

## **Consumer's Intention of Purchase Sustainable Products: The Moderating Role of Attitude and Trust**

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### **Abstract**

Awareness about environment has found its place in consumer's mind set. During the past decades, consumers considered issues such as environmental issues and social issues (e.g. label's right or child's right) while purchasing products. Hence, this group of consumers are looking forward the alternative products such as sustainable products which could be presuming environmental issues and social issues. Sustainability is a vital element which is a challenge for product developers nowadays. On the other hand, companies put efforts to meet the demand of this group of consumers where the competition is high. While, there are available sustainable products in the markets, consumer's intention of purchase these products is imprecise. Besides, the attributes of these products are not categorised yet by scholars. Therefore to understand consumer's intention, the present study aims (i) to categorise the sustainable products; (ii) to extract the influential factors on consumer's intention to purchase sustainable products; and (iii) to develop a conceptual model of consumer's intention to purchase sustainable products. By reviewing literature, the factors of belief, knowledge, attitude, company's sustainable responsibility (i.e. economic, environment and social), trust and perceive quality are founded to be as the influential factors on consumer's intention to purchase these products. Besides, the mediating roles of attitude and trust on consumer's intention to purchase sustainable products are considered in this paper. Eventually, the conceptual framework of consumer's intention to purchase sustainable products is proposed.

**Key Words:** Sustainability, sustainable products, attitude, trust

### **Introduction**

During the past decades, consumers considered issues such as environment and social while purchasing products (Harrison, Newholm, & Shaw, 2005). Moreover, as product production and consumption has effects on the environment, in new product development, sustainability is a vital element which is a challenge for product developers (Rahimifard, Coates, Staikos, Edwards, & Abu-Bakar, 2009). Sustainable product production brings new opportunities for companies. Hence, many companies are shifting to

production of sustainable products while struggling with consumers and acceptance of these products by market (Murto, Person, & Ahola, 2014).

In review of literature, there are available researches considering sustainable products mainly with the aim of targeting related customers (William, Kumju, Seonaidh, & Caroline J., 2010). However, consumers in practice, do not purchased these products a lot. The main reason is that consumers do not have the essential knowledge about the attributes of sustainable product. Besides, the underling factors which play role on intention of consumers to purchase these products are not clear. Therefore, this study, firstly aims to discover the segment of sustainable products. Secondly, by reviewing literature, the influential factors on consumer's intention will be clear. In the last stage, study will propose the conceptual framework of consumer's intention to purchase sustainable product.

Sustainability concept was introduced for the first time in the United Nations conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972. This concept is defined as "Sustainability development is the one that can meet the demands of people at present time without affecting the future generation to meet their demands". Sustainability is concerned with three main elements of environment, economic, and social known as *Triple Bottom Line (TBL)* (Jackson, Boswell, & Davis, 2011). Considering the main focus of sustainability, related products should have these three attributes. This paper considers three products as sustainable products: green product, organic product, and fair trade product. Explaining the attributes of each product can clear reason behind categorising them as a sustainable product.

Green, environmentally friendly or environmentally conscious products are the ones which reduce natural resource usage in addition to reduce hazardous impact on environment in whole life cycle production. Besides, waste generation prevention and avoiding toxic materials are other attributes of these products (Tsai, 2010). Green marketing refers to activities mainly to lessen environmental and social effects of product. More importantly, this marketing concerns with promotion methods to target consumers (i.e. green consumers) in an efficient way. Wildly literature tried to define green product, yet there are some confusions. Albino et al. (2009) believes that changing from green or eco-friendly product to sustainable

product is a broad concept while these terms are used interchangeably. Besides, ethical or sustainable consumption is increased remarkably among consumers (Berger & Heath, 2007).

Organic products such as organic foods are produced with no chemical material to maximise sustainability (Snyder & Spaner, 2010). Moreover, there are changes in consumer behaviours toward performing ethical or sustainable consumption such as organic food consumption as they believed by consuming these products, they can protect environment (Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Schultz, & Stanton, 2007), and consumers have more willingness to pay more for these products due to health issue and protecting environment (Jan, Nguib, & Anand, 2011)

The focus of fair trade practices is on sustainable development and people oriented business model. This concept potentially brings fair wage, working condition improvement, improve safety, decrease discrimination between men and women, protect children's right and ethnic environment (Littrell & Dickson, 1999). Besides that, fair trade can embed social and environmental aspect function as a 'mirror' for the consumer in securing the benefits of self-expression and positive social identity" (Zadek, Lingayah, Forstater., 1998). There is an increasing rate for demand of fair trade products (Ma & Lee, 2012), and consumers carry intention to purchase fair trade products (Goig, 2007).

