

## UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER DECISION MAKING TOWARDS GREEN ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS

Yasmin Hassan  
Marjan Nor Amalina Mohd Nor  
Faculty of Business Management UiTM Cawangan Kelantan

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of consumer behavior towards green electronic products. The objective is to determine the level of consumers decision making towards green electronic products and to identify the factors such as attitudes toward environmental protection, knowledge of the environment, green purchase intention and safety and health concerns that influence consumers when making a decision in choosing green electronic products. A survey of 80 respondents using questionnaires was conducted among consumers around Kubang Kerian, Kelantan an area which can be considered as comprising of medium to high class consumers since it is near to Universiti Sains Malaysia Health Campus who are likely to be aware and purchase lead-free electronic products (green electronics). From the results of the study, it shows the level of decision making among consumers to choose green electronic products is still weak and this also means that users are less aware about the existence of a variety of green electronic products in the market. The findings also indicate that environmental knowledge and purchase intention on green products were found to enhance the explanation in predicting consumer decision making towards green electronic products.*

*Keyword: green, electronic products, environmental protection*

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### INTRODUCTION

Green marketing covers the overall brand of marketing activities undertaken by companies in a manner that they promote manufacture of products which have a positive impact on environment or alternatively reduce negative impact on the environment. Today green marketing is a vital component of marketing research which began due to increasing media exposure and pressure on firms to present eco friendly behaviour. The growth in green marketing over the years has been promoted by adoption of product packaging and presenting to the public these improvements.

In general, green product is known as an 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 or packaging in reducing the environmental impact (Wasik, 1996). In other words, green product refers to product that incorporates the strategies in recycling or with recycled content, reduced packaging or using less toxic materials to reduce the impact on the natural environment. Krause (1993), in his research found that consumers were becoming more concerned about their everyday habits and the impact on the environment. The outcome of this is that some of the consumers translated their environmental concern into actively purchasing green products commitment (Martin and Simintiras, 1995).

Interest in green products has grown in recent years, as indicated by increased consumer demand (Chen, 2008), increased supply by companies (Chung and Wee, 2008), consumer and environmental protection offered by non governmental entities, universities developing specific green marketing courses, and increased number of research publications (Hartman and Ibanez, 2006; Nyborg, Howarth and Brekke, 2006).

The main problem with green products relates to definition. The definition is unclear, the concept boundaries are poorly defined, and the literature still lacks a commonly accepted definition. According to Ottman (1998), a well-known author in the field of green marketing, green products are typically durable, non toxic, made of recycled materials, or minimally packaged. Of course, there are no completely green products, for they all use up energy and resources and create by-products and emissions during their manufacture, transport to warehouses and stores, usage, and eventual disposal. So green is relative, describing products with less impact on the environment than their alternatives.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Consumers demand for high tech products around the world have made the electronic industry very dynamic and new products are launched every day in the consumer electronics sector. As the technology is growing rapidly, people constantly upgrade to new equipment, and retire their old equipment. In today's competitive environment, consumers are less aware about the importance of green products to meet their needs. Therefore, a consumer is faced with the choice of whether to buy electronic products that are free of lead or non-lead-free electronic products. Many consumers are not exposed to the benefits to be gained if using eco-friendly electronic products (electronic products without lead). In addition, not all consumers are able to buy electronic products without lead because it is sold at a price higher than the normal electronic equipment.

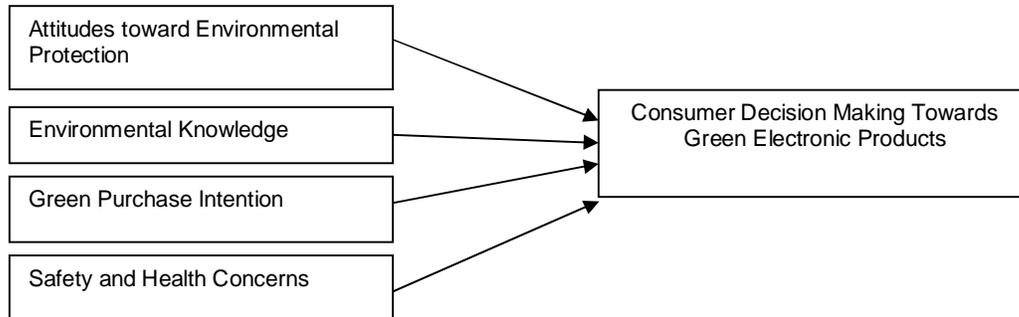
This study is conducted to identify the level of knowledge of consumers toward electronic green products when making purchase decisions. Campaigns and efforts have been made by various parties about the awareness of protecting the environment.

