



Research article

Intention and behavior towards green consumption among low-income households



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ABSTRACT

In order to address the issues of climate change through wise management of resources and environmental conservation, this study examined the intention and behavior towards green consumption among low-income households. This study was a cross-sectional that relied on 380 low-income household respondents who lived in coastal areas of Peninsular Malaysia. The findings revealed a positive effect of eco-literacy and self-efficacy on attitude towards green products. Subsequently, the findings also ascertained a positive effect of attitude and perceived behavioral control on intention and consumption of green products. In addition, both scholars and policymakers can rely on these findings to increase the intention and behavior towards the consumption of green products in order to reduce the environmental vulnerability to the coastal communities. Therefore, responsible organizations should implement programs and policies that minimize the adverse effects of climate change through resource management and environmental conservation by promoting the use of green products among Malaysians.

1. Introduction

There has been a strong interest in understanding the negative consequences of climate change for the economy and society. Recent researchers pointed out that neglecting the significance of environmental sustainability is likely to weaken the society that relies on natural resources to generate revenue (Jiang and Zheng, 2017). In fact, Stern (2007) claimed that climate change is one of the most influential factors of market failure. Climate change could result in a loss of 5–20 percent of gross domestic products (GDP), if there was no effective precautionary measure taken to protect the environment. This finding was consistent with previous studies (Weitzman, 2007; Nordhaus, 2007) which revealed that environment protection such as reduction in carbon emission should be prioritized to sustain a country's socio-economic. Hence, the issues of global climate change have been a challenge to economists and policy makers to identify countermeasures.

To tackle the negative effects of different climate patterns and environmental degradation, one of the solutions is to introduce green products that can protect the environment (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki,

2007). Normally, conventional products are non-biodegradable and unrecyclable. These products contain chemical substances that gradually harm the environment. However, many green products have difficulties in targeting the mass market although they have existed in the market for a long time. In a nutshell, consumer ignorance has been as a hindrance to promoting green consumerism. Lim et al. (2013) found that the Malaysian' personal welfare are more important than the environmental well-being. They stated that the environmentalist should be responsible for managing environmental concerns.

Undoubtedly, many countries have promoted environmentalism. Although numerous campaigns have been launched to preserve the environment, the concept of being green is novel for many citizens and their perception of eco-friendly products is low (Rezai et al., 2013). Thus, consumers have misconception about "green" due to insufficient understanding and information. Besides, Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) mentioned that eco-friendly products have been underrated by firms because they think that the products will not boost consumer demand since they are not necessity for the consumers. The majority of the consumers are not well informed about the benefits of green products

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that contribute to subsequent purchase (Nagaraju and Thejaswini, 2016).

However, addressing the adverse effects of climate change demands the participation of political decision makers and the general public (Sandvik, 2008). Although packaging waste is the responsibility of the industry and the local governments are generally in-charge of waste management (Cruz et al., 2014), the role of consumers in protecting the environment is equally crucial. A necessary pre-condition for decision makers to take action is based on the assumption that the general public does reckon the adverse impacts of climatic change issues (Sandvik, 2008). Despite of the effort from both government and non-government organizations in promoting green consumption, as well as the diffusion of green products that can be traced since past four decades; the market for green products has yet to attain the mass-market status (Olive, 2007). As such, enhanced understanding regarding the present state of green consumption, as well as the effects of environmental literacy, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, is crucial to encourage mass consumption of green products among those from the low-income households.

Therefore, this study examined the intentions and behaviors of green consumption among low-income households in coastal Peninsular Malaysia. According to the Department of Statistics (2016), the bottom 40% of the Malaysian populations are categorized under low-income group, which is relatively higher in coastal areas as compared to cities. Moreover, the median monthly household income growth for low-income group in Malaysia was 6.6% in 2006 (Department of Statistics, 2016). Specifically, this study was concerned about whether consumers spent their disposable incomes on conventional or green products. Besides, it was also crucial to look into the effect of psychological factors on purchase decision in order to enhance the green criteria. Therefore, this study intended to examine the factors that affected intention and behavior towards the use of green products among low-income households in coastal Peninsular Malaysia.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theory of planned behavior

