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## **The Relationship between Dimension of Consumption Value and Intention to Purchase of Green Products**

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### ***Abstract:***

*The existence of green products is still new in Malaysia and most consumers still face difficulties purchasing green products when it comes to the product selection process. To date, the number of studies on green purchase intention among Malaysian consumers is still lacking. In response to this, the present study aims to examine the factors that influence purchase intention of green products among young consumers in Malaysia by using the Theory of Consumption Values as the underpinning theory in measuring consumers' intention. This is a quantitative study whereby convenience sampling was conducted to a total of 382 respondents from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). The findings indicated that emotional and epistemic values are the most influential factors that help young consumers to make the decision in choosing green products compared to other consumption values. A number of recommendations were highlighted and it is hoped that it can assist the concerned parties in improving green purchase intention among Malaysian young consumers.*

**Keywords:** *green products, green purchase intention, theory of consumption values and young consumers*

### **1. Introduction**

There now exists sensitivity towards the environment and social consciousness with an increase in consumer awareness regarding the health and nutrition of eco-friendly products. This sensitivity on health and environmental issues has led consumers to behave more 'green' when it comes to buying decisions. While people are aware of the green concept, are they really buying green? In terms of behavioral context, the awareness for green products consumption among Malaysians is relatively low (Lee, Yeow & Hasan, 2012; Rashid, 2009). As stressed by Ohtomo and Hirose (2007), it is not guaranteed that individuals who are environmentally conscious will act pro-environmentally. The culture of purchasing green products is still new in Malaysia and the market for green products is at an early stage of its development (Rezai, Teng, Mohamed & Shamsudin, 2012). Although consumers are aware on the issues affecting the environment, they still facing difficulties purchasing the green products. Studies have found that 30% of United Kingdom consumers are highly concerned about environmental problems but they are struggling to transform it into green purchase behavior (Young et al., 2009). This is consistent with a study by Royne, Levy and Martinez (2011), who claimed that green products are usually more expensive compared to regular products, which causes difficulty for consumers to buy the green products.

In Malaysia, the eco-friendly concept or green marketing is still in its early phase whereby green marketing studies in Asia are still less compared to Western countries (Lee, 2011; Ooi, Kwek & Keoy, 2012). Additionally, several green studies have been conducted in China that look at the green purchase intentions of Chinese consumers in that country. However, as emphasized by Rahbar and Abdul Wahid (2011), due to different cultural and demographic contexts, generalization is not an effective method to be applied in the study of green purchasing behavior. Consumers from countries that have serious environmental problems may have different views and buying behaviors compared to consumers in less environmentally focused countries (Shahnaei, 2012). Thus, there is a need for studies on green products' purchase behavior to be explored within the Malaysian context so that potentially different findings that are influenced by the Malaysian culture may be discovered, as the trend to buy green products tends to be different due to geographical factors and demographic factors (Goh & Abdul Wahid, 2015). In understanding green behavior among Malaysian consumers, this study was carried out using the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) as the underpinning theory which can predict, describe and explain the relationship between consumption values theory and green purchasing intention towards green products within the Malaysian consumers context.

## 2. Research Framework and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1. Consumption Values and Consumer Purchase Intention

According to Sheth et al. (1991), there are five values that determine the behavior of consumers when dealing with intention: functional, social, emotional, conditional and epistemic values. Suki (2016) stated that recent studies have focused more towards the relationship between consumers' environmental behavior and consumption values. These consumption values argue that consumers have different values to different products which will automatically influence buying decision (Ramkissoon, Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2009). The influences of purchase decision making are still highly dependent on the situation, yet these five consumption values are derived from multiple disciplines including social psychology, clinical psychology, sociology, economics and experimental psychology (Lin & Huang, 2012; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000). This theory integrates components from various consumer behavior models and predict that consumer choice is a function of multiple consumption values (Turel et al., 2010). The theory also discussed why consumers buy certain products or choose one product over another (Candan & Yildirim, 2013). Again, this theory depends on how the consumers are being informed about the product or service which intrinsically and extrinsically motivates the decision to consume (Kim, Chan & Gupta, 2007). Thus, the explanation of individual consumption behavior is more applicable by using the consumption value theory (Wang, Liao & Yang, 2013).

