

## The Effects of Marketing Stimuli Factors on Consumers' Perceived Value and Purchase of Organic Food in Malaysia

*(Kesan Faktor Rangsangan Pemasaran Terhadap Persepsi Nilai Pengguna dan Pembelian Makanan Organik di Malaysia)*

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study is to examine the effects of marketing stimuli factors on consumers' perceived value and subsequently on their actual purchase of organic food in Malaysia. Five key marketing stimuli variables were examined in this study, and they were product attributes, price, availability, sales promotion and marketing communications. This paper presents the results of a survey conducted on a sample of 430 organic food consumers in Malaysia. The structural equation modelling was used for data analysis and six hypotheses were tested. The results revealed that product attributes, availability and marketing communication have significantly influence consumers' perceived value of organic food. Subsequently, consumers' perceived value is positively correlated to the actual purchase of organic food. There was no significant effect of price and sales promotion on consumers' perceived value of organic food. Based on the findings, the marketing stimuli strategies should be focused on providing superior value to consumers in the aspects of nutritional value, long term health benefits, environment friendliness, social status symbol and easy accessibility to increase consumers' purchase of organic foods.*

*Keywords: Marketing stimuli; perceived value; product attributes; organic food*

### ABSTRAK

*Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menguji kesan faktor rangsangan pemasaran terhadap persepsi nilai pengguna and seterusnya pembelian makanan organik di Malaysia. Lima jenis faktor rangsangan pemasaran dikaji, iaitu atribut produk, harga, ketersediaan, promosi jualan dan komunikasi pemasaran. Kajian ini berdasarkan keputusan daripada kaji selidik terhadap 430 pengguna makanan organik di Malaysia. Dengan menggunakan struktur pemodelan persamaan (SEM), enam hipotesis telah dikaji. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan atribut produk, ketersediaan dan komunikasi pemasaran mempunyai kesan signifikansi terhadap persepsi nilai pengguna untuk makanan organik. Seterusnya, persepsi nilai pengguna mempunyai hubungan positif dengan pembelian makanan organik. Tiada kesan yang signifikan bagi faktor harga dan promosi jualan terhadap persepsi nilai pengguna untuk makanan organik. Berdasarkan kajian ini, faktor rangsangan pemasaran perlu ditumpukan terhadap pemberian nilai kepada pengguna dalam aspek nilai nutrisi, manfaat kesihatan jangka panjang, mesra alam, simbol status sosial dan ketersediaan produk untuk menggalakkan pembelian makanan organik oleh pengguna.*

*Kata kunci: Rangsangan pemasaran; persepsi nilai; atribut produk; makanan organik*

### INTRODUCTION

Organic food is defined as foods produced without using chemical fertilizers, artificial pesticides, antibiotics, growth hormones, irradiation, food additives, and genetic modification (USDA 2007). Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize on the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Global sales for organic food have reached US\$72 billion and 43.7 million hectares of agricultural land were certified as organic in 2014 (FiBL & IFOAM 2015). Economic growth, urbanisation, globalisation and trade liberalisation

has significantly impact consumers' food choices and preferences. Among the main factors that contributed to the increasing consumers' demand towards organic food products are food safety concern (Hsu, Chang & Lin 2016; Wee, Ariff, Zakuan, Tajuddin, Ismail & Ishak 2014), better quality (Basha, Mason, Shamsudin 2015; Edman, Shuib & Abdullah 2012), health benefits (Mohamad, Rusdi & Hashim 2014), better taste (Dahm, Samonte & Shows 2009), higher nutritional values (Magistris & Gracia 2008; Zakaria & Lim 2012) and environmental concern (Sia, Ooi, Chong, Lim & Low 2013).

Since the early 1990s, the Malaysian government has undertaken various measures to support the growth

of organic food industry by encouraging local organic farming, introducing organic certification program and environmental protection initiatives (Quah & Tan 2010). According to the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), the total production of organic produce was recorded at 65,591 tons with an estimated value of RM175 million in 2014. The number of organic farms accredited with my Organic certification has increased from 3 in 2003 to 151 with a coverage of 1,848 hectares in 2015 (MARDI 2015). However, the coverage of organic agricultural farms are still relatively small compared to the total agricultural farms of 7.6 million hectares in Malaysia (Department of Statistic Malaysia 2014). Tiraieyari, Hamzah, Samah and Uli (2013) found that local farmers faced challenges towards adopting organic farming due to the expensive certification process, lack of training and technical knowledge to practice organic farming, labour shortages and marketing or supply chain issues.

Locally produced organic food products are insufficient to meet the local consumers' demand (See & Mansori 2012; Voon, Kwang & Agrawal 2011). Due to the shortage of local supply and increasing demand for organic food products, approximately 70% of the total organic products sold in Malaysia are imported from Australia, New Zealand, United States (U.S), Japan, China, and European countries (OTA 2013). The high dependence on imported organic food has contributed to several issues in the aspect of product quality, freshness and high pricing. In Malaysia, organic food is much more expensive than conventional food, with substantial price differences by as much as 100% to 300%, compared to approximately 25% to 30% price gap in the U.S. and European countries (Shaharudin, Pani, Mansor, Elias & Sadek 2010). In view that the majority population of Malaysia comprises of the middle class category (Malaysia Economic Monitor 2014), affordability issues leads to barrier to purchase organic food.