By considering the categories of sustainable product, there are some questions remained. The questions here are that what the factors are that affect consumer's intentions to purchase these products. Using the literature review helps to unpack this question.

### **Influential Factor on Sustainable Product Purchasing**

Many determinants of sustainable products choice are discovered among scholars like attitude, belief, knowledge, and trust. In review of psychology studies on consumer purchase behaviour, attitude has been found to be as one of the most effective factors (Hosseinpour, Mohamed, Rezai, Shamsudin, & Abdlatif, 2015). Attitude towards a behaviour is related to the person's evaluation of the behaviour as positive or negative act. Consumers might carry different attitude towards the environmentally friendly behaviour. For instance, recently in the study conducted by (Hosseinpour, Mohamed, Rezai, Shamsudin, & Abdlatif,

2014), it was found that the majority of respondents had positive attitude towards environmentally friendly behaviour. With concerning to attitude of consumers towards sustainable product purchasing, there are available studies in understanding the role of attitude on consumers. Gracia & Magistris (2007) founded that attitude towards organic food was one of the major predictor of purchasing these food types. Majority of studies reach the point that attitude has the positive and influential effects of the behaviour of a person. Besides, some studies found attitude of consumers as a mediator factor on behavioural intention of product purchasing. Therefore, in this study attitude towards sustainable products is considered as one of the main components which positively affect consumer's behaviour in addition to play as a mediator factor on intention.

Simultaneously attitude is considered as a vital factor, there are other factors which can shape attitude towards particular concept. These factors are belief and knowledge about the concept. If a person believes that by performing particular behaviour, he/she might contribute positive or negative act to the society, this evaluation can affect person's attitude. Besides that, the general knowledge about a concept can change person's attitude towards that concept (Alena & Bilal, 2014). For instance, if the person has the knowledge that by performing environmentally friendly behaviour, there is a possibility that he/she can protect the earth, his/her attitude might change.

Another influential factor in terms of sustainable purchasing is trust (Chen & Chang, 2012) which is a multidimensional concept. Greenberg (2014) defined trust as "consensus that trust means believing that a person(s) or organization(s) can be relied upon to accomplish objectives because they are competent and possesses values and intentions".

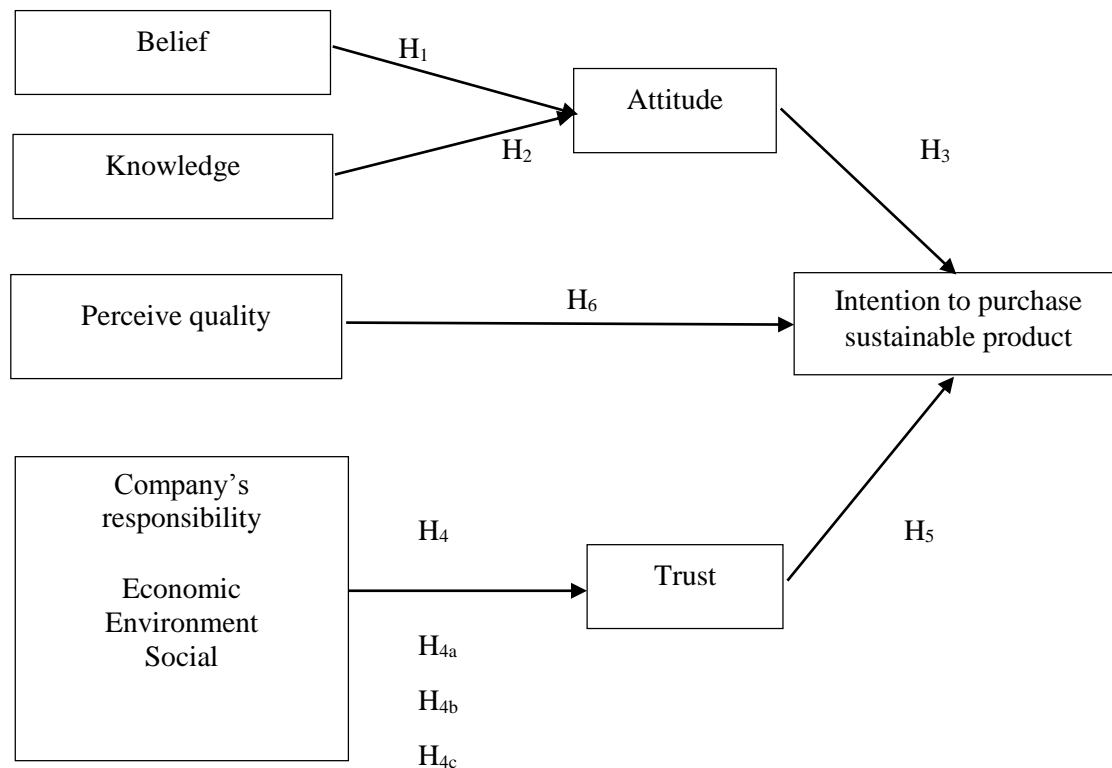
In concerning to sustainable product purchasing, trust is the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the behaviours or intentions of another (Jongchul, Hanjoon, & Kim, 2014). This factor has founded to be positively effective on the choice of environmentally friendly product purchasing. Consequently, the present study considers the positive association between trust and consumer's purchase behaviour.

