Religiosity As An Antecedent Of Attitude Towards Green Products: An Exploratory Research On Young Malaysian Consumers

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Religion has long been acknowledged as an important social force that influences human behavior but yet in the secular society its influence on consumer behavior appears to be underestimated. Of the sporadic research conducted, findings indicated that religion can be a significant factor in relation to consumption patterns, innovativeness, media usage, family decision-making, purchase risk aversion and selected store patronage behavior. The current research is exploratory in nature and attempts to investigate the influence of religiosity on attitudes towards green products especially among young Malaysian consumers. Religiosity, the independent variable, was measured by the intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientation scale adopted from Allport and Ross (1967). The dependent variable was derived from a study on attitudes towards green product (Mostafa, 2007). The questionnaires were distributed to students in a large private university located in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Reliability analysis and multiple linear regressions were conducted. The results from the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that intrinsic religiosity has a significant relationship on consumer’s attitude towards green product. However, in the case of extrinsic religiosity, there is no significant relationship on consumer’s attitude towards green product.

Keywords: Intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, green products, young consumers

Introduction

Religion has long been acknowledged as an important social force that influences human behavior. However, its influence on consumer behavior appears to be underestimated in the secular society. With the drastic shift in consumer behaviors and marketers especially towards environmentally safe or green products, there is a need to address whether religiosity has a significant influence on the attitudes of consumers towards green products. To date the marketing value of religion as a cultural based predictor of consumer behavior has not been adequately examined even though there has been a call for such research in the literature.

Religion is an important cultural factor to study because it is one of the most universal and influential social institutions that have significant impact on people’s attitudes, values and behaviors at both the individual and societal levels (Mokhlis, 2006). Religion and its associated practices often plays a critical role in influencing many of the important life transitions that people experience (e.g. births, marriages and funeral rites), in values that come to be important to them (e.g. moral values of right and wrong), in shaping public opinion on social issues (e.g. cohabitation, premarital sex, family planning, organ donation, abortion), in what is allowed and forbidden for consumption (e.g. restriction on eating and drinking) and in many other aspects that pertain to everyday life (Mokhlis, 2006). These norms differ between diverse religious

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faiths. Hence the level of observance determine to what extent these norms are kept.

Of the sporadic research that has been conducted, findings indicated that religion can be a significant factor in relation to consumption patterns, innovativeness, media usage, family decision-making, purchase risk aversion and selected store patronage behavior. So far, searches through the literature have not revealed any past studies on religiosity as a predictor of attitudes towards green products.

Consumers have long been recognized as one of the most influential stakeholder groups that could affect the well-being of a corporation. Consumers can be categorized into various segments and there is also variety of ways to establish consumer market segments. One way of segmenting consumer markets is to group them based on age, income level, occupation as well as hobbies or interest. For example, Lewis and Bingham (1991) classified young consumers as youths between the age of 15 and 24 years old. In Malaysia, young consumers group have been a growing population. They are not only increasingly cosmopolitan in their outlook and preferences but also highly exposed to various media and advertising tactics.

An exhaustive review of the pertinent literature revealed that there is a dearth of published research that specifically focused on religiosity and its relationship to the attitude towards green products. Therefore the current research is essentially exploratory in nature. It attempts to investigate the influence of religiosity on attitudes towards green products especially among young Malaysian consumers. Furthermore this study is to provide a basis for further investigation in this promising research area. This study contributes towards research in consumer practices in the Malaysian perspective. Specifically, the study provides some insights on the influence of religious commitment on the attitudes towards green products among young consumers in Malaysia. The insightful findings may help corporations and marketers to formulate appropriate policy or strategies to promote positive consumer attitudes towards green products among Malaysian consumers.

The paper begins by providing a theoretical background of the relevant literature. Thereafter the methodology and the results from the quantitative study were presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and identifies several limitations for future improvement.

