

Green Product Purchase Behaviour: Relevance for Muslims

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Recent climate change phenomenon and other prevailing environmental problems have marked a need for human beings to rethinking their way of life, particularly in their relationship with the environment. In Islam, human beings are made responsible at his/her best efforts in preserving the environment including practising pro-environmental behaviour. Due to strong pressures by Western public movements since past decades, the emergence of green products in marketplace has provided an alternative and better way of consumption in reducing adverse environmental impacts. However, little attention has been paid on relating green product purchase behaviour with Islamic teachings. Therefore, the paper discusses the role of green products purchase behaviours in reducing adverse environmental impacts and its relationship with Islamic teachings as mentioned in Al-Quran and As-Sunnah. Besides, the importance of green product knowledge in determining green product purchase behaviour is also discussed. Implications from the study would provide some insights on links between green product purchase behaviours and Islamic teachings as well as improving understanding on the influence of knowledge on pro-environmental behaviours both in empirical manner and as being outlined in Islam.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, environment, green, Islam, marketing, product knowledge, purchase

Introduction

Environmental problem is nothing new. Since early times, human beings have been experiencing environmental degradation due to the development activities due to rise of civilisations such as deforestation in Babylon, lead poisoning in Rome, and pollution and plague in Europe (Environmentalhistory.org, 2009). Even during the medieval period, environmental problems were experienced also experienced by Caliphates (Lutfallah, 2002) and getting widespread in the era of Industrial Revolution in 1800s until today. Conflicts between achieving higher development and improving environmental quality for their well-being seem to be never ending.

Due to greater development achieved in Malaysia, economic prosperity is enjoyed by consuming more products (Sharifah Azizah Haron, Laily Paim, & Nurizan Yahaya, 2005). Such unsustainable consumption resulted into various environmental problems in the country with adverse impacts to Malaysians well-being. Since consumption is inevitable for human being to survive, green product is viewed as a means in reducing the impacts of human consumption on the environment. In Islam, environment is highly regarded as a gift from Allah to humans for their well-being in the world in order to perform *ibadah* (act of worship) to Allah. Therefore, it is

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important to preserve the environment in every way. By purchasing and consuming green products, human beings can contribute towards environmental improvement and perform *ibadah* to Allah at the same time. Lack of studies which strongly relate to green product purchase behaviour to Islamic teachings triggers a need for further review on the importance of environmental protection in Islam as well as knowledge pertaining to it. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to relate green product purchase behaviour with Islamic teachings on environmental protection as mentioned in Al-Quran and As-Sunnah. Besides, the paper also discussed the importance of product-related knowledge in influencing green product purchase behaviour. A brief content analysis has been done using Al-Quran and Hadith as important references regarding Islamic teachings on environmental protection. Reviews are also done on empirical studies of green product purchase behaviour in Malaysia as well as the influence of environmental knowledge on green product purchase behaviour.

Green Product Purchase Behaviour

Green or environmental-friendly purchase behaviour is the individual's purchasing habit of environmental-friendly products (Schlegelmilch, Bohlen, & Diamantopoulos, 1996, p. 40), i.e., products that will not pollute the earth or deplete natural resources, and can be recycled or conserved (Shamdasani, Chong-Lin, & Richmond, 1993, p. 488). The act of acquiring green products are important, the right buying decision can reduce or even totally eliminate the risk of environmental harm in the post-purchase stages of consumption cycle (Stern, Dietz, Ruttan, Socolow, & Sweeney, 1997) and able to cause significant impact on environment if it is done in aggregate (Stern, 2000). The idea of green product's purchase has been popular when the adverse consequences of environmental degradation to human being became increasingly apparent in the Western countries in 1970s which has resulted to the rise of green movements which demanded businesses to be more responsible towards the environment (Kilbourne & Beckmann, 1998). Since a few decades ago, the number of green products have been increasing and until March 2011, it is reported that there are 1,229 green products are being made available in Asian markets (Asian Productivity Organization, 2011), including those which are recyclable, having long life, degradable, high quality, energy saving, environmental clean-up products and those made of recycled materials. The trend is expected to increase in the future due to expected demands from people in Asia, including Malaysia.

