



Health and cosmetics: Investigating consumers' values for buying organic personal care products



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ABSTRACT

In investigating consumers' intentions to re-purchase organic personal care products (PCP), this study extends the theory of planned behaviour by including perceived value dimensions as the antecedents of attitude in the model. The findings revealed that most of the hypothesised relationships linking the consumer perceived value constructs (namely, health, safety, hedonic and environmental) with attitude towards the rebuying of organic PCP, were supported. Also, better product knowledge about organic PCP would lead to more positive attitudes towards re-purchasing the product. In contrast, social value was not important in predicting attitude. Similarly, the influence of subjective norm on rebuying intention was not supported. In terms of ranking of importance with regards to prediction of re-purchasing intention, attitude was the most important predictor followed by perceived behavioural control, product knowledge, hedonic value, environmental value and safety value.

1. Introduction

The market for green and organic cosmetics is expanding globally (Onel, 2016; Raska and Shaw, 2012). The rising health- and go-green consciousness and the growing consumer awareness of the hazards of synthetic chemicals have fuelled the demand for a healthier life style and for organic personal care products (PCP). Organic PCP comprises of skin care, hair care, oral care, colour cosmetics, deodorants, toiletries and feminine hygiene products. They are formulated from agricultural ingredients which are grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms or ionizing radiation, making them more desirable among these green consumers (Organic.org, 2016). In the global market, Ecocert, the USDA, the ICEA, the Soil Association, the BDiH, CosmeBio, and the Control Union are the leading organic certification bodies.

According to the Organic Monitor (2016), Asian consumers are now also turning to natural and organic cosmetics. In Malaysia, PCP have become part of the urban culture whereby urbanites consume at least one type of item on a daily basis (Davis, 2010). Malaysia's organic cosmetics market is anticipated to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.7% during the forecast period 2014–2020, reaching a value of US\$ 533.3 million (FMI, 2015). Considering this sizeable market volume and significant growth, the market for organic PCP

constitutes an important sector that requires an in-depth investigation. In particular, understanding Malaysian consumers' decisions behind why they choose to purchase organic PCP has become worthwhile due to the recent trends and transition into a more green cosmetics market (Dutta and Youn, 1999; Nguyen and Rowley, 2015).

Previously, the literature on green products have focused mainly on organic foods (e.g. Chen, 2007; Padel and Foster, 2005; Zanolli and Naspetti, 2002; Yadav, 2016). There has been little research on the understanding consumers' purchasing behaviour with regards to organic personal care products (Cervellon and Carey, 2011; Kim and Chung, 2011). In principle, many analogies exist between consumer choices regarding organic foods and organic PCP (e.g., Lin et al., 2017). Thus, some of the findings from previous studies related organic food produced were utilised as the basis for this study.

This study examines Malaysian consumers' perceptions toward re-purchasing organic PCP and seeks to understand the relationship between values, attitudes and behavioural intentions. Based on an extensive review of the literature, the study focuses on the value aspects of health, safety, environment, hedonic value and social value, as well as product knowledge. Focusing on these issues and values relating to organic PCP decision-making ensures a greater understanding of the green consumers that will have both theoretical and practical significance for marketers. The study also expands on Ajzen and Fishbein

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(1980) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and develops a conceptual model which links perceived values to green consumers' attitudes, which in turn influences their re-purchase intention. In particular, by investigating the impact of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control on re-purchase intention, the 'attitude-intention' framework is tested and validated in the context of organic PCP. In doing so, several theoretical implications arise from the current study. Another important contribution of this study is that it focuses on re-purchase intentions as opposed to purchase intentions. In other words, this study examines factors influencing repeat purchase intentions, which may be different from purchasing for the first time. This study is also the first to study the influence of the specific types of consumers' perceived values, namely, hedonic value, health value, safety value and environmental value, on re-purchase intentions of organic PCP. The study thus extends previous research, for example on organic foods, which showed that concerns regarding health, product safety and environment are key motivators for consumer organic choices.

2. Literature review

2.1. Consumers' perceived value

In the current dynamic marketplace, consumer value has become one of the most vital drivers. According to Holbrook (1884, p.22), "... customer value is the fundamental basis for all marketing activity." Zeithaml (1988) refers to perceived as a consumer's overall assessment of a product/service based on perception of what is received (benefits) and what is given (costs incurred). It is commonly termed as the ratio or trade-off between quality and price (Liu et al., 2006; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Customer consumption experiences often involve the interplay of many dimensions of values simultaneously. In influencing consumer choice for instance, Sheth et al. (1991) suggested five dimensions of values (social, emotional, functional, epistemic and conditional value) to adequately capture the cognitive and affective nature of value.