**Literature Review**

**Religion and Religiosity**

Johnstone (1975) defined religion as a system of beliefs and practices by which group of people interpret and respond to what they feel is mystical and revered. Furthermore, religion is a social institution that shapes and controls the beliefs and behavior of its followers. Religion affects individual behavior through two sources. First, religion stipulates rules and obligations as well as sanctions that directly control and influence individual’s behavior (Harrell, 1986). One example might be the prohibition of gambling and consumption of liquor for Muslims. Second, as an influential social institution religion has an indirect role in shaping culture, norms, attitudes and values in society (Al Habshi and Syed-Agil, 1994).

Religiosity or religious commitment is “the extent to which an individual’s committed to the religion he or she professes and its teachings, such as the individual attitudes and behaviors reflect this commitment” (Johnson et al 1995: p. 25). Hence the extent to which religion affects one's beliefs and behavior depends on the individual’s level of religiosity and the importance one places on the religion itself (Sood and Nasu, 1995). It is argued that religiousness or religiosity, as an important value in the individual’s cognitive structure, can influence an individual’s behavior.
According to him the pro-religious (or highly religious) individuals are likely to be more dogmatic and more conservative than are the non-religious (or least religious) individuals. As such, it is expected that the more religious person would more likely to align their behavior in compliant with their religious belief and practices. It is further suggested that those who are strongly committed to religion are both attitudinally and behaviorally capable of making decisions consistent with moral conscience (Delener, 1994).

Caird (1987) proposed that religiosity could be measured based on three dimensions: cognitive (focuses on religious attitudes or beliefs), behavioral (measures that seek to evaluate church attendance or private prayer), and experiential (query that relates to mystical experiences). Worthington et al (2003) developed the Religious Commitment Inventory Scale (RCI-10) to measure religiosity. The RCI-10 consists of 4 dimensions of intrapersonal religiosity (cognitive) and 6 dimensions of interpersonal religiosity (behavioral) to a religious value system respectively. The intrapersonal religiosity dimension focuses on religious attitudes or beliefs and the interpersonal religiosity measures that seek to evaluate mosque/temple/church attendance or private prayer.

No approach to religiousness has had greater impact on the empirical study of religion than Gordon W. Allport’s concepts of religiosity. Allport (1950) perceived religious motivation as differentiated by two types of religious sentiment; intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. The intrinsically motivated person lives his religion whereas the extrinsically motivated person uses his religion (Allport and Ross, 1967). Donahue (1985) reviews concepts associated with intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness in Allport’s writings and found that intrinsic religiousness relates to all of life, unprejudiced and tolerant; integrative, unifying and meaning-endowing. In contrast, extrinsic religiousness is compartmentalized, prejudiced and exclusionary; immature, dependent and seeking comfort and security. The current research would adopt the intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity scales developed by Allport and Ross (1967).

Attitude towards green products

Allport (1935) defined attitude as: “A mental and neural state of readiness, which exerts a directing, influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situations with which it is related”. According to Schultz and Zeleny (2000), “attitudes of environment concern are rooted in a person’s concept of self and the degree to which an individual perceives him or herself to be an integral part of the natural environment”. In the nutshell, attitudes represent what consumers like and dislike (Blackwell et al., 2006) and consumers’ product purchasing judgments are often based on their environmental attitudes (Irland, 1993; Schwerpker and Cornwell, 1991). The two most studied attitudes in the ecological literature, with respect to environmentally friendly behavior, are importance and inconvenience. Amyx et al (1994) defined perceived importance with respect to the environment, as the degree to which one expresses concern about ecological issues warta berita hari ini

The dramatic increase in environmental awareness over recent decades has resulted in the emergence of “green” consumerism (Brown, 1992; Peattie, 1992). Green product is known as ecological product or environmental friendly product. Shamdasami et al. (1993) defined green product as the product that will not pollute the earth or deplete natural resources, and can be recycled or conserved. It is a product that has more environmentally sound content and packaging in reducing environmental impact (Elkington and Makower, 1988; Wasik, 1996). Green product is also known as product that incorporates recycling or with recycled content, reduced packaging or using less toxic materials to reduce the impact on the natural environment. In his research, Krause (1993) discovered that consumers were becoming more concerned about their everyday habits and the impact on the environment. Some consumers translated their environmental concern into actively purchasing green products commitment (Martin and Simintiras, 1995).