In 2002, the Malaysian Department of Agriculture outlined the national standards and the government certification program known as Malaysia Organic Scheme (MOS) with the introduction of the standard 'Organic Malaysia' logo. Organic food products produced according to the MS 1529 national standard are able to display the Organic Malaysia logo (Organic Monitor 2006). The objective of this positive initiative undertaken by the government is to set the standards and requirements in the production of organic food, including farming operations, preparation, storage, transportation, and labelling. The scheme is also aimed at increasing consumers' awareness, knowledge and consumption of organic food products produced or sold in Malaysia. However, several studies (e.g., Phuah, Rezai, Mohamed & Shamsudin 2012; Saleki, Seyedsaleki & Rahimi 2012) found that consumers were lacking of knowledge and awareness concerning organic food. Consumers have inadequate information on organic food (Zakaria & Lim 2012). Hence, the effectiveness of communication

strategies by the government and organic food retailers to raise consumers' awareness and knowledge of organic food are highly questionable.

Studies on consumer purchasing behavior in the organic food industry have been widely investigated in the western countries, but there exists a paucity of such studies in Malaysia (Voon et al. 2011). In Malaysia, empirical studies on consumer behaviour in organic food industry were very much confined to the religious factors (Shaharudin et al. 2010), socio-demographical factors (Ahmad & Judhi 2010; Omar, Nazri, Osman & Ahmad 2016; Quah & Tan 2010) and consumers' attitude factors (Voon et al. 2011) in influencing consumer intention to purchase or purchase of organic food in Malaysia. A preliminary literature review revealed that several research gaps exist. Firstly, critical marketing factors influencing consumer actual purchasing decision in the organic food industry in Malaysia were not adequately covered by the past studies. Major issues surrounding the development of organic food industry in Malaysia are related to marketing aspects, such as product attributes, high pricing, availability, communication of information and promotions.

Secondly, previous research studies in Malaysia were more concentrated on specific geographical locations as the study scope, for example at Klang Valley (Lim et al. 2014; Mohamad et al. 2014; Sia et al. 2013), Penang (Quah & Tan 2010), Sarawak (Edman et al. 2012), and Peninsula Malaysia (Phuah et al. 2012), which may limit the generalisation of the results in the context of Malaysia. Hence, there is a need to conduct a study which covers a broader context of Malaysia (Shaharudin et al. 2010; Ahmad & Judhi 2010). Thirdly, there is a lack of attempt to investigate the perceived value as motive to purchase by the consumers. Lim et al. (2014) highlighted that perceived value is an important factor in consumers' purchasing decision process. Consumers would perceived the overall value in the aspect of nutritional value (Mohamad et al. 2014), long term health benefits (Magistris & Gracia 2008), environment friendly (Wee et al. 2014), social status symbol (Chen 2012) and easy accessibility when making decision to purchase organic food.

This study aims to bridge the highlighted research gaps by conducting an exploratory study to examine how marketing stimuli factors influence consumers' perceived value and actual purchase of organic food in Malaysia. The primary objectives of this study are; 1) to investigate the effect of product attributes, pricing, availability, sales promotion and marketing communications on consumers' perceived value of organic food and 2) to analyse the influence of consumers' perceived value towards actual purchase of organic food.

The investigation on the relationship between perceived value and consumers' purchase behaviour will provide theoretical implications in the aspect validation and extension of the Stimuli-Intervention-Response Model (Kroeber-Riel & Weinberg 2003). In the aspect

of managerial implications, the research findings will assist in the planning, formulation and implementation of marketing strategies to producers or retailers of organic food. Producers or retailers can focus on creating better values to organic food consumers. Policymakers can develop new policies or subsidy programmes to enhance the growth of organic food industry in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

STIMULI-INTERVENTION-RESPONSE MODEL

The Stimuli-Intervention-Response Model is used to examine consumer purchasing behaviour (Kroeber-Riel & Weinberg 2003). This model contains three elements of stimuli, intervention and response as illustrated in Figure 1. The first element comprising marketing and environmental stimuli served as the influencing factors. Second element involves the intervention of activating process and cognitive process which leads to the third element of response in the aspect of purchase, choice and preference. Previous studies (e.g., Nigli, Leifert, Alfoldi, Luck & Willer 2007; Stolz 2011) on consumers' purchasing behaviour of organic food have applied this model. Hence, in this study, the constructs of marketing stimuli factors, perceived value and actual purchase were developed based on the Stimuli-Intervention-Response Model.

PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES

Product attributes of tangible (product freshness, taste, labelling and packaging) and intangible (quality, safety, brand and country of origin) attributes are important to induce consumers' purchase and consumption of a product (Wier & Calverley 2002). Several scholars (Edman et al. 2012; Makatouni 2002; Michaelidou & Hassan 2008) confirmed that product attributes of

organic food have positively influenced consumers' perceived value.