A model of purchase decision-making behavior is adapted whereby TCV was used as the underpinning theory in this study (Figure 1.0).

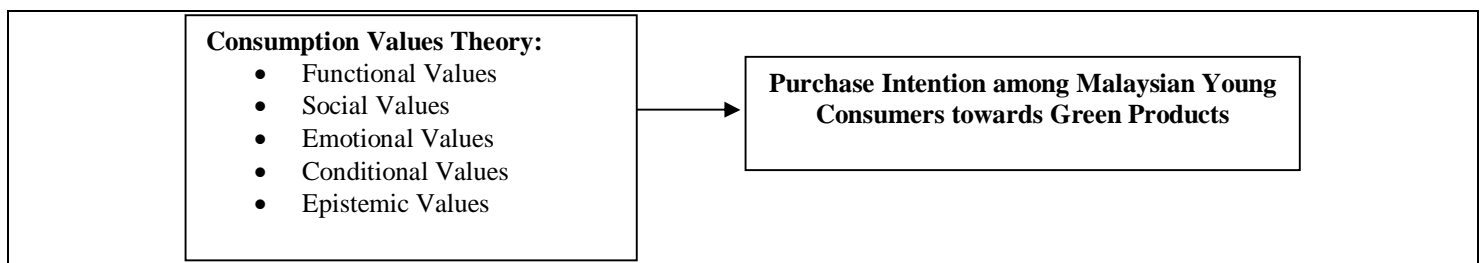


Figure 1

#### 2.1.1. Functional Value

Sheth et al. (1991) defined functional values as “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity for functional, utilitarian or physical performance. An alternative acquires functional value through the possession of salient functional, utilitarian or physical attributes. Functional value is measured on a profile of choice attributes” (p.160). Traditionally, Sheth et al. (1991) assumed that functional value is the main determinant of consumers’ choice when dealing with a decision-making situation. The best characteristics or attributes that describe functional value could be in terms of reliability, durability and price (William & Soutar, 2009). For example, tourists will consider exotic food, historical sites and the quality of facilities when choosing their vacation destination (Phau, Quintal & Shanka, 2014). From this situation, consumers are easily affected with factors of price and quality of the product itself as recently consumers have developed an awareness for the things that they purchase.

In the context of green products, there are previous research that found consumers generally having positive attitudes towards eco-friendly products and are willing to pay more for them to protect individual and societal benefits (Xu et al., 2012; Liu, Pieniak & Verbeke, 2013; Tully & Winer, 2014). As mentioned by Lin and Huang (2012), in 1993 in the United Kingdom, 79% of female consumers showed their willingness to pay up to 40% more for eco-friendly products but with proven green aspects. Suki (2013c) also claimed that consumers tend to be influenced by functional benefits gained from the performance of the product. From this discussion, it can be summarized that consumers are influenced by both price and quality in their decision to purchase green products.

#### 2.1.2. Social Value

The second most addressed factor is social value. Sheth et al. (1991) stated that “social value is [a] perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s association with one or more specific social groups such as demographic, socioeconomic and cultural” (p.161). In today’s competitive marketing environments, businesses really need to understand consumer behaviors and form marketing decisions accordingly. This is to ensure continuous purchasing from consumers based on what they want from the product. For many young adult consumers, consumerism and seeking for status are legitimate activities before purchasing (O’Cass & Siahtiri, 2013; Kim & Jang, 2014). O’Cass and Frost (2002) claimed that the propensity for consumers to seek prestige and recognition for particular products is well known. This relatively describes that consumers may also be influenced by the element of social recognition in terms of prestige during the product selection process.

