



## **Corporate Marketing Referents to Green Consumer Intention: An Educated Young Malaysian Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates marketing strategy affecting sustainable food consumption among the young educated population of a selected group at an excellent institute of training and information expertise in Malaysia. The investigation was based on pro environmental concerns / health consciousness, cost, convenience (availability) and communication (product info / labeling), as marketing references influence green consumption. Based on the planned behavior theory, these factors are considered as behavioral control elements to move towards a green attitude. A total of 174 participants from the academic members of University Utara Malaysia participated in this empirical research and findings of the study proved that consumers' needs, cost, convenience and communication are influencing people's intention to move towards green consumption.*

**Keywords:** *green consumption, planned behavior theory, green marketing*

### **INTRODUCTION**

We humans are chewing the surrounding environment and spitting out waste and destroying the planet just like a giant monster that multiplies rapidly and transfers this way of behavior to the next generation. There is a growing awareness and concern about this situation, among some people, however, at least sustainable food consumption should pose as a life priority for many of us. This study may provide precious information to make efficient decisions about both sustainable consumption as well as environment by organizations.

Given the promise of high demand, the food industry has a strong potential for developing and offering sustainable food supply to markets. The first concept of green marketing proposed in 1975 in a workshop on ecological marketing held by the American Marketing Association, was where the impact of marketing on the natural environment was debated. This initial definition mentioned three dimensions: raising a subset of overall marketing activities, considering positive and negative activates and finally analyzing a narrow range of environmental issues (Polonsky, 1994). Later, (Polonsky, 1994) introduced that "Green or Environmental Marketing consists of all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with

minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment”. This definition considers benefits and needs of both consumers and factories and also consists of environment protection taking into account minimal deleterious effect on the natural environment. Green purchase behavior defines buying products with the afore-mentioned properties. It seems achieving sustainably is a slow and difficult process. There are seated barriers deeply rooted in our attitudes and beliefs which must be discovered and removed.

Academicians along with marketing practitioners struggle to identify and realize consumer attitude towards green products, the needs of consumers and to expand market offerings that meet these needs (D’Souza et al., 2005).

Predilection for environmental issues represents concern of human beings which affect their behavior in a positive or negative manner. These predispositions are commonly referred to as attitudes and beliefs (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In reality, companies that pursue green marketing, encounter numerous challenges mainly from the variability of demand, unfavourable consumer perception and high cost (Gurau & Ranchhod, 2005). The key concern lies in an understanding of green consumers and their characteristics to enable firms to develop new targets and segmentation strategies (D’Souza *et al.*, 2005).

## CONSUMERS PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Concern about the environment and the degree of overall orientation and emotional involvement denotes the value of environment conservation and level of awareness and concern. Dunlap and Jones (2002) define environmental concern as an individual's awareness of environmental problems and attempts to solve either them or willingness to contribute to such attempts. The main assumption is individuals with a strong concern about nature are more likely to buy green goods, in comparison to those who are less concerned about environmental issues. (Lee, 2008) discovered that consumers with high ecological concerns tend to purchase eco-friendly products. He investigated consumers' buying treatment of insecticide products in Hong Kong, and concluded environmental concerns did not determine buying decisions of customers who were younger.

**Hypotheses 1:** There is a significant relationship between Consumers Pro- Environmental Concerns and their intention to sustainable food consumption.

**Consumers Health Consciousness:** The most important reason of consumers’ willingness in sustainable food and sustainable consumption appears to be health concerns. It has been proven by recent studies that organic and environmental friendly (Green) products are safer than conventional products. This has been shown in the studies of Vermeir and Verbeke (2004) and Padel and Foster (2005), that consumers’ main reason for the purchase and consumption of sustainable products is not their environmental concerns in the first place. They give priority to their own health. This study attempts to examine the social psychology and marketing dimensions of consumers to describe young buyers’ choice of food in Malaysia by using the TPB of Ajzen (1991).

**Hypotheses 2.** There is significant relationship between Consumers Health Consciousness and their intention to sustainable consumption.

**Cost Percussion:** An upsurge in the number of buyers who are ready to pay a premium for green goods can be considered the most influencing confirmation encouraging the rise of ecology-conscious buyer treatment (Laroche et al., 2001). Those consumers who have never bought or usually don’t buy organic products, compared to organic food consumers, are more likely to take into consideration prices (Laroche et al., 2001).

**Hypotheses 3.** Cost Percussion has direct and positive influence on consumer's intentions to sustainable consumption.

**Convenience precedence:** Most consumers prefer convenience on their shopping. The results of several studies have proven green food's low availability in a store is a barrier to consumer purchase. Even if the consumers' motivation or intention towards the purchase of specific products is high, low availability makes it impossible to transform the intention into practice (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2004).