According to Edman et al. (2012), Malaysian consumers believed that organic food is better in terms of quality and freshness, and perceived good value contribution for their health. Michaelidou and Hassan (2008) confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between product safety and perceived value of health benefits, as consumers believed organic food without chemicals and genetically modified organisms enhances their health value. Makatouni (2002) found that consumers were motivated to purchase organic food because they perceived as safer. Consumers acknowledged the specific benefits of organic food products in the aspects of taste, nutrition, and sensory characteristics that differentiated the products from conventional food (Arvola, Vassallo, Dean, Lampila, Saba, Lahteenmaki & Shepherd 2008). Other important product attribute factors that positively influenced consumers' perceived value of organic food were labelling (Ponsanam, Napompech & Suwanmaneepong 2014; Sia et al. 2013) and certification (Sia et al. 2013).

In contrast, the product quality of the imported organic foods, particularly imported organic vegetables with shorter shelf life, has negatively affected consumers' perceived value (Roddy, Cowan & Hutchinson 1996). Consumers were concerned over paying high prices for the imported organic vegetables that does not match with its freshness and quality. A study conducted in the U.S (Zhao, Chambers, Matta, Loughin & Carey 2007) has shown that there were no significant differences between organic and conventional vegetables in terms of 'consumer perceived' sensory quality. In view of the different perspectives on the relationship between product attributes and customers' perceived value of organic food, the following hypothesis will be tested in this respect:

H<sub>1</sub> Product attributes has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food.

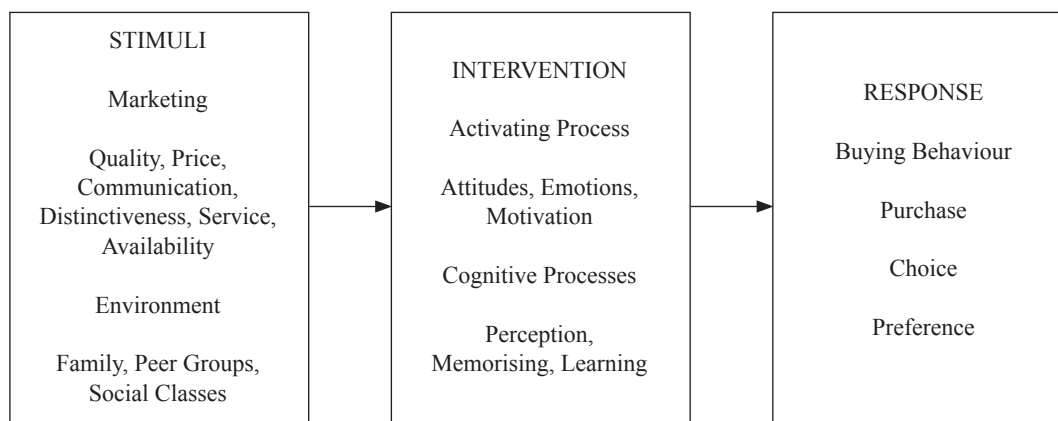


FIGURE 1. Stimuli-Intervention-Response model  
Source: Adapted from Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg, 2003

## PRICE

Perceived value for money has considerable influence on consumers' purchasing intention and consumption behaviour because consumers aim to balance the benefits (e.g., quality, better taste, nutritional value) of the consumption against the money paid (Al-Sabbahy, Ekinci & Riley 2004). Organic foods generally higher priced compared to conventional food (Saleki et al. 2012). High price is one of the major factors that caused a barrier to purchase organic food (Sia et al. 2013; Sangkumchaliang & Huang 2012). McEachern and Willock (2004) confirmed that the high price factor coupled with perceived weak contributing value of organic food by the consumers has created negative attitudes towards the purchase of organic food.

Sangkumchaliang and Huang (2012) found that Thai consumers relate the awareness of organic labels with prices. Consumers have unclear understanding on the safe food or organic labels, and this has disadvantaged them in relating product value to the price premium of organic food products. Consumers are willing to pay for a higher price if they receive superior product value from the organic food (Mohamad et al. 2014). Ahmad and Judhi (2010) confirmed that consumers in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, were willing to pay a higher price for organic food products to reflect the value of the products. The findings by Ahmad and Judhi (2010) were consistent with the study conducted by Edman et al. (2012), who found that consumers who perceived good health value from the consumption of organic food were willing to pay higher prices for the products. Malaysian consumers who have been convinced of the values obtained from the organic food consumption and have adopted the organic lifestyle, may be less likely to be deterred by the high price (Voon et al. 2011). Organic food is seen as more of a 'luxury good,' where the higher price tag gives the purchaser a feeling of high product quality and social esteem (Govindasamy, DeCongelio, Italia, Baobour & Anderson 2001). Therefore, to test this relationship the following hypothesis is formed:

H<sub>2</sub> Price has significant effect on the consumers' perceived value of organic food

