

A Mediator Role of the Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) Scale of Consumer Adoption for the Environmentally Friendly Food Products in Thailand

Pornpirat Kantatasiri¹, Pensri Jaroenwanit² and Rudolph Brown³

ABSTRACT

This research purposes to investigate the mediator influences of the Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) scale on consumer adoption measuring the consumers attitude for the environmentally friendly food products. The field survey research was conducted by using a questionnaire as a data collecting tool with a face to face interview and a convenience sampling technique. The research samples were the 775 consumers who lived in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Songkhla provinces as the representatives of central, northern, northeastern, and southern region respectively. The results found that environmental, psychological, and perceived characteristic of innovation factors were significantly influenced consumers' attitude toward environmentally friendly food products testing with the ECCB scale as a measurement (0.380, p-value < 0.001, 0.990, p-value < 0.01 and 0.298, p-value < 0.05) and consumers' attitude toward environmentally friendly food products testing with the ECCB scale was significantly influenced to consumer adoption (0.825, p-value < 0.01). Finally, this result implied that the ECCB scale had a mediator effect from environmental, psychological, and perceived characteristic of innovation factor to consumer adoption.

Keywords : Consumer Adoption, Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) Scale, Environmentally Friendly Food Products

¹ Corresponding author, Mahidol University Nakhon Sawan Campus, Thailand

² Faculty of Management Science, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

³ Faculty of Management Science, Khon Kaen University, Thailand

pornpirat.kan@mahidol.ac.th

บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์การวิจัยเพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลตัวกลางส่งผ่านของตัววัดพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคที่ใส่ใจสิ่งแวดล้อม (ECCB) ในการนำไปใช้ในการวัดทัศนคติของผู้บริโภคสำหรับผลิตภัณฑ์อาหารที่เป็นมิตรกับสิ่งแวดล้อม การวิจัยการสำรวจภาคสนามได้ดำเนินการโดยใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล โดยเก็บแบบสัมภาษณ์โดยตรงกับผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ และใช้เทคนิคการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบง่าย กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการวิจัยคือผู้บริโภค 775 คนที่อาศัยอยู่ในจังหวัดกรุงเทพฯ, เชียงใหม่, ขอนแก่นและสงขลา ในฐานะตัวแทนของภาคกลางภาคเหนือภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือและภาคใต้ตามลำดับ ผลการวิจัย พบว่า ปัจจัยแวดล้อมภายนอก ปัจจัยด้านจิตวิทยา และปัจจัยการรับรู้ลักษณะของนวัตกรรม มีอิทธิพลต่อทัศนคติของผู้บริโภคที่มีมาตรวัดพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคที่ใส่ใจสิ่งแวดล้อม (ECCB) เป็นตัวกลางส่งผ่านอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ (0.380, p-value <0.001, 0.990, p-value <0.01 และ 0.298, p-value <0.05) และการวัดทัศนคติของผู้บริโภคด้วยมาตรวัดพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคที่ใส่ใจสิ่งแวดล้อม (ECCB) มีอิทธิพลต่อการยอมรับของผู้บริโภคอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ (0.825, p-value <0.01) ในที่สุดผลการทดสอบนี้แสดงให้เห็นว่า มาตรวัด ECCB มีผลเป็นตัวกลางส่งผ่านจากปัจจัยสิ่งแวดล้อม ปัจจัยทางด้านจิตวิทยา และปัจจัยการรับรู้ลักษณะนวัตกรรมต่อการยอมรับของผู้บริโภค

Introduction

In present, although many Thai people are increasing consumption the environmentally friendly food products (EFPs) such as safety food products and organic food products, they are still less than conventional products consumption (Huber, Rembiatkowska, rednicka, Bügel, & van de Vijver, 2011). However, some reason can be affected to the EFPs consumption such as the high price, less quantity of EFPs launch into the market (e.g. Zagata, 2012), less distribution channel or distributor to sale, food is not the one cause of to get illness, and, etc. (Ozguven, 2012; Zagata, 2012). These are reasons effect to consumers' consumption. For the academic disciplinary can be divided to two main factors: external and internal factors. The external or environmental influences are social, culture, family, and so on (Blackwell, 2012) while the internal or psychology or individual influences are knowledge, personality, attitude, and so on (Blackwell, 2012; Cheah, 2011; Grunert, 2012).