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) discusses about the various situation-specific cognition that influence an individual's initial intention to behave specifically (Ajzen, 1991). Generally speaking, the formation in an individuals' decision making is guided by three distinctive factors, which are the combination of attitude, subjective norms as well as perceived behavior control. This social-psychological framework has been commonly applied by other scholars. The positive and negative beliefs are influential on the intention and behavior in certain actions, which provide a favorable direction to strengthen consumer commitment (Yadav and Pathak, 2017). The TPB hypothesizes that one's behavior could be determined by behavioral intentions that can be predicted by certain socio-cognitive factors, such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control (Ajzen, 1991). According to Liobikienė et al. (2016), TPB was used to measure the degree of green consumerism in European Union countries and facilitate policy implementation. For instance, Denmark and Austria supplied more eco-friendly products for consumers to choose. On contrary, Sweden, Italy and Czech Republic required government intervention through subsidy in green products that allowed their consumers, who were sensitive to price, to afford green products.

In response to the above discussion, TPB is applied to explain how and what kind of beliefs helps the low-income households to make green purchase. Several studies used this theory to understand the reasons that induce the user's intentions to purchase eco-friendly products (Bamberg, 2003; Rashid, 2009; Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010; Kanchanapibul et al., 2014; Maichum et al., 2016). This theory is expected to assist green markets in exploring different perceptions of and behaviors towards green consumption among low-income households

in Malaysia. Subsequently, it encourages more strategic planning to ensure the sustainability of the business lifecycle with minimal damage to the environment.

2.2. Attitude towards green products

Attitude is considered as one of the important factors participants can evaluate in terms of the benefit of purchasing green products. Ajzen (1985) postulated that participants are more likely to behave when they think that participating in a certain act will be advantageous for them. Since then, the individuals' behaviors can be evaluated based on the participants' attitudes. With the studied context, attitude towards green products is perceived as the degree to which performance of green purchase behavior is negatively or positively valued by individuals (Chen and Deng, 2016). Previously, attitude has been studied as an independent variable to predict behaviors. Green consumption studies contended that consumers are more willing to learn about eco-friendly products when they hold positive attitudes toward these products (Paul et al., 2016; Sharma and Dayal, 2016). Kim and Chung (2011) stressed that when consumers had positive mindset of green purchasing, they had higher intention to use green products. However, Vermeir and Verbeke's (2006) study was more diverse as the consumers had opposing intentions and attitudes toward the use of sustainable products. In connection with the current study, Tanner and Kast (2003) stated that positive attitudes toward environment can increase natural food consumption. This finding was confirmed by Taylor et al. (2010) in wine sector. Based on the basis of theoretical and empirical evidence, attitude is an important predictor of purchase intention. Hence, it proposes a directional relationship between attitude and intention to purchase green products.

2.3. Factors effecting attitude towards green products

Eco-Literacy can be considered a determinant of intention to consume green products. In general, knowledge reflects the characteristic that influences all phases in one's decision-making process, which may form either positive or negative attitudes towards a certain behavior (Mei et al., 2012). This term is defined as any individuals who are concerned about the climate change and willing to overcome environmental issues. This aspect is crucial to raise the attention from the communities who are looking for green information. Paul et al. (2016) proved that eco-literacy of Indian consumers had a positive impact on their attitude toward green consumption. In other words, their understanding about the climate change positively changed their purchasing behavior. Based on the above discussion, consumers who are eco-literate have positive attitude toward green consumer behavior (Zhao and Zhong, 2015; Tseng and Hung, 2013).

Self-Efficacy - the second determinant of an individual's attitude is self-efficacy. Normally, consumers are capable of making better adjustment to prevent environmental degradation. The theory suggests that self-efficacy beliefs (perceived ability) can affect one's thoughts and emotional responses (Bandura, 1977; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977). Meanwhile, Durndell and Haag (2002) discovered higher computer self-efficacy correlated to higher positive attitudes towards Internet, which led to longer use of the Internet. Self-efficacy has been proven to determine behavioral intention significantly (Giles et al., 2004) particularly in the context of pro-environmental behavior (Taberero and Hernández, 2011). Sharma and Dayal (2016) indicated that consumers' self-efficacy can influence their perception of eco-friendly products. Their climatic living conditions were also taken into consideration when they made their purchase. They believed that their own initiatives were likely to make significant differences to the environment. The social and environmental values the consumers had would foster them to use green products (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Joshi and Rahman (2015) posited that products with natural and societal functions can translate consumers' positive attitudes into green consumption. The

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