



## THE ROLE OF RELIGIOSITY IN SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

Marhana Mohamed Anuar<sup>1</sup>

Fadzli Adam<sup>2</sup>

Khatijah Omar<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*Present environmental problems can be associated with consumers' conspicuous consumption and materialistic lifestyle. Environment can be sustained if consumer considers the impact of their consumption on the environment by practicing socially responsible consumption. This study is exploratory in nature and it tries to investigate the role of values in socially responsible consumption. Values have been suggested to affect various aspects of consumption attitudes and behavior. A value-attitude-behavior model was applied in order to investigate the roles of religiosity in socially responsible behavior. The socially responsible behavior was examined using intention to purchase cause-related products. Surveys were conducted on consumers from several big malls in three cities of Malaysia. The data were analyzed using an independent sample T-test and a simple regression. The results demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between religiosity and socially responsible consumption. More specifically, the findings indicate that highly religious consumers have higher intention to purchase cause-related products.*

**Key Words:** Socially responsible consumption, Religiosity, Consumers, Cause-related products, Attitude, Behavior.

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Management and Economics, University Malaysia Terengganu, 21030, K. Terengganu, Terengganu.

**E-mail:** [marhana@umt.edu.my](mailto:marhana@umt.edu.my)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Nationhood and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Social Development, University Malaysia Terengganu, 21030, K. Terengganu, Terengganu. **E-mail:** [fadzli@umt.edu.my](mailto:fadzli@umt.edu.my)

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Management and Economics, University Malaysia Terengganu, 21030, K. Terengganu, Terengganu.

**E-mail:** [khatijah@umt.edu.my](mailto:khatijah@umt.edu.my)

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing consumers concern towards the environment has changed consumers' values and lifestyles. Consumers have placed great concern on the impact of their consumption on environments as well as social. It is very important for consumers to conserve the environment today as today's consumers' pattern of consumption will have impact on the future of this world. Etim (2012) highlights that it is important to have responsible attitude towards nature and instills the consciousness of living in partnership with the natural environment because if the environment deteriorates the future of generations of humans will be harmed (p. 486). Consumers' consumption that takes into consideration the impact of their purchase on environmental and social issues can be considered as ethical consumption or socially responsible consumption (SRC). Although, price, quality and value are the most important buying criteria for majority of the US consumers, products link to environmental and social causes is the fourth important criteria that consumers consider when making their purchase decisions. Research shows that consumers are more likely to purchase products or services from companies that are socially responsible (Farache et al., 2008; Maignan, 2001). The increasing importance of SRC is evidenced in the results of Cone 2008 cause Evolution Study involving 1071 American adults. The results revealed that approximately 87% of the consumers surveyed stated that given products of equal price and quality, they would switch to brands associated or linked with causes (Cone Inc., 2008). Similarly, in Malaysia, the Malaysian consumers are showing the same trend. As cited in Chua (2009), the Nielsen Survey found that 72% of Malaysian consumers surveyed stated that they would switch to a brand or a retailer that is associated or linked with causes if the price and quality similar. In response to the increasing trend over SRC, many companies in the US and in many parts of the world have adopted socially oriented business practices. Socially oriented business practices are also becoming important in Malaysia as is evidenced by the amount allocated for these types of initiatives. A total of RM100 million was allocated specifically for corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in 2010 (CSR, 2010). One of the most important CSR initiatives is cause-related marketing (CRM). Cause-related marketing refers to donation to a cause that is linked with a purchase of a product or service. More specifically, a company contributes to a cause based on a percentage of a product sold (Anuar & Mohamad, 2012). The funds raised via CRM campaign goes to a designated environmental or social cause. For example, The Store Pacific Milimewa, a retailer in Malaysia conducted a CRM campaign called "Lovely Heart for a Lovely Hope". Throughout the campaign for every purchase of selected brand a portion (RM.30) was donated to charities in Malaysia (The Store for Malaysia, 2009).

It is very important for consumers to practice SRC as pollution and other environmental problems can be linked to consumer conspicuous consumption of goods. Researchers have suggested that SRC is very much related with consumers' values. According to Fraj and Martinez (2006) values and lifestyles are psychographic variables that can be used to identify ecological concern consumer

segment. In this context, religiosity is deeply related to consumers' values and is predicted to influence SRC.