Previous studies showed the influences of social value in the acceptance of green hotel services among consumers who preferred to stay and revisit green hotels (Han & Kim 2010; Chen & Peng 2012; Lien et al. 2012; Teng, Wu & Liu, 2015). Furthermore, social image was also found to be the third top determinant of green buying behavior among Hong Kong young consumers (Lee, 2008). In other words, a consumer’s decision is easily affected by social influences including social image and status, individual thinking and others’ perception towards themselves.

### 2.1.3. Emotional Value

Other than functional value and social value, another consumption value that measures choosing behavior is emotional value. As cited by Sheth et al. (1991), emotional value can be described as “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity to arouse feelings or affective states when customers experience the product or company’s services positively” (p.161). In this respect, a consumer’s feeling could be positive, negative or mixed, and this is definitely different among individuals based on various personal and emotional experiences (Sheth et al., 1991). This is how the emotional factor plays its role and coincidentally may interrupt the process of product selection. Emotional value can also be described as any feelings and emotions from the consumer’s reaction when they use the product (Xiao & Kim, 2009). For example, consumers might feel more secure when using cosmetic products that are free from synthetic and animal ingredients. This is consistent with a previous study by Ahmad and Juhdi (2008) that showed consumers concerned with the environment and having a healthy lifestyle exhibited more pro-environmental behaviors. Furthermore, today’s consumers are more aware of green purchasing which is associated with the concepts of protecting nature and promoting a healthy lifestyle. The emotions involved in this situation encourage consumers to go for green products as they feel that they are protecting the environment and are contributing towards sustainable development (Suki & Suki, 2015).

### 2.1.4. Conditional Value

In the 1970s, the factor of conditional value on human behavior was studied in the marketing discipline. As stated by Hansen (1972) and Belk (1974), the basic element that described conditional values are “time, place and context” (Candan & Yildirim, 2013). However, Sheth et al. (1991) stated that conditional value is derived from external factors that caused changes in consumers’ behavior, yet the influence of decisions are caused by the external environment. In brief, Sheth et al. (1991) defined conditional value as “the perceived utility acquired by an alternative [as] the result of specific situation or set of circumstances facing the choice maker. An alternative need conditional value in the presence of antecedent physical or social contingencies that enhance its functional or social value” (p.162).

Conditional value is only reflected for products or services that are mainly used in a specific context (Wang et al., 2013). For example, today’s market is highly focused on producing eco-friendly based products that are less harmful to consumers. Another example that reflects conditional value is greeting cards for special events and ceremonies such as birthdays or weddings. With regards to green products, Lin and Huang (2012) stated that conditional value may influence the consumer’s choice as much as consumers consider environmental consequences while making their purchase decisions. In addition, previous studies have found that consumers buy the products because of particular circumstances and conditions (Bayer & Ke, 2013; Samson & Voyer, 2014).

### 2.1.5. Epistemic Value

Epistemic value can be defined as “the perceived utility acquired from an alternative’s capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty and/or satisfy a desire for knowledge. An alternative need epistemic value by questionnaire items by referring to curiosity, novelty, and knowledge” (Sheth et al., 1991; p.61). It is normal to see a situation where consumers search and ask for product information before deciding to purchase a product. The seeking of product information may be due to the consumer being bored, curious or has the intensity to learn (Yeo, Mohamed, & Muda, 2016). Two elements that were explained by motivation theories as incentives existing in human nature are curiosity and innovativeness (Candan & Yildirim, 2013). Therefore, marketing experts concluded that incentives of “innovation and variety searching” influences a consumer’s purchase decision (Candan & Yildirim, 2013). Furthermore, Hessami and Yousefi (2013) stated that product knowledge plays an important role when it comes to product selection. For instance, young consumers who plan to buy organic skincare products will definitely seek extra information regarding the product’s benefits, ingredients and so forth before making the purchase. When consumers are faced with new products, normally they will evaluate the information and make a decision whether to buy the product or not (Lin & Huang, 2012).