Sweeney and Soutar (2001) suggested that consumer assessment of products is not just based on quality and performance, but also takes into account the enjoyment and pleasure derived from the product (emotional value) and the social pressure regarding what the product communicates to others (social value). These value dimensions are often independent from each other as they relate additively and make incremental contributions to consumer choice. They identified four distinct consumer value dimensions (social, emotional, quality/performance and price/value for money) that significantly drive purchase attitude and behaviour. Furthermore, they supported the expectation that if a consumer perceives a product to be valuable, they would be more willing to buy the product at a premium price (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Chen (2007) claimed that the attitude toward the purchase of a product depends on the perceived consequences such as expectations and personal beliefs of the purchase outcome.

Perceived values are important criteria that are employed by a person in making preference judgement and guide the consumers' choice (Butler et al., 2016; Sheth et al., 1991; Varshneya and Das, 2017). It was found that the interaction between customer and product, and found to be significant in explaining attitudes in post purchase situations (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). As such, this study proposes five consumers' perceived values with respect to health, safety, social value, hedonism and environment that may influence attitude toward re-purchasing organic PCP in which the products are generally viewed as promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyle. These are explained next.

2.1.1. Health value

A study of men's use of grooming products in France revealed that, reducing the ageing process and the maintenance of health were among the factors driving the consumption of these products (Sturrock and Pioch, 1998). Past research has also shown that health benefits such as

health preservation and improvement of health are among the predominant motives driving organic consumption (Dardak et al., 2009; Xie et al., 2015; Yin et al., 2010).

The health aspect of organic consumption is often associated with the absence of chemicals, such as pesticides and chemical-based fertilizers, used in agriculture (Xie et al., 2015). Many consumers feel that organic foods are healthier than conventional products because they are free from pesticides and other chemical residues (Wier et al., 2008). Smith-Spangler et al. (2012) suggested that the consumption of organic products might reduce exposure to pesticide residues and antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can lead to health risks. Magnusson et al. (2003) also showed that concerns about their own personal and their family health, was the most important factor influencing consumers' attitude towards organic food. Han and Chung (2014) also found that the perceived health benefits have a significant influence on attitude toward purchasing organic cotton apparels. Thus, it is highly likely that the perceived health value will have similar relationship with repurchase of organic PCP as well and we propose that:

H₁: Consumer perception of the health value (HEV) of organic PCP will have a significant positive effect on attitude toward re-purchasing (ATT) the products.

2.1.2. Safety value

Scandals regarding product safety have played an important role in driving up the purchase of organic food products (Davis, 2010; Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2002). For example, in 2008 the incident of melamine-tainted milk products in China caused death and illness in thousands of children (Xie et al., 2015). Similarly, in the context of PCP, the case of ovarian cancer being linked to the daily use of Johnson's talcum-based baby powder and shower products (Bloomberg, 2016) could alarm consumers into being more cautious of the products that they use daily. Bauer et al. (2013) defined perceived safety value as the degree to which customers feel that the consumption of products is harmless as these are free from synthetic chemical residues. Most consumers perceive organic products to be of superior quality due to the use of natural ingredients without chemical inputs (Midmore et al., 2005). Furthermore, Yin et al. (2010) revealed that 67.5% of respondents' initial purchase reasons for organic foods were their perceived lack of chemical content.

Yeung and Morris (2001) conceptualised that there would be a negative correlation between perception of food safety related risks and purchase behaviour. They believed that consumers would modify their "purchasing decisions in order to relieve perceived risk" (p. 182). Another study in South Korea also revealed a link between food safety and purchase of environment friendly agricultural products (Kim, 2007). It was found that consumers who assessed agricultural products safety negatively were more likely to purchase these products. These perceptions of safety would most likely have an impact on re-purchase of PCP as well. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: Consumer perceptions of the safety value (SFV) of organic PCP will have a significant positive effect on attitude toward re-purchasing (ATT) of the products.

2.1.3. Social value

Sweeney and Soutar (2001) describe social value as the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self-concept. It is measured on a profile of choice imagery (Sheth et al., 1991). According to Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), consumers will engage in behaviour, including making purchases, to obtain a positive reaction from their social peers. A study by Kumar and Ghodeswar (2015) showed a significant relationship between social appeal and green product purchase decisions. It suggested that others' perceptions about one's behaviour have a considerable influence on green purchasing behaviour. Social appeal is influential in developing consumers' product preference, as

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