**Hypotheses 4.** Convenience precedence has direct and positive effects on a consumer's intention to sustainable food consumption.

**Interaction impression:** D'Souza et al. (2005) holds the view that information on goods is a major factor that can impact an individual's intention towards the purchase of products. It's been found that consumers get information on the green products from their labels before deciding to purchase them. Rashid (2009) in his study found eco-label to be a crucial factor that gives consumers necessary information regarding the environmental effect of the product that they wish to purchase and enables them to choose correctly.

**Hypotheses 5.** Interaction impressions have a positive influence on consumers' intentions to sustainable consumption.

**Sustainable consumption:** Sustainable consumption can be considered as use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations [Oslo Symposium (1994) declaration]. Obviously, a more eco-friendly mode of production and consumption can potentially be shaped by informed and responsible consumers (Hertwich, 2005). In line with this, the idea of consumers adopting sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles becomes an important area for research and development.

Many empirical literatures have revealed increasing social concerns for the environment in various regions of the globe. Sustainable Consumption is a bridge to preserve natural resources for the coming generations. In this particular research the researchers tried to explore how the ambiguity remains to what extent, the shadow of marketing strategies that leads to modify behavior in sustainable purchase?

**Research Design:** This research was cross sectional in nature where the purpose is to describe the influence of market referent factors on purchasing behaviour of Malaysian consumers which comprised of different races and genders, different majors and levels of education. Sample volume determined maximum acceptable values of the relative error ( $\epsilon$ ) of students of University Utara Malaysia Sintok Campus have been considered equal to 0.1 with attention to that volume of society. A total sample of 174 respondents was considered for the study. The results show that Cronbach's Alpha value for all variables are above 0.7 which is considered as good, and acceptable.

$$n_1 = \frac{(Z^{\alpha}/2)^2 * pq}{(\epsilon)^2} \quad n_1 = \frac{(1.96)^2 * .5 * .5}{(0.1)^2} = 96$$

**Table 1**  
**Factor Analysis**

Sl No	Factors	% of variance explained	Cronbach's $\alpha$
1	Perceived behavioral control (Market referent)	0.2010	0.790
2	intention on Food sustainable consumption	0.2119	0.801

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### Pro-Environmental Concern

Table 2: ANOVA – Pro- Environmental Concern					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	.114	1	.114	.219	.641
Residual	38.529	174	.521		
Total	38.643	175			

  

Table 3: Coefficient - Pro- Environmental Concern					
	Unstandardized Coefficient		Mean Square	CR	Sig
	B	Std Error			
(Constant)	3.801	.264	-.054	14.4	.000
Pro-environmental Concern	.037	.079		18	.641
				.468	

According to ANOVA procedure provided the P-value of 0.641 that is greater than 0.05. Hence, regression model would not be significant. Therefore, since it is more than 0.05, the mentioned hypothesis could not be refused significantly. On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between pro-environmental concern of consumers and their intention to sustainable food consumption.

### Health Consciousness

Table 4: ANOVA – Health Consciousness					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	3.6913	1	3.691	7.814	.007
Residual	4.952	174	.472		
Total	38.643	175			

  

Table 5: Coefficient - Health Consciousness					
	Unstandardized Coefficient		Mean Square	CR	Sig
	B	Std Error			
(Constant)	2.648	.379		6.984	.000
Health consciousness	.298	.107	.309	2.795	.007

According to the ANOVA procedure provided the P-value that is not bigger than 0.05. so regression model would be statistically significant. Therefore, since it is not bigger than 0.05, mentioned hypothesis could be rejected significantly. The results of Table 5 confirmed that health consciousness is positively associated with intention of sustainable purchase behavior. As it shown, health consciousness (B=.298, Sig=0.007<0.1) is directly contributed in predicting dependent variable. Hence, there is a significant positive relationship between the health consciousness of consumer and their intentions to sustainable food consumption.

### Cost Percussion

Table 6: ANOVA – Cost Percussion					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	5.474	1	5.474	12.2	.001
Residual	33.169	174	.448	12	
Total	38.643	175			

  

Table 7: Coefficient - Cost Percussion					
	Unstandardized Coefficient		Mean Square	CR	Sig
	B	Std Error			
(Constant)	2.663	.302		8.816	.000
<b>Cost Percussion</b>	.298	.084	.376	3.495	.001

According to the ANOVA procedure provided the P-value of 0.001 that is not bigger than 0.05. So, the regression model would be statistically significant. Since the P-value is not bigger than 0.05, mentioned hypothesis can be refused significantly. The outcome of able 6 confirmed that economic influence is positively associated with intention of sustainable purchase behavior. As shown in Table 7, economic influence (B=.295, Sig= 0.001 < 0.05) is directly predicting dependent variable. Hence, Cost Percussion has a direct and positive effect on consumer's intention to sustainable food consumption.