Therefore, based on the Theory of Consumption Value, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Functional value is positively related with young consumer’s intention to purchase green products.
- H2: Social value is positively related with young consumer’s intention to purchase green products.
- H3: Emotional value is positively related with young consumer’s intention to purchase green products.
- H4: Conditional value is positively related with young consumer’s intention to purchase green products.
- H5: Epistemic value is positively related with young consumer’s intention to purchase green products.

## **3. Methodology**

To determine the study’s objective, a survey was carried out on a sample of 390 young consumers in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). A total of 382 out of 390 questionnaires with a response rate of 98% were collected by the researcher. This study adopted scales by Awuni and Du (2015) using a five-point Likert scale (1, strongly disagree; 2, disagree; 3, neutral; 4, agree and 5; strongly agree).

## **4. Results and Discussion**

In this study, the data was violated from the assumption of normality since the values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov were less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05). As supported by Pallant (2013), a Sig. value of more than 0.05 indicates that the data follow a normal distribution. In this study, Kolmogorov-Sminov was considered as an alternative test of normality instead of Shapiro-Wilk due to the larger sample of study (n= 382). None of the variables were significant and this strongly indicated that the distribution of data was not normal.

Since the data of this study deviated from the normality assumption, data screening was done by checking for any missing values and outliers which can cause the data to deviate from being normally distributed. A few data by certain respondents were detected as outliers and needed to be removed. However, after removing the outliers from the study, the distribution of the data was still not normal and therefore the researcher decided to proceed with a non-parametric technique for inferential analysis as an alternative for the data that were not normal. Table 1 summarizes the results.

Based on the table, the results indicated the relationship between functional value and intention to purchase green products. The significance value (p-value) was less than 0.05. This suggested that there was a positive relationship between functional value and intention to purchase green products. In terms of strength, the  $r$  value was 0.336, indicating medium strength between variables. The factor of product features, quality and price could also be one of the values that positively relate with the intention to purchase green products. In this study, young consumers still considered the factors of the green product's performance including product quality, product price and product stability before they decided to purchase the green products. They would go for the green product if they expect the product to function well and is affordable in term of price. This suggested reason was supported by Hur, Yoo and Hur (2010), who stated that consumers are more likely to seek for product benefits and product function at a minimum cost. Meanwhile, the findings of this study is in line with previous work done by Yoo, Divita and Kim (2013) who found a positive relationship between functional value and green purchase intention. The researchers believed that consumers are more sensitive to price even though it is a green product (Yoo et al., 2013). In fact, most consumers will evaluate the product for the price that they have pay (Nowlis & Simonson, 1996; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001).

<b>Correlation between Functional Value and Purchase Intention</b>		
		<b>Purchase Intention Towards Green Products</b>
Functional Value	Spearman Rho Correlation ( $r$ )	0.336
	Sig (2- Tailed)	0.000
	N	382
Social Value	Spearman Rho Correlation ( $r$ )	0.332
	Sig (2- Tailed)	0.000
	N	382
Emotional Value	Spearman Rho Correlation ( $r$ )	0.479
	Sig (2- Tailed)	0.000
	N	382
Conditional Value	Spearman Rho Correlation	0.348
	Sig (2- Tailed)	0.000
	N	382
Epistemic Value	Spearman Rho Correlation ( $r$ )	0.472
	Sig (2- Tailed)	0.000
	N	382

Table 1

Additionally, the variable of social value was correlated with purchase intention. The respondents agreed that they felt more acceptable, that the way they were perceived improved and that they made a good impression to others when purchasing green products. This provided social approval when using green products. However, the strength of the relationship was still considered as medium since the value of  $r$  was 0.3332, falling between the range 0.30 to 0.49 (medium). Similar to functional value, social value was also found to be positively related to intention in purchasing green products. This shows that social value also contributes to the consumer's decision when it comes to green purchase intention. However, the strength of the relationship between both variables was still considered as medium strength with the value of  $r = 0.332$ . Based on this study, Malaysian young consumers considered themselves to be more accepted and that others were impressed when they buy and use green products. Such results suggested that young consumers are easily affected by others, especially from people close to them including family and friends. The reason of this finding was supported by Suki (2016), who discovered that consumers are motivated to buy green products due to social influences including friends and family.