Not only attitude affects to consumer consumption of general kind of products and service (Aygen, 2012; Blackwell, 2012) but many authors found that consumer's attitude is an important factor for many categorizes of environmentally friendly products consumption also (Jansson, 2011). Thus, consumer's attitude towards products and environment (Jansson, 2011) is the key success for this research, especially, attitude towards environment is an important factor. So, how Thai consumer's attitude about the environment and the products are that relate with people live. Additionally, many researchers are finding the cause of human diseases are based on food that people intakes because the producers use more chemical synthesis on process of food production than past time (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). As World health Organization

reported that toxic from chemical synthesis has high risk to human health, especially, people who has occupation to relate with agro chemical in developing countries was killed 355,000 people each year by pesticide poisoning (World Health Organization, 2014). In sum, food production is an important for human life and environmental health so that food product which safe for life in the world called environmentally friendly food product.

Moreover, studying between consumer behavior and environmental products are using the scale to detect view of customer about environmental. The scale is called the Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) (Roberts, 1997). This scale has rarely been studied within the context of attitude-behavior (Olson, 2013; Young, Hwang, McDonald, & Oates, 2010), and academic research has rarely focused on consumers' adoption of environmentally friendly food products. Thus, this research will fill this gap and increase knowledge for businesses that strive to sell environmentally friendly products testing with the ECCB scale.

Research Objectives

1. Study the mediator effect of consumers' attitude testing with the ECCB scale between independent factors and consumer adoption.
2. Study the factors that impact attitude towards environment scale of attitude towards environmentally friendly food products for consumer who have consumed EFPs.

Literature Review

1. Consumer Adoption

The concepts of the diffusion process and the adoption process are closely related; both processes are concerned with the acceptance of an individual or a new product by consumers (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). The diffusion process is a macro process which is concerned with consumer acceptance of a new product and the period of time it takes to spread this acceptance across communities (Leepaiboon, 2007). The adoption process, on the other hand, is a micro process that focuses on individual consumer decision making as it passes through its different stages. Kotler (2003) noted that, "the consumer adoption process focuses on mental process through which an individual passes from first hearing about an innovation to final adoption."

In this research, innovation refers to environmentally friendly food products (EFPs), which some consumers in Thailand never buy. The innovation decision process is an information-seeking process at the individual level, which decreases uncertainty when buying a new product (Rogers, 1995). The consumer adoption process focuses on the individual consumer's thinking process that starts from first hearing about an innovation or a new product and continues to final adoption (Kotler, 2003). In terms of the consumer adoption process for this study, adoption means that cu-

stomers have decided to purchase as green consumers, and then become frequent customers. Therefore, consumer decision adoption relates to mental as an attitude about the EFPs that relationship with consumer purchasing the EFPs.

2. Environmentally Friendly Food Products (EFPs)

Beginning products of environmentally friendly food agriculture are defined by the practices and input used in the production process and not by inherent properties of the product (Oliver, J.D., 2007). There is no common legal definition of environmentally friendly food products, and the term environmentally friendly food is referred to as a process claim, not a product claim. Despite the limitations of the process claim, consumers often perceive environmentally friendly food products as having certain intrinsic quality and safety characteristics, as well as representing an environmentally friendly mode of production (Vindigni et al., 2002). Thus, the environmentally friendly food products mean the process of growth plant, the process of products with using less synthetic chemicals. For example, environmentally friendly food crops are grown without using synthetic fertilizers or synthetic pesticides at least three years before harvesting (GreenNet, 2010). Not only prohibit uses synthetic fertilizers or synthetic pesticides but also covering prohibits the use of antibiotics and hormones.

3. Attitude towards Environmentally Friendly Food Products

Attitude is one of important factor in psychological influence because it refers to three functions; cognitive function (human's thoughts), affective function (human's feeling or emotion), and conative function (human's behavior). These all three functions have relationship and effect to each other (Gordon. R. Foxall., 2010; Hoyer, W.D., 2010). From the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory is used to investigate something that motivations behind consumers' behavior in connection with the environmental context (Ibtissem, 2010). Indeed, in this research the individual value implies the consumers' view of green values in relation to their attitude toward self responsibility (Stern et al., 1999; Nordlund and Garvill, 2002).

4. Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) scale

The Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) scale is an instrument to detect human attitude relative with behavior. The ECCB was a view that human actions and it was developed in many stages and dimensions of people's behavior (Tilikidou, 2013); for instance, to study pro-environmental purchasing (Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2005b) and pro-environmental post purchasing (Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2004). Although, many scholars have studied the green consumer behavior with the ECCB scale, the results were useful for learning consumer behavior with environmentally friendly products (Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2005a). Ge-

nerally, the ECCB scale used to test people's attitudes in connection with environment consciousness (Tilikidou, 2013). Therefore, this research will use the ECCB scale to measure the consumers' attitude toward environmentally friendly food products, especially, studying factor influences to consumer's attitude toward environment.

5. Environmental Influences

Environmental influences are factors that affect consumer decision making. Following the EBM model, environmental influences effect the consumer decision making in the alternatives evaluation stage and the important factors influencing consumers evaluation (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). However, studies have mentioned culture, especially, cross cultural aspects as one of the issues that (Hofstede 1980, 2003; He, Senanz, Sui, & Humphreys, 2014) was studied and it was divided into five dimensions (Hofstede, 2002; 2011). The first dimension is individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 2002; 2003; 2011). Hence, this research studies the effect of | environmental influences containing individualism and collectivism to attitude and behavior under the EBM model.

The overall study of consumer decision adoption behavior is consumer culture (Yalcinkaya, 2008), especially, the environmental friendly products such as environmentally friendly food products, which in this case relates to the culture dimension that is individualism versus collectivism (Papamarcos et al., 2007). In Thailand, Buddhism influences Thai people to have collectivism characteristics, however, the lifestyle of Thai people has changed so that today some Thai people have increased the individualism characteristic. Therefore, this research has to study culture also because individualism and collectivism influence the whole culture (Slangen & van Tulder, 2009). Additionally, collectivists have personalities belonging to social belief and social communication that has more loyalty than individualists (Mahmud et al., 2012). Therefore, consumers who adopt an environmentally friendly food product may have personalities that are affected the environmental influences because the individualism is independent or thinking differently from society. These information leads to the hypotheses:

H1 : Attitude towards environmentally friendly food products testing with ECCB scale will be a positively related to Environmental Influences.

6. Psychological Influences

The psychological influences were different from a normal level of stimulus-response, so many researchers use this theory for collecting data from many kinds and levels of

respondents (Evans et al., 2006). However, this research emphasizes the study of consumers' thoughts so that the consumer decision making stage is important for this research's theme, especially when studying consumer decision adoption for a new product (Gordon. R. Foxall, 2010) Consumer decision making in the S-R theory contains three important sections, such as the psychology section, the decision-making section, and consumer experience section. The most important for this research is the decision making part that mentions components of the psychological section as personality, values, lifestyle, and attitude (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010); however, personality in this research refers to consumer innovativeness and value refers to green consumer values (Jansson, 2011). Otherwise, the value for this research also includes a guideline about attitude and action so that a human's attitude is an effect to human thought and feelings that implies cognitive and affective functions of human behavior (Pickett-Baker, 2008).

H2 : Attitude towards environmentally friendly food products testing with ECCB scale will be a positively related to Psychological Influences.

7. Perceived Characteristic of Innovation

The consumer perceived characteristic of innovation related to the innovativeness concept that depending potential adopters form their attitudes to the innovation based on their perceptions of five key characteristics (Roehrich, 2004; Sääksjärvi, 2011). According to Rogers (2003), these attributes are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Many scholars' studies have confirmed that consumer perceptions of innovation characteristics in general are better predictors of adoption than the adopters' socio-demographic profiles, such as income, education, and age (Agarwal and Prasad, 1997; Labay and Kinnear, 1981). However, in this research study about an environmentally friendly food product the factors that have an influence were relative advantage, compatibility, and risk/uncertainty.

Given the fact that innovations involve an element of uncertainty or risk for the adopter, researchers have added perceived risk to Rogers' innovation characteristics (Claude, 2012; Flight et al., 2011). Different types of risk (for example, economic and social) can have varying influence on rate of adoption (Flight et al., 2011). However, most commonly it has been found that the higher the perceived risk, the less willing individuals are to adopt the innovation (Flight et al., 2011). Thus the following hypothesis was developed:

H3 : Attitude towards environmentally friendly food products testing with ECCB scale will be a positively related to Perceived characteristic of innovation.

Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) scale and Consumer Adoption From the ECCB scale emphasizes the human action so that the ECCB scale should suitable for the mediator between independent factor and human behavior. Thus, the following hypothesis was developed:

H4 : Consumer adoption will be positively related to attitude towards environmentally friendly food products testing with ECCB scale.

Conceptual Framework

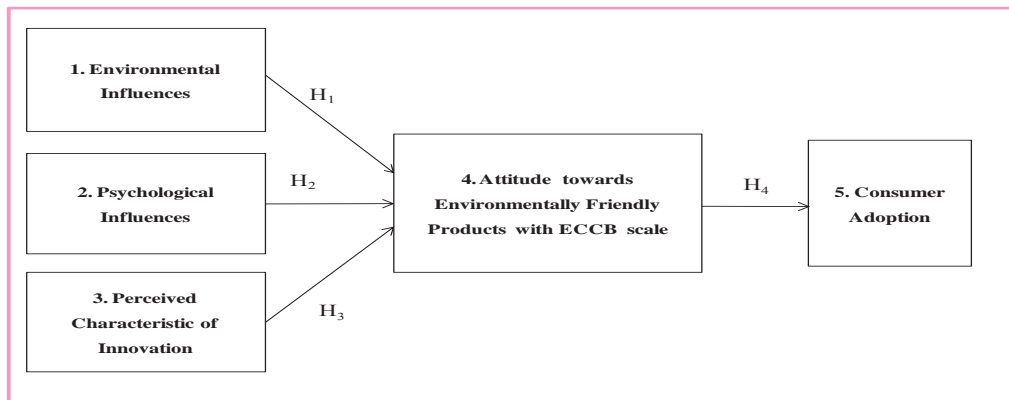


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Methodology

This research uses the deductive approach to investigate factors influencing on environmental attitude of Thai consumers to environmentally friendly food products. The questionnaire survey instrument and the seven-point Likert scales were used in all measures. They either ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree and data were analyzed with the factor analysis and the structural equation model (SEM). Furthermore, the factors were defined as Env_Inf = environmental influences Psy_Inf = psychological influences, Per_Inn = perceived characteristic of innovation, and Att_EFPCB = attitude toward environmentally friendly food products testing with ECCB scale and Adopt = consumer adoption.

Data Analysis

The statistics were used for analyzing data that contain a descriptive statistic and inferential statistic. The descriptive statistic was used for analyzing the personal data; in addition, Factor analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Path analysis were the inferential statistics techniques for this research.

Results

Personal Data

The total of 775 samples consisted of 285 (36.8%) male respondents and 490 (63.2%) female respondents. In terms of age, the maximum of participants were between the ages of 20 – 30 years old that was 58.3% of respondents (n = 452), followed by the ages of 31 – 40 years old (24.8%, n = 192), and the ages of 41 – 50 years old (10.7%, n = 83). In terms of education, the majority of respondents had the highest education's level of bachelor's degree (65.9%, n = 511), followed by 2-year college degree (9.9%, n = 77), and upper master's degree (9.2%, n = 71). Finally, in terms of occupation reported, the highest level of occupation was student (30.1%, n = 233), followed by business's employee (19.1%, n = 148), and business owners (16.0%, n = 124).

Factor Analysis of Variables

The exploratory factor analysis accomplished on all items of each factor that were tested and analyzed the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) as Env_Inf = environmental influences, Psy_Inf = psychological influences, Per_Inn = perceived characteristic of innovation, and Att_EFPCB = attitude towards environmentally friendly food products testing with ECCB scale. These factors were 0.837, 0.897, 0.861, and 0.905. The cumulative of rotation sums of squared loadings were 68.915%, 72.186%, 71.333 and 70.938%.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) of Attitude towards Environmentally Friendly Food Products ECCB scale

The structural equation model was used in this research for testing the mediator effect. Specifically, consumer's attitude testing with ECCB scale was a mediator factor which related between independent factors and consumer adoption. This research result as shown as figure 2