Even though the concept and practice of SRC is important, marketing research on this issue remains scarce. In addition, what is the effect of religiosity on SRC remains unclear. Therefore, this study was carried out in order to explore the effect of religiosity on SRC. This paper is structured into several parts as follows: first, a brief overview on SRC is highlighted, second summary of literature review that deal with SRC and religiosity are presented, third, methodology is explained, fourth, the results and discussions are described and finally, the paper end by discussing the conclusions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Socially Responsible Consumption**

In 1975, Webster provided the definition of socially responsible consumer. He defined socially conscious consumers as “a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change” (p.188). The definition was based on psychological construct of social involvement. The definition suggests that socially responsible consumers must be aware and understand the impact of their consumption on community. Additionally, socially responsible consumers also believe that their consumption can make a difference in the community. Webster's (1975) research acts as a platform for SRC studies. Twenty years after Webster's (1975) defined SRC, Roberts (1995) proposed another definition of SRC. Roberts (1995) defined SRC as “one who purchases products and services which he or she perceives to have a positive (or less negative) impact on the environment or uses his/her purchasing power to express current social concerns” (p. 98). This definition suggests that SRC covers two dimensions; environmental and societal concern. A responsible consumer buys products that have a positive or less negative influence on the environment and social. Examples of such products are green products and cause-related products.

Mohr et al. (2001) offered a broader definition of SRC as compared to Robert's (1995). They defined SRC as, “a person basing his or her acquisition, usage and disposition of products on a desire to minimize or eliminate any harmful effects and maximize the long-run beneficial impact on society” (p. 47). Mohr et. al's (2001) definition suggest that SRC refers to acquisition, usage and disposition of products by an individual that is based on his or her desire to reduce environmental damage and give a long-term beneficial impact to the society. More recently, Yan and She (2011) proposed another definition of SRC. Yan and She (2011) defined SRC as “behaviors in every step of consumers' consumption process influenced by their concerns over social, moral and environmental issues” (p. 260). Their definition suggests that at every stage of an individual's consumption, the long-term interest of the society and the nation must be taken into consideration (Yan & She, 2011, p. 260). Their definition of SRC is based on Taoist philosophy.

Based on definitions of SRC given by previous authors (e.g. Mohr et al., 2001; Robert, 1995) several studies (e.g. Lecompte & Roberts, 2006; Webb et al., 2008) have come out with dimensions of SRC. Lecompte and Roberts (2006) conceptualized SRC from five dimensions. The conceptualization provided by Lecompte and Roberts is a comprehensive view of SRC. They operationalized SRC based on: (1) firm's behavior, (2) cause-related products, (3) small business, (4) geographic origin and, (5) consumption volume. Lecompte and Roberts (2006) have broadened the scope of SRC to also include other aspects such as preference to buy local products and from small business operators. Based on the definition given by Mohr et al. (2001), Webb et al. (2008) conceptualized SRC based on three dimensions: (1) purchasing based on firm's CSR performance, (2) consumer recycling behavior, (3) avoidance and use reduction of products based on their environmental impact. Webb et al.'s (2008) dimensions differ from those of Lecompte and Roberts (2006), LeCompte and Roberts (2006) focused on buying cause-related products, buying from small business operators and buying local products while Webb et al. (2008) focused on consumer recycling behavior and CSR performance of companies.

A more recent study conceptualized SRC based on three dimensions that are appropriate for Asian consumers especially the Chinese consumers (Yan & She, 2011). The dimensions of SRC proposed by Yan and She (2011) consist of: (1) the responsibility of achieving harmony with nature; (2) the responsibility of promoting social and ethical progress; and (3) the responsibility of defending national interests (p. 270).

This study uses the concept of SRC based on Lecompte and Roberts (2006) as their view of SRC include the purchase of cause-related product.

### **Religiosity and Socially Responsible Consumption**

McDaniel and Burnett defined religion as "a belief in God accompanied by a commitment to follow principles believed to be set forth by God" (1990, p. 103). Religiosity is defined as "the extent to which an individual's committed to the religion he or she professes and its teachings, such as the individual attitudes and behaviours reflect this commitment" (Johnson, Jang, Larson, & Li, 2001: p. 25). Based on both of these definition, religion provides a set of principles that guides people on how to live and it also strongly influences people daily lives.