On the other hand, consumers might not totally trust in sustainable company in the way that the sustainable company really performs sustainability (i.e. considering environment, social and economic). In this regard, the responsibility of a company in terms of considering environment, economic and social aspects can be vital on trust which is effective on company's reputation. More importantly, trust was considered as a mediator factor which positively play role (Alena & Bilal, 2014). Current study considers role of company responsibility in terms of *TBL* on consumer's trust in company as well as to be as a mediator factor.

Perceive quality is another factor to be vital on consumer's purchase behaviour. This factor is defined as "the customer's judgments about a product's overall environmental excellence or superiority" (Zeithaml, 1988). In fact, this factor differentiates between the actual product and the alternative ones (Hardie & Walsh, 1994). For instance, (Alena & Bilal, 2014) found that consumer's perception of organic food with the issues of health, environment and animal welfare has directly effect on their intention to purchase. The present study considers this factor as a direct and an influential one on respondent's intention.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to approach the objectives. By reviewing the literature, factors of knowledge, belief, attitude, company's responsibility (i.e. economic, environment, and social) and product's attribute are considered as the influential ones on consumer's intention to purchase sustainable product. The theoretical framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of consumer's intention to purchase sustainable product

In the present, at the first stage, it is planned to organise the focus group consists of consumers in order to extract their intention of purchasing these products by considering the proposed theoretical model of this study. Besides, during the focus, there are chances to extract some other influential factor from consumer's side that could be helpful for the study.

In the second stage, distributing the questionnaire among consumers is considered. The first part of questionnaire will be concerned with consumer's belief, knowledge and their attitude towards sustainable product purchasing. In the second stage, company's responsibility (i.e. economic, environment and social) as well as perceive quality of sustainable product will be considered. Moreover, in this part there will be questions about consumer's trust. Third stage of questionnaire is related to the intention of consumers to

purchase sustainable product. Eventually, in the last stage, some information about their demographic characteristics will be gathered.

### **Analytical Model**

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) firstly will be employed to extract the hidden influential factors on the intention. In the second stage, structural equation model (SEM) will be applied to describe the inter-relationship among belief, knowledge, attitude, company's responsibility, trust and intention. SEM is considered as a suitable analysis for this study since it is able to test the hypothesized patterns of directional and non-directional relationships between a set of observed and unobserved variables. The following hypotheses will be tested:

- H<sub>1</sub>: Belief towards sustainable product will have a positive influence on attitude of consumers.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Knowledge of sustainable product will have a positive influence on attitude of consumers.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Attitude will be play as a mediator factor on consumer's intention.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Company's responsibility will have a positive influence on consumer's intention.
- H<sub>4a</sub>: Company's economics responsibility will have a positive influence on consumer's intention.
- H<sub>4b</sub>: Company's environment responsibility will have a positive influence on consumer's intention.
- H<sub>4c</sub>: Company's social responsibility will have a positive influence on consumer's intention.
- H<sub>5</sub>: Trust will be play as a mediator factor on consumer's intention.
- H<sub>6</sub>: Perceive quality of sustainable product will have a positive influence on consumer's intention.

### **Conclusion**

Sustainability is the concept that has the attention of both scholars and businesses. Consumers of these days are concerned about environmental issues and social issues. This concern can be observed in their behaviour due to changes in their purchasing towards some products such as sustainable products. Sustainable products should cover TBL of sustainability. By considering dimensions of sustainability, three products

types of green or environmentally friendly product, organic product and fair trade products are categorised as sustainable products. In this study, the effective factors on consumer's intention towards purchasing these products were reviewed. These factors are listed as consumer's knowledge, belief, attitude, trust, company's responsibility and products attributes. Besides, it was considered that the factors of attitude and trust can play as mediator factors on consumer's intention. Eventually, the conceptual framework of this study was presented.

The results of this study are practical and theoretical useful for both industries and scholars. By discovering result, it will be clear the characteristics of consumers who might purchase these products. Therefore, markets can use the results in order to market their products. Besides that, if any governmental organisation or non-governmental organisation aim to set up the plans or programmes to promote sustainable consumption, the results could be helpful. Therefore, it will be easier for the organisers to set up their plans accordingly.

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