The acceptance of green products among Malaysians is encouraging. Studies done by Aini Mat Said, Fakhru'l-Razi Ahmadun, Laily Paim, and Jariah Masud (2003) found that 18.2% of selected teachers from 10 schools in Selangor reported high level of environmentally-conscious consumer behaviour, while the remainder (81.8%) of respondents reported moderate level of environmentally-conscious consumer behaviour. The studies also reported that among the most frequently engaged behaviour include the usage of unleaded petrol to reduce pollution and not purchasing products that harm the environment although low it is lower price. Another study done by Siti Nor Bayaah Ahmad and Nurita Juhdi (2008) reported that 48.6% of 177 consumers intercepted in supermarkets in Klang Valley reported that they have purchased green products in their lifetime. In another study, Mohamad Fazli Sabri and Teoh Yong Yong (2006) found that 21.3% of respondents among 80 employees in a private company in Selangor reported high level of green product purchase behaviour, while 71.3% reported moderate level. Studies too, was been done on university students whereby Tan and Lau (2009) reported moderate level of sustainable consumption among students in a private university while Siti Haslina Md Harizan (2006) also reported moderate level in the events of green products purchases among students in a public

university. Overall, the behaviour of purchasing green products among Malaysians has been growing.

Apart from actual green product purchase, Malaysians too, reported significant interests towards acquiring green products. Study by Iman Khalid Abdul Qader (2008) on 170 lecturers in a public university reported that lecturer's intention to purchase electronic green products was positively driven by extensive media exposure which disseminates environmental issues including green products. Another study by Akram Ahmed Alodini (2008) found that willingness to pay more for green products among public university students was moderate whereby students are positively influenced by attitudes and past pro-environmental behaviour while a study by Nik Ramli Nik Abdul Rashid (2007) on 526 employees from 46 ISO 14000 certified organisations found that respondents reported moderate to high intention to purchase energy-efficient bulbs as compared to incandescent bulbs. In short, Malaysians seemed to be keen on having green products not only at present, but also in future.

Looking into past studies, green products have been increasingly accepted by Malaysians since most respondents reported moderate to high level of green products purchases. Nevertheless, little has been understood in relating green product purchase behaviour with Islamic teachings. Therefore, it is important to highlight some verses of Al-Quran and narrations from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sayings in further understanding the need to protect the environment from unsustainable activities.

Islam and Environmental Protection

Allah has provided the environment and its components for human well-being and sustenance on earth in order to carry out our responsibility and to worship Allah. In Al-Quran, Allah says:

Then let man consider his nourishment: that We pour down the rain in showers, and We split the earth in fragments, and therein make the grains to grow, and vines and herbs, and olives and palms, and gardens of dense foliage, and fruits and fodder—provision for you and your cattle. (Surah-'Abasa (80), pp. 24-32).

Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, and We separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe? (Surah Al-Anbiya' (21), p. 30).

And we made the sky a protected ceiling, but they, from its signs, are turning away. (Surah Al-Anbiya' (21), p. 32).

In addition, Allah too, has reminded us not to perform destructive activities including causing degradation of the environment. In Al-Quran, Allah mentions:

Eat and drink, but waste not by excess; Verily He loves not the excessive (Surah Al-'Araf (7), p. 31).

And do not cause corruption in the earth, when it has been set in order. (Surah Al-'Araf (7), p. 56).

And do not follow the bidding of the excessive, who cause corruption in the earth and do not work good. (Surah Ash-Shu'ara' (26), pp. 151-152).

Yet, presently, the environment has suffered severe degradations due to mishandling by human beings in their lives for example, pollution and climate change which had caused the downgrading of human well-being and quality of life, for example poverty due to destroyed crops in rural areas and diseases due to low environmental quality among city dwellers. Ibn Khaldun, a medieval-Islamic scholar, had also mentioned in his work of *Muqaddimah* or *Prolegomena* on environmental degradation as well as falling quality of human lives due to economic growth which is no longer sustainable (Al-Attas, 2008). Besides, Rostow (1960), in his *Theory of*

Economic Development highlighted the same process and consequences in achieving economic growth. Again, in the current era, human beings have forgotten or even ignored Allah's warnings on such phenomenon as mentioned in Al-Quran:

Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]. (Surah Ar-Rum (30), p. 41).

And how many towns have we destroyed which exulted in its means of subsistence, so these are their abodes, they have not been dwelt in after them except a little, and we are the inheritors. (Surah Al-Qasar (28), p. 58).

No! [But] indeed, man transgresses because he sees himself self-sufficient. Indeed, to your Lord is the return. (Surah Al-'Alaq (96), pp. 6-8).