Delener (1994) suggests that religiosity is an important value in an individual's cognitive structure and it can influence an individual's behaviour. In line with Delener's (1994), Mokhlis (2009) point out that religion has significant influence on people's attitudes, values and behaviours at both the individual and societal levels. In addition, religious persons differ from those of less religious and non-religious in terms of their value systems (Mokhlis, 2006). Past study also suggested that people who are more religious are both attitudinally and behaviourally capable of making decisions consistent with moral conscience (Sood & Nasu, 1995). Past studies provide support on the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward business ethic (e.g. Mokhlis, 2006; Vitell,

Paolillo & Singh, 2005). These studies found that the level of religiosity has positive influence on an individual's behaviour and attitude; more specifically, the higher the level of religiosity the higher the ethical attitudes. Ibrahim et al. (2008) found that highly religious managers are more ethical and have higher philanthropic orientation than those of less religious managers. Lau (2010) examined the effect of religiosity and money ethics on SRC. The results of Lau's (2010) study showed that the effect of religiosity on SRC is significant. More specifically, Lau (2010) found that religiosity is the main contributor to all the three SRC dimensions (i.e. CSR performance, consumer recycling behaviour and environmental impact purchase and use criteria). Lau (2010) proposed that highly religious consumers are more supportive of companies CSR initiatives, recycling activities and have higher intention to purchase and use green products than those of less religious consumers.

In the context of this study, it is expected that the more religious consumers would be more likely to behave in accordance to and compliant to their religious belief and practices. Highly religious consumers are expected to be strongly committed and comply to their religious beliefs both attitudinally and behaviourally. Hence, it is predicted that more religious consumers are more willing to purchase cause-related products compared to less religious consumers. It is therefore suggested that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between religiosity and intention to purchase cause-related product.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The sample of this study consists of consumers from three cities in Malaysia. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed in several malls in the three cities. Of this figure a total of 209 questionnaires were used for further analyses. The respondents consist of 46.9 percent male and 53.1 percent female. With regards to race, 88.0 percent were Malay, 6.7 percent were Chinese, and 5.3 percent Indian and other races. In terms of age, the sample is quite diverse, the sample consists of respondents from the age of 17-74. However, the majority (78.5%) of the respondents were young consumers with age between 17-30.

The respondents were given booklet which contains a CRM ad and questions on religiosity and purchase intention or cause-related or CRM product and simple demographic questions. The respondents were instructed to fill out each page completely and that the image portray in the ad was for illustration purpose only. The respondents were presented with a stimulus that consisted of a print CRM advertisement using fictitious toothpaste brand and a cause. Figure 1 shows the stimulus advertisement for this study. A fictitious toothpaste brand and an orphanage cause were used in the stimulus advertisement as to eliminate any past experience with the company and the cause that may influence the results of this study. Toothpaste was chosen as the product in this study because of two reasons. First, toothpaste product is actively involved with CRM campaign

(e.g. Colgate, Mukmin). Second, toothpaste is a convenience good that is purchased regularly by consumers.

The CRM ad explained that for every purchase of Brand X's toothpaste, a portion will be donated to the cause that helps support orphanages all over Malaysia. Thereafter, the respondents were asked to rate their religiosity and purchase intention of cause-related product. Religiosity were measured using a three-item, five-point scales while purchase intention were measured using a three-item, five-point scales. Scales anchored with strongly agree/strongly disagree. Both measures used for further analysis were reliable with Cronbach's alpha for religiosity = 0.80 and purchase intention = 0.74. The data show that the reliability coefficients of the variables were .70 and above, indicating good levels of reliability. The questionnaires end by soliciting the demographic information.

**Figure-1:** Stimulus advertisement



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main objective of this study was to explore the effect of religiosity on SRC. More specifically, this study examined the effect of religiosity on intention to purchase cause-related product. The effect of religiosity on purchase intention was analyzed using descriptive statistics, simple regression and an independent-sample T-test. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 16.0. An independent sample T-test has several assumptions. The assumptions are: (1) the dependent variable is normally distributed, (2) the groups are independent in their response to the dependent variable and (3) variances between groups are equal. Preliminary checks were conducted in order to

checks whether that these assumptions were fulfilled. Preliminary checks conducted confirmed that all the assumptions have been met.