### Convenience Precedence

Table 8: ANOVA – Convenience precedence					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	.49238.	1	.492	.954	.332
Residual	15138.	174	.516		
Total	643	175			

  

Table 9: Coefficient - Convenience precedence					
	Unstandardized Coefficient		Mean Square	CR	Sig
	B	Std Error			
(Constant)	3.450	.253		13.634	.000
<b>Convenience precedence</b>	.085	.087	.113	.977	.332

According to Table 8, the ANOVA procedure provided the P-value of 0.332 that is greater than 0.05. Hence, the regression model is not significant. Therefore, since the P-value is more than 0.05, the mentioned null hypothesis could not be rejected significantly. On the other hand, no significant relationship between Convenience precedence and their intention to sustainable food consumption. Visual Cues

### Interaction Impression

Table 10: ANOVA – Interaction impression					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	15.202	1	15.202	47.99	.000
Residual	23.441	174	.317	0	
Total	38.643	175			

  

Table 11: Coefficient - Interaction impression					
	Unstandardized Coefficient		Mean Square	CR	Sig
	B	Std Error			
(Constant)	1.685	.296		5.695	.000
<b>Interaction impression</b>	.570	.082	.627	6.927	.000

According to Table 10, the ANOVA procedure provided the P-value of 0.000 of which is lesser than 0.05. Hence; regression would be statistically significant. Since it is not bigger than 0.05, mentioned hypothesis can be refused significantly. According to the result of Table 11, it is confirmed that Interaction impression has positively associated with intention of sustainable purchase behavior. As shown in Table 11, Interaction impression (B=.570, Sig= 0.000 < 0.05) are directly predicting dependent variable. As a result, Interaction impressions (availability of product info/eco-label) have a direct and positive effect on consumer's intention to sustainable food consumption.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Food habits of people vary from country to country and region to region. People of some countries are well aware of the utilitarian perspectives of green products, while some other countries are very much inclined towards non vegetarian foods. The findings of the present research (Tables no 2 and 3) indicate that Malaysian consumers are not so inclined towards green products and the green consumption habit. In this context Brown (2003) states that buyers' trouble in identifying eco-friendly goods is partly on account of the absence of information. D'Souza et al. (2005) believe that information provided on goods is a major factor that can impact an individual's intention towards the purchase of products. Consumer decisions based on less awareness about nature consequence will always lead to such a behavior, away from green consumerism and green consumption. The present findings relate to the pro-environmental attitude of Malaysian consumers is due to less awareness and understanding about nature consequences and nature friendly food habits.

The findings (Tables 4 and 5) related to health consciousness indicates that Malaysian consumers are very much mindful about their health. They are choosy in the selection of their food and what food habits they wish to form. The contrary feature is that even though people are conscious about their health they are less aware about green products and nature-friendly products which are better for their health.

Findings related to the economic condition show that the higher income group naturally has the capacity to purchase green products. But those people in the middle and lower income communities who purchase green products indicate that a different logic is needed to understand the relationship. Past findings indicate that there is an upsurge in the number of buyers who are ready to pay premiums for green goods can be considered the most influencing confirmation encouraging the rise of ecology-conscious buyer treatment (Laroche *et al.*, 2001).

The result (Tables no 10 and 11) clearly indicates that the marketing and sales promotion is having a high effect on attitude and behaviour of Malaysian consumers. In general people are attracted towards product features like colours, packaging, labeling, text, shape, size etc. The higher the information a company shares about its products with the consumers, the higher the response the products may get from market.

## CONCLUSION

Since the current study was done in Malaysia, it prepares a viable contribution and logical picture for those companies which are interested to operate in or target the Malaysian market. This study inferred that the main influence factors on consumer choice behaviour regarding green products include health consciousness and visual cues that influence the Malaysian consumer's nature towards going green. This indicates that considering the business perspective, in order to promote the green consciousness and green attitude, companies should go with more appealing and product information campaigns. Green marketing strategies ought to be well evaluated and redesigned influencing the thought process of consumers that compel them to go with green products. Health and visual cues are the mediums with which the companies can plan ahead better marketing strategies. Effective communication based on information sharing can support green companies to promote their products in Malaysian markets and also enhance their market share.

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