## AVAILABILITY

Availability refers to the level of ease or difficulty to obtain or consume a specific product. Easy availability of organic food has positively influenced the consumers' perceived value and purchase of organic food (Hanpermchai & Dejtanasoontorn 2011). Ahmad and Judhi (2008) found that consumers have easy access to organic food products due to the wide supply of organic food at urban areas in Klang Valley, Malaysia. In contrast, limitation in the availability of organic food has negatively influenced the consumers' perceived value (See & Mansori 2012). See and Mansori (2012) concluded that lack of availability was negatively

related to consumer purchase intention as Klang Valley consumers in Malaysia believing that organic foods were not conveniently available for their purchase. The results of See and Mansori (2012) contradicted with the findings from Ahmad and Judhi (2008). Voon et al. (2011) also confirmed that the lack of organic product availability in the market as one of the barriers to Malaysian consumer consumption. Furthermore, shortage of organic food products produced locally or inadequately promoted has also contributed to the availability problems (See & Mansori 2012). Availability issues have negatively affected the consumers' perceived value as they have to spend more time, effort and costs to search for organic food products.

Dettmann and Dimitri (2010) acknowledged the key feature of availability is the range of organic food products in the market. The limited number or types of organic food products sold in some food stores have caused limitations in consumer options. According to Edman et al. (2012), due to the limited varieties of organic food found in the supermarkets in Sarawak, consumers often have to find it at the open markets. The shortage of a complete assortment of organic food limits the consumption of organic food by consumers. As a result, the following hypothesis will be tested in this respect:

H<sub>3</sub> Availability has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food

## SALES PROMOTION

Sales promotions enable consumers to purchase and increased satisfaction through value received (Darke & Dahl 2003); therefore, advertising, premiums and discounts can persuade consumers to buy more organic foods. According to Gilbert (1999), other than price reduction, coupons or refunds given by retailers, other sales promotional tools such as free sampling and buy-one-get-one-free or in-pack premium item were found to be inducing consumers to purchase more of the product. Teng and Wang (2015) examined the effect of sales promotion on consumers' perceived value and subsequently purchase intention for organic fruits and vegetables in Taiwan. They found that sales promotion was highly positively correlated to perceived value and purchase intention.

In contrast, Noble and Philips (2004) found that customers reject loyalty program memberships due to unattractive program benefits and perceived negative value, such as loss of social status or loss of freedom in choosing. Inadequate sales promotion of organic food has negatively influenced consumers' perceived value (Loncaric, Deže & Ranogajec 2009). In a study conducted in Ireland, Roddy et al. (1996) believed that organic food attributes, such as unclear promotion, higher price and inadequate information on the label or packaging, generated negative consumers' attitudes towards their purchase. Hence, to explore the relationship

between sales promotion and consumers' perceived value, the following hypothesis is developed:

H<sub>4</sub> Sales promotion has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food.

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Marketing communication campaigns are important to overcome consumers' negative perceptions of high price and difficulties to access organic food (Raab & Grobe 2005). Effective advertising has positively influenced consumers' perceived value (Hill & Lynchehaun 2002; See & Mansori 2012). See and Mansori (2012) confirmed that effective advertising through magazines, newspapers and TV channels has enhanced organic food awareness and purchase intentions of young female organic food consumers in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Furthermore, advertisement's role is important to increase consumers' confidence and trust level, and promote credence to the nature organic food. Hill and Lynchehaun (2002) found that some consumers perceived organic food to be a fashionable product which conveys exclusive status because of considerable coverage in the media, promotional campaigns and the higher prices linked with organic food.

Lim et al. (2014) found that Malaysian consumers faced some difficulties in their attempts to search for more information on organic food due to the limitation of marketing communication strategies by the retailers and this has affected their perceived value of organic food. Ineffective marketing communication strategies have created confusion among the consumers. For example, in Australia, Henryks and Pearson (2010) reported that certain retailers' marketing communication strategies

had created a degree of confusion as to which foods were organic and which were not, among the consumers, which in turn had affected the consumers' perceived value and purchase of organic food. Hence, to examine the relationship between marketing communications and consumer's perceived value the following hypothesis is formed:

H<sub>5</sub> Marketing communications has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food.

PERCEIVED VALUE

Consumer perceived value is the difference between the consumer's evaluation of all the benefits and all the costs of an offering and the perceived alternatives (Kotler & Keller 2011). A number of studies have investigated consumers' perceived value motives to purchase organic food which were mainly related to perceived health benefits (Magistris & Gracia 2008; Roitner-Schobesberger, Darnhofer, Somsook & Vogl 2008), concern for the environment, ecology and protection of animal welfare (Roitner-Schobesberger et al. 2008), nutritional value (Zakaria & Lim 2012), social status symbol (Chen 2012; Hill & Lynchehaun 2002) and ease of sourcing time (Hanpermchai & Dejtanasontorn 2011).

According to Makatouni (2002) and Essoussi and Zahaf (2009), health benefits factor is the most significant motive for purchasing organic food compared to animal welfare and environmental factors. Blair (2012) highlighted that consumers' health safety and benefits were the key motives for buying organic food products.