Aggregate score for each variable was computed. The results are presented in Table 1. The results showed that in general the respondents' religiosity level is ( $M=4.68$ ). The respondents purchase intention of cause-related products ( $M=3.42$ ). In general, the results demonstrate that the level of religiosity among the respondents was quite high. With regards to the respondents' intention to purchase cause-related product, the results show that their intention to purchase cause-related product was above the average level.

**Table-1:** Descriptives statistics of main variables

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Religiosity	4.68	0.87
Purchase intention	3.42	0.52

It was predicted that religiosity level would influence consumers' intention to purchase cause-related products. A simple regression was run to test this relationship. The results indicated that there is a significant relationship between religiosity and intention to purchase cause-related products. As shown in Table 2, the adjusted  $R^2=.078$ ,  $F=18.232$ ,  $p=0.000$ . The results showed that the religiosity level could explain about 7.8% of the consumers' intention to purchase cause-related products.

Additionally, an independent sample T-test was carried out in order to understand the effect of the different levels of religiosity on intention to purchase cause-related products. Table 3 shows the influence of religiosity on intention to purchase cause-related product. Respondents' religiosity levels were divided into two; low and high using a mean split. Respondents who scored less than  $< 4.68$  religiosity were classified as having low religiosity level while respondents who scored high than  $> 4.68$  as having religiosity level. An independent-samples T-test was conducted to compare the purchase intention of cause-related product scores for respondents with low religiosity level with high religiosity level. The results showed a significant difference on purchase intention score for respondents with low level of religiosity ( $M=3.24$ ,  $SD=.94$ ) and high level of religiosity ( $M=3.55$ ,  $SD=.80$ ;  $t(175) = -4.34$ ,  $p=.00$ ). The results demonstrated that the higher the level of religiosity of a respondent, the higher would be the intention to purchase cause-related products. This study demonstrates that those that are highly religious tend to have higher intention to purchase cause-related products. Thus, H1 is supported.

The results of this study show support for past studies (e.g. Mokhlis, 2006; Vitell, Paolillo & Singh, 2005) that found religiosity significantly influence ethical attitudes and religious persons differ from those of less religious and non-religious groups in terms of attitudes and behaviour. The

results further imply that highly religious people tend to follow strictly principles set forth by God and this influences their attitude and behaviour.

**Table-3:** Independent sample t-test of religiosity level

Variable	Religiosity	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p (one-tailed)
Purchase intention	Low religiosity	3.24	.94	2.433	0.01
	High religiosity	3.55	.80		

## CONCLUSIONS

Basically, this study reveals two main findings. First, the results show that consumers' religiosity level in Malaysia is generally high and the intention to purchase cause-related products is also above the average level. The high level of religiosity provides empirical evidence that they firmly hold on to their religious teaching and practices. The respondents are also found to have above the average level of intention to purchase cause-related products. The majority of the respondents who were Malays could be well considered as significant influence to these findings. In general, Malays are regarded to firmly hold on to Islamic practices that strongly encourage a combination of daily activities with religious ethics such as generosity and sincerity. As a result, they are used to regularly give out donation to the poor as is required by Islamic principles.

Second, the study shows significant influence of religiosity level on intention to purchase cause-related products. In other words, the findings indicate that individual with higher religiosity provide higher intention to buy cause-related products. This scenario is particularly influenced by Islamic teaching which consistently encourage people to perform good deeds and give donation to the poor. This study also provides empirical evidence that religious people are more likely to involve and practice SRC. Finally, this study extends past literature in the area of SRC in such a way that it provides empirical evidence on the effect of religiosity on SRC.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to acknowledge the financial support provided by Universiti Malaysia Terengganu for this research (Research Grant TBPK Vot: 53077).