Apart from functional and social value, there was a positive relationship between emotional value and the young consumer's intention to purchase green products. This suggested that young consumers felt positive and morally right when using or purchasing green products. This study showed that there was a positive relationship between emotional value with young consumer's intention in purchasing green products. Based on the population of this study, this result suggested that young consumers in UUM have positive feelings and perceptions towards green products. This is line with the culture of UUM that always brings the concept of 'green' among young consumers and this helps in creating 'green behavior' among them. The finding of this study is also consistent with a previous

study conducted by Awuni and Du (2015) who discovered a positive relationship between emotional value and green purchase intention. In their study, young consumers were easily attached by emotional factors including moral responsibility in saving the environment when choosing green products.

Based on Table 1, there was also a positive relationship between conditional value and purchase intention towards green products. The strength of the relationship between both variables still showed medium strength with the value of  $r = 0.348$ . Thus, conditional value in terms of any value or extra benefits has a positive relationship with green purchase intention. Based on this result, the intention of purchasing green products during product selection was related with the conditional value. In this study, most of the young consumers agreed that they would purchase green products when there were discounts and promotions. They also agreed that they would consider buying green products to protect the environmental condition. However, this finding is not in line with the study conducted by Awuni and Du (2015), whereby conditional value did not have any significant relationship with green purchase intention. In others studies by Suki (2016), conditional value had no relationship with green purchase intention. This indicates that consumers are not affected with the green products' promotional activities and caused low propensity in buying the products.

For epistemic value, the researcher was able to claim that there is a positive relationship between epistemic value and intention to buy green products. This can be showed through the value of significance which was greater than 0.05 and also with medium strength ( $r = 0.472$ ). This finding suggests that Malaysian young consumers especially from UUM, Kedah found epistemic value as useful things in searching for extra information regarding green products. Most of the young consumers in this study were willing to obtain green product information before they make the decision to purchase the products. Besides that, they also love to try new and different things, especially involving green products which are more environmentally-friendly. The result of this research is supported by a previous study conducted by Lin and Huang (2012), whereby epistemic value was found to be positively related to propensity in purchasing green products. Based on their study, consumers were found to have higher curiosity in seeking for green product information, which indirectly led to higher intention to buy the products. However, the finding of this study is not consistent with a previous study conducted by Awuni and Du (2015), whereby the researcher found epistemic value to be insignificant with green purchase intention. This means that factors contributing to green purchase intention young consumers in Chinese cities were not highly dependent on novelty seeking of product information. According to Liu et al. (2012), the study revealed that most consumers in China had difficulties in identifying information regarding green products, and less than 30% of the respondents were interested in environmental information.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the five (5) consumption values, the researcher highly suggested emotional value as the key determinant value that helps young consumers to make the decision in choosing green products compared to other consumption values. Ironically, consumers felt happier and morally right when they use green products as they think using green products could help in reducing harmful effects to themselves and towards nature. It is believed that consumption values could be another key theory that can be used to measure consumers' purchase intention instead of using TPB and TRA. The use of consumption values to measure consumers' purchase intention is not only limited to green products, but also to different product categories such as Halal products, mobile banking adoption and destination choice decision. On the other hand, from the industry's perspective, the researcher believes that these findings will help them develop and produce green products together with emotional value attachment and epistemic value. Along with the attachment of these values, young consumers will be more interested in buying green products.

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