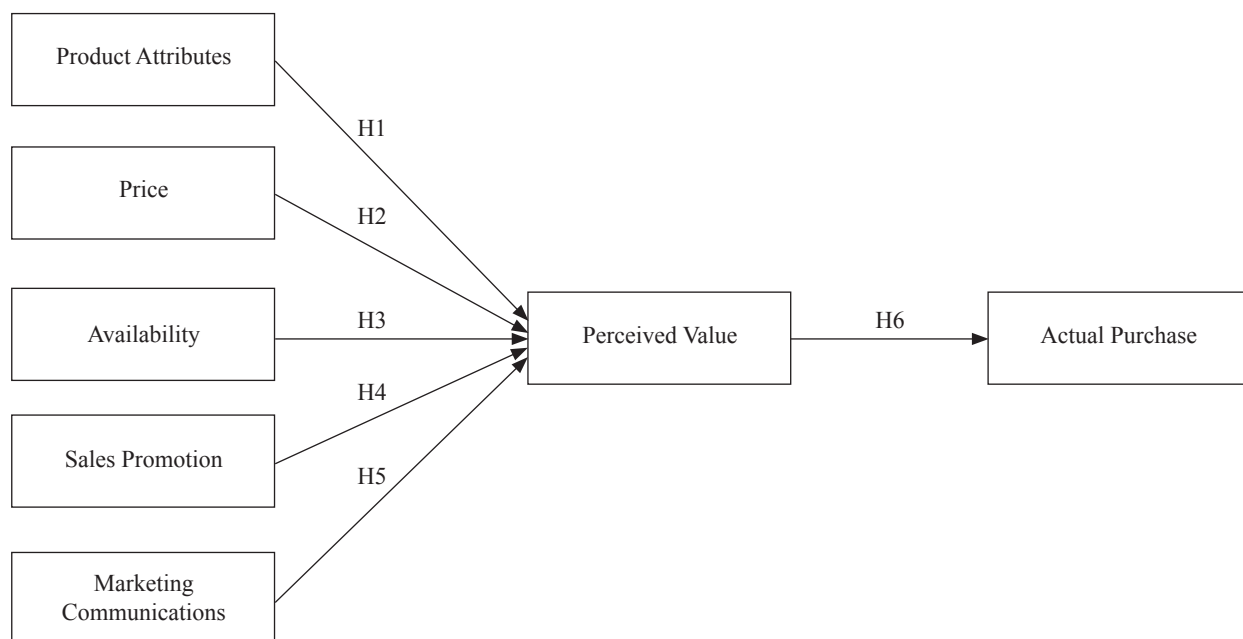


FIGURE 2. Conceptual framework

However, Michaelidou et al. (2001) found that health consciousness appears to be the least important motive in contrast to findings from some previous research. In Norway, Honkanen, Verplanken and Olsen (2006) found that environmental and animal rights concerns had a strong influence towards the purchase of organic food.

#### ACTUAL PURCHASE

The Stimuli-Intervention-Response Model (Kroeber-Riel & Weinberg 2003) highlighted that actual purchase is the important final stage in the consumers' process of buying a product or service. The past literature in the context of organic food study in Malaysia has made little attempt in investigating this final stage of actual purchase. Most of the past literature covered until the stage of consumers' purchase intention (Lim et al. 2014; See & Mansori 2012; Sia et al. 2013). For example, Shaharudin et al. (2010) confirmed that consumers perceived organic food has superior value and benefits and subsequently contributed to their willingness to pay higher price for organic food and positive purchase intention of organic food. Therefore, to explore the relationship between perceived value and actual purchase, which has not been extensively covered in the current literature, the following hypothesis will be examined:

H<sub>6</sub> Perceived value is directly and positively correlated to the consumers' purchase of organic food.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

##### SAMPLING, MEASUREMENT AND METHODS

The population of this research was individuals residing in Malaysia aged 18 and above who are existing consumers of organic food. The estimated population of this study is 18 million (Malaysia Demographics Profile 2015). A Raosoft sample size calculator was used to calculate the sample size of the population with a confidence level set at 95% and margin error at 5% (Raosoft 2015), and a minimum sample size of 400 was recommended to be taken from the target population. Furthermore, Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010) suggested that a minimum sample size of 300 is required for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis for seven constructs in the structural model. Researcher has determined a sample size of 430 for this study to meet the requirement for SEM analysis and to achieve generalisation of the findings. A total of 430 self-administered questionnaires were distributed in 11 major states of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Perak, Penang, Kedah, Pahang, Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak). Non-probability convenience sampling method was used to select the respondents who were consumers present at the selected hypermarkets/supermarkets/specialty retail outlets selling organic food products (Aeon Big, Aeon, Country Farm Organics, BMS Organic, and other stand-

alone retail outlets) at the selected states in Malaysia to participate in the survey on a voluntary basis.

The data in this research were derived from questionnaires that were adapted from previous research and designed to accommodate this research. The survey instrument was designed with 34 items assessed by a six-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree and 6: strongly agree) and demographic variable with 6 items. The scale measured product attributes, price, availability, sales promotion, marketing communications, perceived value and actual purchase. The collected data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 to perform descriptive analysis, validity and reliability analysis. Subsequently, SPSS AMOS version 21 was used to perform the SEM analysis to test the hypotheses.

##### VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY ASSESSMENT

The analyses of the pilot study included the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) which was conducted to eliminate variables with factor loading < 0.3 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham 2006). Subsequently, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value should be significant at  $p < 0.05$  and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value should be 0.6 or above (Pallant 2007). In examining EFA using Maximum Likelihood extraction and Promax rotation, it has yielded five dimensions (KMO score of 0.693, Bartlett's Test  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ )). The factor loading for all the 34 proposed items is above 0.3, however one item for price labelled as 'C1', 'Organic food is generally more expensive than conventional food', was below 0.3. Therefore, item 'C1' was removed from further data analysis. A second round EFA was performed on the remaining 33 items and the results confirmed that all the remaining items were accepted with factor loading more than 0.3 with five dimensions extracted. Additionally, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for each item in the construct is presented in Table 1.

For reliability analysis, all the Cronbach's Alpha results were above 0.7 as shown in Table 1. Pallant (2007) noted that the values of 0.7 and above are preferable to demonstrate a high level of internal consistency in the data. The Cronbach's Alpha values were 0.959 (product attributes), 0.933 (Price), 0.844 (Availability), 0.916 (Sales Promotion), 0.894 (Marketing Communications), 0.904 (Perceived Value) and 0.882 (Actual Purchase). Thus, all constructs were valid and reliable for further inferential analyses.

#### RESEARCH RESULTS

##### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Respondents in this research were 430 existing consumers of organic food and who have purchased organic food at least once in their lifetime. The

TABLE 1. The CFA results for the measurement model

Construct	Adapted Source (Year)	Statement (Item)	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Product Attributes	Pomsanam et al.(2014)	Organic food tastes better than non-organic food (P1)	.813	.959
	Mohamad et al. (2014)	Organic food are of higher quality (P2)	.858	
	Pomsanam et al.(2014)	The labels of organic foods are informative (P3)	.877	
	Tison (2012)	Organic certification logo(s) are clearly stated on the label (P4)	.868	
	N/A	There are new varieties or types of organic food products sold in retail outlets (P5)	.876	
	Chen (2012)	The product's country of origin (producing country) clearly stated on the label of the organic foods (P6)	.918	
	Tison (2012)	Organic foods are fresher than non-organic foods (P7)	.892	
	Voon et al. (2011)	Organic food is safe for consumption as it is free from pesticides, fertilizers and genetic modifications (P8)	.818	
Price	Krystallis & Chryssohoidis (2005)	I can afford to buy organic foods (C2)	.843	.933
	Voon et al. (2011)	Organic foods have many price levels (C3)	.976	
	Edman et al. (2012)	Organic food has a clear price tag (C4)	.908	
Availability	Sriwaranun (2011)	It is easy to find organic foods in my area (B1)	.660	.844
	Krystallis & Chryssohoidis (2005)	My preferred organic foods is always sufficiently available at supermarkets/ specialty stores/open markets (B2)	.751	
	N/A	Organic foods are placed at a separate section in the retail outlet that is easy to find (B3)	.735	
	Pomsanam et al. (2014)	A variety of organic foods is available for selection (B4)	.804	
	Hanpermchai & Dejtanasoont-orn (2011)	Organic foods can be conveniently purchase online (B5)	.677	
Sales Promotion	Pomsanam et al. (2014)	Organic foods are discounted occasionally (S1)	.784	.916
	N/A	My preferred retailer(s) provide free samples of organic food products (S2)	.927	
	N/A	I receive attractive free premium items from the purchase of organic foods (S3)	.919	
	Noble & Philips (2004)	Loyalty card that provide privileges to its members are available in most of the organic food retail outlets (S4)	.809	
Marketing Communications	See & Mansori (2012)	I can easily obtain organic foods information through advertisement (e.g., magazines, newspapers, TV Channels, internet, etc) (M1)	.724	.894
	Chen (2012)	Word-of-mouth from family members, friends, food blogs or referrals have influenced my knowledge on organic foods (M2)	.910	
	Sriwaranun (2011)	I do receive regular information on organic foods through email/mail/ phone call from my preferred organic food retailer(s) (M3)	.898	
	N/A	Sales staff in the retail outlets are always available to advise me about organic foods (M4)	.780	
Perceived Value	Mohamad et al. (2014)	I believe that organic foods have higher nutritional value (V1)	.754	.904
	Wee et al. (2014)	I believe continuous consumption of organic food would promote my long term health benefits (V2)	.792	
	Dickieson & Arkus (2009)	I view organic food as a status symbol and affluent lifestyle (V3)	.885	
	Wee et al. (2014)	I believe organic foods have good contributions towards environmental friendly, ecology and protects animal welfare (V4)	.900	
	Sia et al. (2013)	Easy availability has eased my time in sourcing for organic foods (V5)	.665 .828	
Actual Purchase	Wee et al. (2014)	I am a regular purchaser of organic food (AP1)	.821	.882
	Dickieson & Arkus (2009)	My purchase proportion of organic food is relatively higher compared to non-organic food (AP2)	.810	
	Wee et al. (2014)	I purchase organic food for my own consumption (AP3)	.772	
	Mohamad et al. (2014)	I purchase organic food for my family's diet (AP4)		

demographic profile of respondents is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Respondents' demographic profile