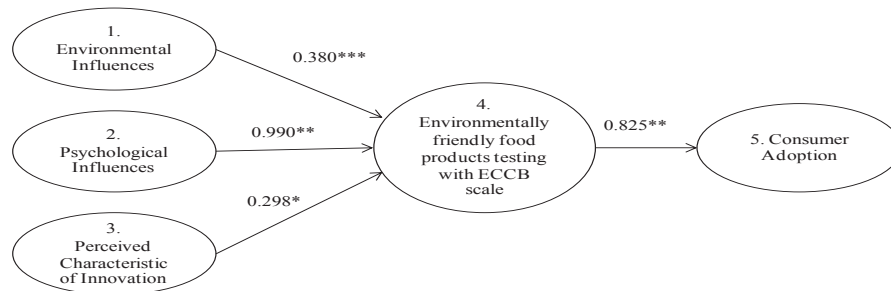


Figure 2 the SEM of Attitude towards Environmentally Friendly Food Products testing with ECCB scale.

Path Analysis of Attitude towards Environmentally Friendly Food Products ECCB scale

For path analysis with a path diagram that was present in the conceptual model considered an arrow to belong to the construct. The results found that the Env_Inf (Environmental Influences), Psy_Inf (Psychological Influences), and Per_Inn (Perceived Characteristic of Innovation) constructs had direct effects on the Att_EFPEP (Attitude towards Environmentally Friendly Food Products NEP scale) with significant DE scores = 0.380***, 0.990**, and 0.298*; in addition, the Att_EFPCB (Attitude towards Environmentally Friendly Food Products ECCB scale) construct had a direct effect on Adopt (Adoption) with significant DE score = 0.825**, and the Lifestyle construct had a direct effect on Adopt (Adoption) with a significant DE score = 0.870**. Therefore, details of results are shown in table 4.19 and figure 4.27.

Hypothesis statistic testing

Table 1 Hypotheses statistic testing

Hypothesis	Estimate	S.E.	P	Standard Regression Weight	Result
H1 : Env_Inf → Att_EFPCB	.402	.103	.000***	.380	Accepted
H2 : Psy_Inf → Att_EFPCB	1.144	.003	.002**	.990	Accepted
H3 : Per_Inn → Att_EFPCB	.321	.031	.030*	.298	Accepted
H4 : Att_EFPCB → Adopt	.973	.071	.000**	.825	Accepted

Discussion

Considering the ECCB scale (Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior), it was shown that the ECCB scale was suitable for Thai consumers who have consumed or purchased EFPs, because, overall, the hypotheses testing of the ECCB scale gave all of factors supported. Following the result the ECCB scale was affected by three main factors (environmental influences, psychological influences, and perceived characteristic of innovation).

The overview of independent factors found that the ECCB scale was more responsive and supports the activity of the consumers who have consumed EFPs. This encourages similarly as prior research about the ECCB scale suitable for consumers who have activities as purchasing, consumption the EFPs (Tilikidou, 2013). Hence, these results imply that Thai consumers, who have not consumed EFPs, have attitudes towards the environment in their thoughts and how to save it while Thai consumers are weak in practicing this in daily life.

Conclusion

The results found that environmental, psychological, and perceived characteristic of innovation factors were significantly influenced consumers' attitude toward environmentally friendly food products with using the ECCB scale as a measurement (0.380, p-value < 0.001, 0.990, p-value < 0.01 and 0.298, p-value < 0.05) and consumers' attitude toward environmentally friendly food products with using the ECCB scale was significantly influenced to consumer adoption (0.825, p-value < 0.01). Finally, this result implied that the ECCB scale had a mediator effect from environmental, psychological, and perceived characteristic of innovation factors to consumer adoption.

Implications

Academic Implications

1. The ECCB scale is reasonable to be develop with environmental factors, psychological factors that relates with consumers, activity in daily life, and consumer environment consciousness, especially, use this scale to study the mind of consumers and consumer ethics. The implementation would be completed by the gap between belief, personal norm, and behavior.

2. The ECCB scale can expand scholar knowledge about the correct way to measure consumer's attitudes towards the environment, for instance, to study the gap in consumer activity between culture changes and behavior.

Business Implications

1. The research presented here contributes to managerial values of developing strategies for inducing the consumer to adopt environmentally friendly food products in a new market.

2. From the finding, the psychological influences has more effect than others factors. This presents that the marketer can be launched the campaign increasing the amount of selling volume, for instance, inducing value of EFPs relevant with personality value; inducing the innovation value of EFPs interrelated with modern people or trend of people in 21st century ; and inducing the value of EFPs connection with good health of consumers who have consumed EFPs.

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