Therefore, this study was undertaken to find out the extent of awareness and consumers' knowledge about the existence of a variety of green electronics products in the market and it also aims to find out whether consumers are exposed to enough information or not about green products. In addition, it is also meant to know the extent of the studied factors influencing consumer decision making in the selection of green electronic products.

The objective of this study is generally to understand the factors that influence consumers' decision making towards green electronic products and is specifically aimed to determine the level of consumers decision making towards green electronic products and to identify the factors that influence consumers when making a decision in choosing green electronic products.

The theoretical framework describes the hypothesized relationship among the variables in a path diagram. The framework consists of four independent variables which are attitudes toward environmental protection, environmental knowledge, green purchase intention and safety and health concerns.

Figure 1 Theoretical framework



## LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer decision making style is psychological and cognitive approach that can be applied to find out how consumers make decision towards shopping and buying behavior. This means that, consumer decision making style is the cognitive procedure of making decision to purchase a particular product among varieties of products and decide to repurchase or not (Safiek Mokhlis, 2009).

Environmental attitude is defined as a learned predisposition to respond consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to the environment. Overall, there has been consistent empirical evidence supporting a positive association between environmental attitude and behaviour. These studies have also indicated that even if people have little knowledge about the environment they would still exhibit strong emotional attachment to environmental wellbeing (Ling-ye, 1997). Attitude, as opposed to knowledge and behaviour, is the most significant predictor of consumers' willingness to pay more for ecologically favourable products (Laroche et. al., 2001). This study follows earlier studies in conceptualizing attitude toward environmental protection as a unidimensional construct (Noe and Snow, 1990; Minton and Rose, 1997; Sharifah et al., 2005).

Recent research suggests that despite high levels of "green attitudes", environmental concern has failed to translate into widespread environmental action (Roper Organization, 1990; Dunlap & Scarce, 1991; Wall, 1995). Over two decades of environmental attitude research have resulted in a multitude of studies dedicated to discovering the social determinants of environmental attitudes (Van Liere & Dunlap, 1981). There is also evidence suggesting that people believe that environmental conditions are deteriorating and that concern for quality of life has given way, in many cases, to concern about health issues, and life itself, for human and non-human species (Dunlap & Scarce, 1991).

According to Schultz and Zelezny (2000), "attitudes of environmental 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 conclusion, attitude represents what consumers like and dislike and consumers' product purchasing decisions are often based on their environmental attitudes (Blackwell et al., 2006)

There is a general belief among researchers and environmental activists that through purchasing environmentally friendly products or green products, products with recyclable packaging or properly disposing of non-biodegradable garbage, consumers can contribute significantly to improve the quality of the environment (Abdul-Muhmim, 2007). The quality of the environment depends critically on the level of knowledge, attitudes, values and practices of consumers (Mansaray and Abijoye, 1998). Attitudes are the most consistent explanatory factor in predicting consumers' willingness to pay for green products (Chyong et al., 2006). This means that price is not the main factor in preventing consumers from purchasing green products if they are pro-environment.

Thus, attitudes toward environmental protection is conceptualized as an independent variable that includes human behaviour when making decisions during the purchase process for electronic products to choose green electronic products for environmental sustainability.

Conraud-Koellner and Rivas-Tovar (2009) defines environmental knowledge as the sets of ecological knowledge that an individuals have of environmental topics. Both of these researchers belief that environmental knowledge is influences by ecological ethnocentrism, degree of information, past behaviour and perceptions about green products. On the other hand, Chan and Lau (2000) define environmental knowledge as the amount of knowledge a person has regarding environmental issues.

According to D'Souza, Taghian and Lamb (2006) environmental knowledge evolves in two forms; (1) consumers have to educated to be understand the impact of a product to environment; and (2) consumer knowledge in the product itself being produced in an environmentally friendly way. There are many ways on how consumers seeking for knowledge and evidences suggest that consumers are seeking knowledge by reading product label (D'Souza et. al, 2006). If the consumer has knowledge about the environmental issues, then their awareness level would increase and thus would, potentially, promote favourable attitudes towards green products.