Demographic Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	176	41.0
Female	254	59.0
<i>Age</i>		
18-20	40	9.3
21 -38	110	25.6
39-49	211	49.1
≥ 50	69	16.0
<i>Income</i>		
<RM1500	20	4.7
RM1500– RM3000	57	13.3
RM3000-RM6000	178	41.4
RM6000-RM10000	135	31.4
>RM10000	40	9.2
<i>Race</i>		
Chinese	222	51.6
Malay	113	26.3
Indian	58	13.5
Others	37	8.6
<i>State</i>		
Selangor	39	9.2
Kuala Lumpur	40	9.3
Penang	40	9.3
Kedah	37	8.6
Pahang	39	9.1
Perak	38	8.8
Negeri Sembilan	40	9.3
Johor	41	9.5
Terengganu	41	9.5
Sabah	38	8.8
Sarawak	37	8.6
<i>Education Level</i>		
High school and below	42	9.7
Certificate or diploma	116	27
Bachelor degree	226	52.6
Post-graduate	46	10.7

#### MODEL COMPATIBILITY TESTING

SEM was used to measure the proposed research model and test the hypotheses. The results of model compatibility testing using chi-square, Chisq/df, RMSEA, IFI, CFI and TLI is summarised in Table 3.

Overall, the research model has achieved a good fit. The *chi-square* value is 1324.28 and according to Barrett (2007), chi square probability value greater than 0.05 indicated acceptable model fit. The ratio of  $x^2/df$  was 2.8, lower than the value 3.0, as suggested by Byrne (2001) and Marsh and Hocevar (1985). Incremental fit indices were greater than 0.9, with IFI of 0.924, CFI of 0.92 and TLI of 0.915. The absolute index, RMSEA of 0.065 was

TABLE 3. Goodness of fit indices

Index	Level of Acceptance	Result	Model Evaluation
Chisquare	P>0.05	1342.28	Good
Chisq/df	Chi-square / df<3.0	2.8	Good
RMSEA	RMSEA < 0.08	0.065	Good
IFI	IFI > 0.9	0.924	Good
CFI	CFI > 0.9	0.923	Good
TLI	TLI > 0.9	0.915	Good

lower than the value 0.8, as suggested by Browne and Cudeck (1993).

After the fitness indices have been achieved, the normality assessment is examined to assess the distribution for every variable in the dataset before proceeding to modelling the structural model. By using SEM with Maximum Likelihood Estimator, the results showed that the data was normally distributed with value of skewness between -1.0 and 1.0 and kurtosis of between -3.0 and 3.0. Subsequently, the estimated path coefficients were derived for the examined relationships and research hypotheses were examined.

#### MODEL CAUSALITY TESTING

The final structural model is shown in Figure 3. The regression weights and the probability value which indicates its significance is shown in Table 4. Based on the results, product attributes had direct positive effect (0.17) on perceived value and showed significant P value. Therefore, H<sub>1</sub> which proposed that product attributes has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food is accepted. The regression coefficient of the relationship between price and perceived value is not significant (0.07). As a result, H<sub>2</sub> which proposed that price has significant effect on the consumers' perceived value of organic food is rejected. Subsequently, availability had direct positive effect (0.39) on perceived value and showed significant P value. Therefore, H<sub>3</sub> which proposed that availability has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food is accepted.

The regression coefficient of the relationship between sales promotion and perceived value is not significant (0.06). As a result, H<sub>4</sub> which proposed that sales promotion has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food is rejected. The regression coefficient of the relationship between marketing communications and perceived value is significant (0.13). Therefore, H<sub>5</sub> which proposed that marketing communications has a positive influence on the consumers' perceived value of organic food is accepted. Finally, perceived value had direct positive effect (0.39) on purchase of organic food and showed significant P value. It was concluded that H<sub>6</sub> which proposed that perceived value is directly and positively correlated to the consumers' purchase of organic food is accepted.