Islam is very straight forward in guiding human's life so that sustainability can be preserved and degradation can be avoided. Failure to adhere to its teachings has resulted into various catastrophes which prevail today including environmental degradation. Therefore, as human beings, we are obligated to take care of the environment bestowed by Allah as and should not simply be driven by only monetary returns in managing the environment. Further, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has also mentioned: There is a reward in doing good to every living thing (Hadith of sound authority, related by al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayrah).

Since environmental protection is made responsible for all of human beings in order to perform *ibadah* to Allah, thus, any acts which are pro-environmental is considered as good deeds, including avoiding products which are harmful to environment in daily consumption. Hence, purchasing green products can be also considered as an *ibadah* since the impact from the behaviour contributes towards the betterment of the environment. However, in order to perform *ibadah*, one has to be equipped with necessary knowledge in performing a meaningful and effective *ibadah* to Allah as mentioned by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh):

Acquire knowledge enables its possessor to distinguish right from wrong; it lights the way to heaven. It is our friend in the desert, our company in solitude and companion when friendless. It guides us to happiness, it sustains us in misery, it is an ornament amongst friends and an armour against enemies. "Who are the learned? Those who practiced what they know" (widely attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)).

Hence, it is important for green product knowledge to be in place prior to the event of green product purchase since without specific knowledge on green product, consumers will not be able to distinguish between green products from the non-green or conventional products and thus, refrain them from purchasing green products.

Green Product Knowledge

Knowledge is important in guiding human life. Allah has mentioned the essence of knowledge in Al-Quran: And these examples we present to the people, but none will understand them except those of knowledge (Surah Al-Ankabut (29), p. 43).

Knowledge or ability to learn and to store information plays an important role in all phases of decision-making (Laroche, Bergeron, & Forleo, 2001) including making decision in purchasing environmental-friendly products. Studies showed that knowledge of the environment is pertinent as a pre-requisite of pro-environmental behaviour (Martin & Simintiras, 1995; Hawthorne & Alabaster, 1999). In studies of green product purchase, the influence of knowledge on environmental problems and issues were found

to be significant (Thogersen, 1999; Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics, & Bohlen, 2003; Norlund & Garvill, 2003). General environmental issues studied included acid rain, ozone layer depletion, destruction of rain forests, air pollution, noise, and energy consumption. Apart from knowledge on general environmental issues, specific product knowledge pertaining to green products is also important in determining green product purchase behaviour. Interviews done by Young, Hwong, McDonald, and Oates (2009) on 81 self-declared green consumers found that having knowledge on specific environmental products is essential in order to be “green” and purchasing green technology products. In the study, among product environmental knowledge which is essential are energy efficiency, durability, water consumption, LPG conversion, fuel type, fuel consumption, and energy ratings. Besides, the same study also mentioned on product manufacturing knowledge such as recycled material content, chemical content, and repairability. Apart from the study, Klockner and Ohms (2006) found that specific knowledge on green products such as recyclability and eco-label has significant influence in choosing green products (e.g., organic milk) among respondents. In another study, Sammer and Wustenhagen (2006) found that knowledge on machine configurations, energy, and water consumption has significant impact on purchasing of green electrical appliances for example washing machines. In Malaysia, study done by Sharifah Azizah Haron et al. (2005) on 743 rural and urban households in the state of Selangor found that respondents having high general environmental knowledge with the main sources of information derived from newspaper, television, and radio. The study also found that participation in pro-environmental activities was significantly correlated with knowledge. However, study by Aini Mat Said et al. (2003) found that environmentally responsible behaviour were not in concert with the level of knowledge among school teachers in Selangor. Although teachers reported to have high level of knowledge on environmental issues, yet, their practices of environmental behaviour were rather low although most of the information and learning was acquired through mass media particularly television and newspaper. Hence, more studies are required in better understanding the gap between environmental knowledge and pro-environmental behaviour.

Since knowledge is a pre-requisite for proper behaviour towards the environment, it is important for consumers to possess knowledge both on general environmental issues or problems and products environmental attributes prior purchases of green products. In particular, it is also empirically proven that green product knowledge could impose significant influence on green product purchase behaviour.

Conclusion

Environmental problems have been largely associated with unsustainable consumption. Since consumption is inevitable for human well-being, green products provide a better way in consumption by reducing negative environmental impacts. Since environmental protection is strongly emphasized in Islam, therefore, it is the duty of Muslims to purchase green products. With proper understanding, Muslim’s participation in green product purchase behaviour can be boosted. Nevertheless, without proper knowledge on green products, green product purchase is hardly achieved. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that green product knowledge should be acquired by consumers in facilitating green product purchase behaviour.

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