## REFERENCES

- Anuar, M. M. & Mohamad, O. (2012) "Consumer Response to Cause-related Marketing: A Case of Malaysia" *Journal of Asian Business Strategy*, pp. 71-76.
- Chua, J. (2009) *The CSR Digest*. Retrieved July 23, 2009, from *The CSR Digest*: <http://www.csrdigest.com>
- Cone Inc. (2008) *Cone Inc.* Retrieved July 10, 2010, from *Cone Inc*: <http://www.coneinc.com>



- CSR. (2010)** Prime Minister's CSR Awards 2010. Retrieved February 23, 2011, from Anugerah CSR Malaysia: <http://www.anugerahscrmalaysia.org>
- Cui, Y., Trent, E. S., Sullivan, P. M., & Matiru, G. N. (2003)** "Cause-Related Marketing: How Generation Y Responds" *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* , Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 310-320.
- Delener, N. (1994)** "Religious Contrasts in Consumer Decision Behavior Patterns: Their Dimensions and Marketing Implications, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp. 36-53.
- Etim, F. (2012)** "Environmental Philosophy for Sustainable Development" *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 479-487.
- Farache, F., Perks, K. J., Wanderley, L. S., & de Sousa Filho, J. (2008)** "Cause-Related Marketing: Consumers' Perceptions And Benefits for Profit and Non-Profits Organizations" *Brazilian Administration Review*, July/September, pp. 210-224.
- Fraj, E., & Martinez, E. (2006)** "Environmental Values and Lifestyles as Determining Factors of Ecological Consumer Behavior: An Empirical Analysis" *Journal of Consumer Marketing* , Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 133-144.
- Ibrahim, N. A., Howard, D. P., & Angelidis, J. P. (2008)** "The Relationship between Religiousness and Corporate Social Responsibility Orientation: Are There Differences between Business Managers and Students? *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 78, pp. 165-174.
- Johnson, B. R., Jang, S. J., Larson, D. B. & Li, S. D. (2001)** "Does adolescent religious commitment matter? A reexamination of the effects of religiosity on delinquency" *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 22-43.
- Lau, C. L. (2010)** "Towards Socially Responsible Consumption: An Evaluation of Religiosity and Money Ethics" *International Journal of Trade, Economics and Finance*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.32-35.
- LeCompte, A. F. & Roberts, J. A. (2006)** "Developing A Measure of Socially Responsible Consumption in France" *Marketing Management Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 50-60.
- Maignan, I. (2001)** "Consumer's Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibilities: A Cross-Cultural Comparison" *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 57-72.
- McDaniel, S. & Burnett, J. (1990)** "Consumer Religiosity and Retail Store Evaluation Criteria" *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 101-112.
- Mohr, L., Webb, D. J. & Harris, K.** "Do Consumers Expect Companies to be Socially Responsible? The impact of corporate social responsibility on buying behavior" *Journal of Consumers Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 45-72.
- Mokhlis, S. (2006)** "The Effect of Religiosity on Shopping Orientation: An Exploratory Study in Malaysia" *Journal of American Academy of Business*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 64-74.
- Mokhlis, S. (2009)** "Relevancy and Measurement of Religiosity in Consumer Behavior Research" *International Business Research*, Vol. 2, No. 3, pp. 75-84.
- Roberts, J. A. (1995)** "Profiling Levels of Socially Responsible Consumer Behavior" *Journal Of Marketing Theory And Practice*, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 97-114.

**The Store for Malaysia. (2009)** Retrieved June 24, 2010, from The Store Pacific Milimewa: <http://www.tstore.com.my>

**Vitell, S. J. Paolillo, J. G. P. & Singh, J. (2005)** "Religiosity and Consumer Ethics" Journal of Business Ethics, Vol. 57, pp. 175-181.

**Webb, D., Mohr, J. & Lois, A. (2008)** "A Re-examination of Socially Responsible Consumption and Its Measurement" Journal of Business Research, Vol. 61, No. 2, pp. 91-98.

**Webster Jr, F. E. (1975)** "Determining The Characteristics of The Socially Conscious Consumer" Journal of Consumer Research , Vol. 2, December, pp. 188-196.

**Sood, J. & Nasu, Y. (1995)** "Religiosity and Nationality: An Exploratory Study of Their Effect on Consumer Behavior in Japan and The United States" Journal of Business Research, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 1-9.

**Yan, J. & She, Q. (2011)** "Developing a Trichotomy Model to Measure Socially Responsible Behavior in China" International Journal of Market Research, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 253-274.