Ottman (1992) reported that consumers accepted green products when their primary needs for performance, quality, convenience, and affordability were met. Consumers would also
be more accepting when they understood how a green product could help to solve environmental problems. The knowledge gap of the uses and values of green products prevents consumers in committing themselves to any purchase decisions.

**Hypotheses**

Based on the previously reviewed theoretical literatures, the following hypotheses were proposed:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between intrinsic religiosity and attitude towards green products of young Malaysian consumers.

**H2:** There is a significant relationship between extrinsic religiosity and attitude towards green products of young Malaysian consumers.

**Methodology**

**Research Instruments**

The questionnaire in this research was adopted from earlier studies. Religiosity, the independent variable, was measured by the intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientation scale adopted from Allport and Ross (1967). Slight changes were made in the wording so that the scale would not appear to be measuring any specific religion but rather a general religious orientation. There were a total of 14 items in this scale with 8 items measuring intrinsic religiosity and 4 items measuring extrinsic religiosity. The dependent variable was derived from a study on attitudes towards green products (Mostafa, 2007) and consists of two items. A five-point Likert-type scale, ranking from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), was used for all the constructs.

The alpha values were calculated to evaluate the internal consistency reliabilities of the scales. The reliability coefficients of the religiosity scale and the attitude towards green product scale were indicated in Table 1 below.

Schuessler (1971) stated that a scale is considered reliable if it has an alpha value greater than 0.60. Hair et al (1998) added that reliability estimates between 0.600 and 0.700 represent the lower limit of acceptability in quantitative research studies. Therefore, the alpha value greater than 0.600 for reliability estimates was used due to the exploratory nature of this research.

**Data collection and characteristics of respondents**

The target population of the survey comprised university students from a major private university located in Klang valley, Malaysia. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed. Undergraduate students were chosen as respondents due to their ready accessibility and their demographic that fit into the profile of young consumers. Ferber (1977) noted that using students sample is considered valid for exploratory studies and when the subject of the research is perceived to be both relevant and understandable to the respondents, as in this research study.

Undergraduate students were asked to complete the survey during class time and their anonymity assured. Participation was voluntary and no remuneration was offered. A total of 184 completed questionnaires (yielding a response rate of 92%) were obtained and deemed sufficiently complete to be useable. The remaining questionnaires were discarded due to incomplete or unsatisfactory responses. The majority of the respondents were female (67.4%), and of Chinese ethnicity (59.2%).

Prior to subjecting the data to statistical analysis, frequency distributions were tabulated

| Table 1: Reliability of dependent and independent variable measures |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Construct                        | No. of items    | Cronbach alpha   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| **Dependent:**                   |                 |                  |
| Attitude towards green products  | 2               | 0.782            |
| **Independent:**                 |                 |                  |
| Intrinsic religiosity            | 8               | 0.781            |
| Extrinsic religiosity            | 6               | 0.715            |
for each item to ascertain possible response biases. In addition, a visual inspection was also performed to identify any possible anomalies. Once the sample was determined to be of sufficient quality it was then subjected to statistical analysis.

Results

Prior to the analysis, the potential existence of multicollinearity problem between the variables was diagnosed using a variance inflation factor (VIF) test, which results revealed that both the variables have VIF value of 1.098. According to Hair et al. (1998) a VIF value of less than 10 is acceptable. Thus both variables were retained and used in the subsequent multiple regression analysis.

Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity for predicting attitude towards green products. The combination of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity significantly explained the attitudes towards green product, $F(2, 181) = 9.007$ with only the intrinsic religiosity significantly contributing to the prediction. The beta weight, presented in Table 2, suggest that intrinsic religiosity contribute most to predicting attitude towards green products. The adjusted R squared value was 0.080. This indicates that only 8% of the variance in attitude towards green product was explained by the model. According to Cohen (1988), this is a small effect. Based on the result of the regression analysis, H1 was accepted and H2 was rejected.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the results, intrinsic religiosity was found to significantly explained consumer’s attitude towards green products. Furthermore, the sign of the beta weight for intrinsic religiosity was in the expected direction i.e. the stronger a respondent’s sense of intrinsic religiousness, the more likely they were to have positive attitude towards green products. Donahue (1985) pointed out that intrinsic religiosity correlated highly with religious commitment. Allport and Ross (1967) stated that an intrinsically motivated person lives his religion. This means that an intrinsically religious person follows all the teachings of his religion and follows his religion’s laws and precepts. The result of this study confirmed previous behavioral research on religiosity. It reveals that an intrinsically religious consumer who lives his religion and have a high religious commitment are more likely to have a positive attitude towards green products.

In the case of extrinsic religiosity, apparently it was not a factor in determining consumer’s attitude towards green products. Thus H2 was not supported. In short, consumers who display high level of extrinsic religiosity will not display any favorable attitude towards green products. In this study, extrinsic religiosity was not a determinant of attitude towards green products among young Malaysian consumers. Donahue (1985) affirmed that extrinsic religiosity does not measure religiousness per se, but measures one’s attitude toward religion as a source of comfort and social support and thus are less likely to be highly correlated with religious commitment. This means that an extrinsically religious person would be less committed to his religion compared to an intrinsically religious person. Based on the result of this study, consumers who have shown high level of extrinsic religiosity who “uses” their religion (Allport and Ross, 1967) and thus less committed to their religion have shown not to view green products with much favor. Table 3 provides a summary of the research results.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis

| Dependent variable: Attitude towards green product | Standardized Coefficient (beta) | t-value | Significance |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------|--------------|
| Constant                                          | 8.434                          | 0.000   |              |
| Intrinsic religiosity                             | 0.257                          | 3.463   | 0.001        |
| Extrinsic religiosity                             | 0.097                          | 1.307   | 0.193        |
| R Square = 0.091  F-Value = 9.007                | Adjusted R Square = 0.080  Significance = 0.000 |

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Table 3. Summary of results in relation to the research hypotheses

| No | Hypotheses | Finding     |
|----|------------|-------------|
| H1 | There is a significant relationship between intrinsic religiosity and attitude towards green products of young Malaysian consumers. | Supported |
| H2 | There is a significant relationship between extrinsic religiosity and attitude towards green products of young Malaysian consumers. | Not Supported |

in relation to the hypotheses developed for this study.

**Limitations And Future Research**

There are a number of limitations that should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings of the study. First, given the exploratory nature of this research the results of the identified relationships should be taken as preliminary evidence that warrants further investigation to validate or verify the existing linkages. Second, the results of the study should be interpreted with caution due to the fact that the samples mainly consisted of predominantly Chinese students. Moreover, as in any type of exploratory study, the inherent limitation associated with the problem of generalizing the findings of the research to the general Malaysian young consumers. Future research should attempt to include a representative sample of the general Malaysian consumers. Due to the constraints of time and financial resources, the sample size in this study was relatively small. Thus weakness inherent in a small sample size such as instability of measures and the consequent reduction in the power of statistical tests in the data analysis may have affected the results of this study. A larger and equal sample size would have been more useful to assess the stability and dependability of the findings. Third, only a small percentage of the variance in the independent variables was explained in the attitude towards green products dimension. As such, the study has encountered an omitted variables problem in which other variables may account for the rest of the variance. Future research should probably include other variables such as the role of money and moral philosophies.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to examine the relationship between religiosity and the attitude towards green product among young Malaysian consumers. The research adopted the construct of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity as the independent variables and attitudes towards green product as the dependent variable. The results indicate that intrinsic religiosity has a significant relationship on consumer’s attitude towards green product. Extrinsic religiosity however, did not show any significant relationship. Despite some limitations of the research, the outcomes of this study provide some insights to marketers and policy makers to implement strategies incorporating religious values as this has shown to impact attitudes towards green product. However, more research needs to be conducted as the influence of religiosity on other areas of consumer behaviors has not been fully explored.

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