20 years (25%) and above 41 years (20%), and the rest were above 41 years old. 96.9 % of them were Malays and 3% were Chinese. 43 % of them were SPM holders, 30% had a Bachelor Degree, 26 had a diploma and only 0.9 % had postgraduates degrees. 35% of them worked in the government sector and 32 % worked in the private sector, while rest were self employed (18%) or housewives (13%).

Table 1 describes the various score for composite reliability, average variance and the cross loading items for the construct of the study. The reliability and validity of the construct have described a strong reliability for the measurement suggested by Hair (F. Hair Jr, 2014 ).

**Table 1:** The latent variables score for loading, composite and average variance extracted.

Latent variable	indicators	Loading for items	Composite reliability	Average variance extract
attitude	Att 10	0.693	0.782	0.546
	Att 4	0.826		
	Att 6	0.690		
Religious conscious	Rel 1	0.752	0.841	0.57
	Rel 2	0.772		
	Rel 3	0.716		
Purchase intention	Pi1	0.817	0.898	0.639
	Pi2	0.871		
	Pi3	0.823		
	Pi4	0.782		
	Pi5	0.692		

**Table 2:** Significance Testing Results of the Structural Model path coefficient.

	P values
ATT ->PUR	0.521
REL->ATT	0.597
REL->PUR	0.221

If the p values are less than 0.05, ( $p < 0.05$ ) than the relationship is significant. Unfortunately, the above results show insignificant relationships where the p values from religiosity consciousness to -> attitude was 0.597, religiosity conscious to -> purchase intention was 0.221 and attitude -> purchase intention was 0.521. Therefore, the results of this study show that the effect of religiosity consciousness was so small to actually make the consumers to have the purchase intention towards buying organic personal care products.

## 4. Discussion

Consumers who are concerned about buying products that meet their religiosity needs are consumers that have religiosity consciousness. The existing study aims to examine the relationship between religiosity consciousness and intention to purchase especially for organic personal care products.

Surprisingly, the present study found that religiosity concern or awareness is not significant to influence the attitude of the consumer and also at the same time, not significant in influencing the purchase intention to buy. This reveals that the consumers' concern for religiosity is not an important factor in predicting the consumers' behaviours or attitudes towards having a purchase intention to buy organic products. The current result shows that religiosity consciousness has no effect on the attitudes of the con-

sumer and furthermore, not able to influence their intention to purchase organic personal care products.

Therefore, consumers' intention to purchase an organic product has no relation to the religiosity consciousness. Religiosity consciousness does not play any role in influencing the consumers' attitudes toward organic products. As Muslims, they have the consciousness to purchase products that do not go against their religion. This means that religiosity may not be given much attention especially by young group of people when it comes to buying an organic product.

Past researches have found that consumers are concerned with halal logo and they are anxious to only consume products that are halal according to their Syariah belief ((78, 79) This means that Muslim consumers consume food that follows the Muslim's dietary law. Consumers concern if cosmetic contain alcohol and it is obvious that they focus 'halal' more on food rather than non-food products (80).

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendation

The results of the present study highlight some implications and practice in the context of intention to purchase organic personal care products by the consumers. As a manufacturer of organic personal care product, one should communicate more on the benefits of the green products to the consumers. The marketing department should organise events and campaigns to get the message about benefits of organic products to the consumer. This study found that these consumers cannot associate religiosity consciousness with purchase intention when buying organic products. Unfortunately, even though, the consumers may have associated religiosity consciousness with consumption of food like beef and chicken, they do not have the same concern for non-food products.

From academic perspective, this study has come to integrate purchase intention, attitude and religious concerns with the consumers' purchase intention of organic personal care products. It has also adopted the SEM approach for the analysis of the data and has done this study in one of the developing countries that is Malaysia. Indeed, this empirical study conducted in Malaysia, adds to the existing knowledge, that is, religious concern is not an important factor in determining the factors that influence consumers to buy organic personal care products made locally. Consequently, future research should focus on other factors that could lead to the consumers' purchase intention. The limitation of this study is that the sample taken was limited and focused only on female consumers.

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