The state of one's knowledge about an issue impacts significantly upon his or her decision making process. The importance of knowledge and the impact of lack of knowledge in the decision-making process have been demonstrated in numerous studies (Laroche et. al 2001). Consumers who are aware of the importance of using green products on health and the environment will make the best decision when making the purchasing process.

Many researchers suggested that consumer knowledge of environmentally green product would have a major influence on purchase and purchase behaviour. Therefore, marketers should focus on educating consumers towards social responsibility practices. Marketers should also emphasize on highlighting the significance of the consumers' participations in green movements. Moreover, the consumers should be exposed and introduced to green products through a systematic approach taken by marketers.

In this study, environmental knowledge is conceptualized as an independent variable covering general aspects of what people know about environmental issues and the degree to which the user's knowledge about the importance of environment in making purchase decisions, particularly the purchase of green electronics.

Green purchase intention (PI) is conceptualized as the probability and willingness of a person to give preference to products having eco-friendly features over other traditional products in their purchase considerations. Ng and Paladino (2009) defined behavioural intentions as a measure of a person's relative strength of purpose to execute certain behaviour. Nik Abdul Rashid (2009) defined green purchase intention as the probability and willingness of an individual to give preference to green product over conventional products in their purchase considerations. However, Ramayah, Lee and Mohamad (2010) referred green purchase intention as a determination to act in a certain way.

For the purposes of this study, green purchase intention is conceptualized as an independent variable associated with a consumer's desire to obtain a product especially for green electronic products.

According to Wall (1995), safety and health concerns are considered to be the strongest predictor of attitude and behaviour; her findings lend support to researchers who claim that increasing concern with health and safety are becoming prominent factor in shaping people's attitudes towards the environment. It also supports the self-interest-related notion that behavioural motivation increases with perceptions of personal risk.

However, Rundmo (1999) performed a study aiming to analyse how health attitudes, environmental concern and behaviour are influenced by risk perception. The findings of the study concluded that most respondents felt unsafe on chemical food additives, food infected, industrial pollution and the risks associated with consumer buying behaviour. Attitudes toward health promotion have been closely associated with behavioural health, and environmental issues that significantly affected the behaviour of the environment. Therefore, users need to make the best purchasing decisions in the selection of green products to ensure the safety and health is always guaranteed.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In gathering data, the questionnaire was used and designed based on the theoretical framework, in three sections and in dual-language; English and Bahasa Malaysia to avoid misunderstanding and confusion among the respondents.

Section A is a set of questions designed using nominal scale. Scale is provided to be used for this question is mainly about the demographic profile of respondents and the general information about green electronic products. Respondents only need to identify the categories associated. Section B consists of the questions about consumers when making a purchase.

Section C consists of questions related to the factors that influence consumers behaviour when make a purchase in selection of green electronic products. For section B and C, questions are measured using five-interval Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Target populations are consumers around Kubang Kerian who buy any type of electronic products for daily use. The researcher chose this location because it is an area of high population density, medium to high class consumers and Universiti Sains Malaysia Health campus is located.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the findings, many of the respondents are Malay women and aged between 26-30 years. Majority of them are married and have their own income within RM1001-RM2000. They always buy and use electronics products in their daily lives. However, the results also showed that many of them are not aware about the existence of green electronic products .It was clearly shown that out of 80 respondents interviewed, 98.5% of them use electronic products, whilst only 1.3% do not use electronic product. It was also shown that 47.5% of the respondents spend less than RM1000 to purchase electronic products, followed by 43.8% spend between RM1001 – RM2000 on electronic product, 7.5% spend between RM2001-RM3000 for electronic products and the least is 1.3% spend between RM3001 –RM4000 for electronic products in a year. Most of the respondents prefer Panasonic when purchasing electronic products, which is 35%, followed by Sony which is 31.3%. 20% of the respondents prefer other brands, while another 8.8% prefer Toshiba followed by Samsung at only 5%. 47.5% of respondents do not seem to know about the existence of green electronic products in the market. 36.3% of them realize the existence of these products whilst 16.3% are just not aware.

**Table 1. Mean for all variables**

Dependent Variable	Mean
Consumer decision making	2.168
<b>Independent Variables</b>	
Attitude towards Environmental Protection	2.762
Environmental Knowledge	2.992
Green Purchase Intention	2.155
Safety and Health Concerns	3.792

Based on table 1, it shows the level of decision making among consumers to choose green electronic products is still weak and this also means that consumers are less aware of the existence of a variety of green electronic products in the market. Thus the consumer tend to select items that are not environmentally friendly for their daily use.

According to the overall mean from the table above, it can be concluded that most of the respondents are not quite accustomed with green products, especially electronics products. For instance, consumer decision making towards green electronic product shows a value of 2.168 which means that consumer decision making towards electronic products is still at the stage of introduction.

On the other hand, respondents attitude towards green products are also at the early stage where respondents are still not used with green products that are available in the market where the value shows the mean of 2.762. The respondents environmental knowledge shows the mean value of 2.992. In addition, when it comes to the respondents green purchase intention towards environmentally safe products, the respondents still do not have any idea in indentifying whether to purchase green or non-green products, or most probably they could care less if the products they purchase is environmentally safe or not, where the mean value is 2.155. However, in terms of safety and health concerns, the respondents seem to be positive about keeping the environment safe. This was proven with the mean value of 3.792. Therefore, it can be concluded that safety and health concerns is the key that affects consumers in deciding to choose green electronic products that are environmentally safe for the household and the environment.

**Table 2 Pearson Correlation of consumers decisions towards green products**

		DECISION	ATTITUDE	KNOWLEDGE	INTENTION	SAFETY
DECISION	Pearson Correlation	1	.763**	.688**	.853**	.143
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.204
	N	80	80	80	80	80
ATTITUDE	Pearson Correlation	.763**	1	.554**	.793**	.234*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.037
	N	80	80	80	80	80

KNOWLEDGE	Pearson Correlation	.688**	.554**	1	.680**	.278*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.012
	N	80	80	80	80	80
INTENTION	Pearson Correlation	.853**	.793**	.680**	1	.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.584
	N	80	80	80	80	80
SAFETY	Pearson Correlation	.143	.234*	.278*	.062	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.204	.037	.012	.584	
	N	80	80	80	80	80
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

The table above indicates the result of the correlation test where the relationships between all criteria are significantly correlated at 95% level of confidence, except for the final variable, safety and health concerns. The relationship between consumer decision making towards green electronic products and attitude is significant since the p-value is 0.00, which is below significant level at 0.05. The strength of the relationship is high since the r-value is 0.763. The relationship between consumer decision making towards green electronic products and environmental knowledge is significant since the p-value is 0.00, which is below significant level at 0.05. The strength of the relationship is moderate since the r-value is 0.688. The relationship between consumer decision making towards green electronic products and green purchase intention is proven to be significant since the p-value is 0.000, which is below significant level at 0.05. The strength of the relationship is high since the r-value is 0.853. The relationship between consumer decision making towards green electronic products and safety and health concerns is insignificant since the p-value is 0.204, which is over the significant level at 0.05. The strength of the relationship is low since the r-value is 0.143.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings it was shown that the level of decision making among consumers to choose green electronic products is still weak and this also means that users are less aware about the existence of a variety of green electronic products in the market. It thus causes the consumer to select items that are not environmentally friendly electronics for their daily use.

From the research, it can be clearly concluded that there are two factors influencing consumers' decision in choosing green electronic products, which are environment knowledge and purchase intention. These two factors have the strongest relationships with the dependent variable. Both are significant at the P-value of 0.005 and 0.00.

This information can be used by marketers to improvise their marketing strategies especially on green products by using conventional mix marketing strategies which are the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion). For instance in product development, marketers can provide information on green consumptions trends and green products attributes such as energy saving, etc to cater for the needs of consumers who prefer green products. While, in terms of pricing, consumers can be charged higher because of the benefit in terms of energy saving. Advertisement and marketing efforts can encourage the consumers to use environmentally friendly products while informing them the consequences of using non-environmentally friendly products in the long run.

Further research may be useful to be studied on the other factors that influence the consumer decision towards green electronic products.

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