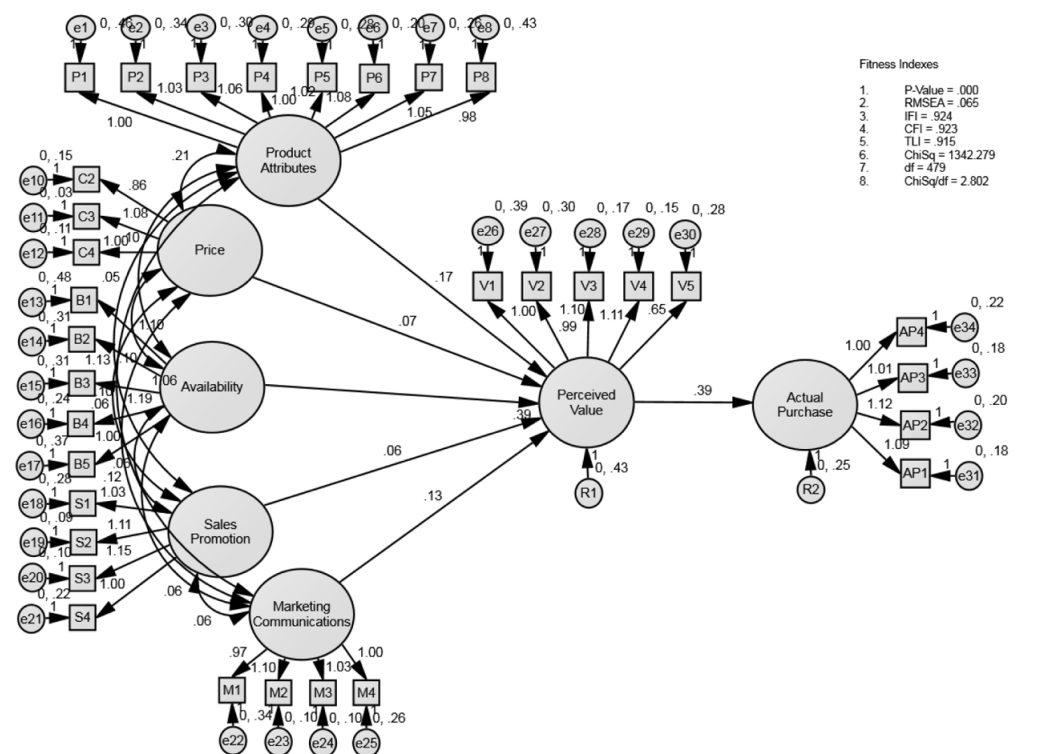


FIGURE 3. Final structural model

TABLE 4. Regression weights and the probability value which indicates its significance

Paths	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
Perceived Value <--- Product Attributes	.173	.040	4.360	.0001	Supported
Perceived Value <--- Price	.073	.054	1.367	.172	Rejected
Perceived Value <--- Availability	.392	.074	5.281	.0001	Supported
Perceived Value <--- Sales Promotion	.058	.055	1.050	.294	Rejected
Perceived Value <--- Marketing Communications	.133	.059	2.275	.023	Supported
Actual Purchase <--- Perceived Value	.390	.042	9.225	.0001	Supported

DISCUSSION

The consumers of organic food products in Malaysia tend to be older, female, Chinese and have a higher income level. This profile is similar to results from studies by Quah and Tan (2010) where consumers purchasing organic food were found to be older, female and Chinese, as well as Omar et al. (2016) also found organic food consumers were from higher income group.

The results of this research has shown that product attributes, availability, marketing communications and perceived value are the main important factors that influenced consumers' actual purchase of organic food in Malaysia. This study has validated the Stimuli-Intervention-Response Model and further proposed that product attributes should be added as an element in the stimuli factors that influence perceived value and actual purchase in the model. Although product attributes of organic food is positively related to perceived value,

the correlation coefficient value still considered as weak according to 'Guilford Rule of Thumb', with r value of below 0.4 (Guilford1956). Marketers should focus on improving the quality of organic food, particularly the imported organic food products. The product's label should be more informative with information on country of origin, nutritional value and organic certification logos to increase the consumers' trust on the organic food. Innovativeness, better taste and appearance of organic food to provide more diverse choice to consumers and improve their satisfaction level. Additionally, the Government should take initiatives to promote the awareness of the organic food to the public by emphasizing on the product attributes, such as better quality, safe for consumption and organic certification process to increase consumers' trust on the organic food products.

The results of this research confirmed that price has no significant effect on consumers' perceived value of

organic food. The price of organic food should be reduced to increase consumers' demand, particularly to encourage purchase from more middle to high income consumers. Policymakers should take initiatives to encourage local organic farmers by providing subsidies and financial assistance to reduce the dependence on imported organic food products which have contributed to the high pricing due to import duties. Availability has recorded the highest correlation coefficient value with perceived value and consumers acknowledged that organic food are easily available in most of the places in Malaysia. The results have supported the previous study by Ahmad and Judhi (2008). Organic food should be made easily availability via online purchase by the consumers and subsequently help to reduce the cost of selling the products and contribute to price reduction.

Sales promotion has no significant effect on the consumers' perceived value due to inadequate promotional activities undertaken by the marketers or retailers. The results obtained are consistent with the previous studies conducted by Loncaric et al. (2009). Retailers should focus on implementing attractive sales promotional activities such as discounts on packaged items, loyalty card programme, free premium items and free sampling to induce consumers to purchase organic food. Consumers would often relate the sales promotion with the price and determine whether good value was received from the purchase of organic food. Additionally, marketing communications has positively influenced the consumers' perceived value of organic food. Public awareness campaign on organic food should be jointly organised by the Government and retailers. More aggressive advertising, word of mouth and direct marketing should be prioritised by the retailers.

In this study, consumers' perceived value has a strong positive relationship with actual purchase and this indicated that consumers placed high priorities on the overall value of organic food products, such as higher nutritional value, long term health benefits, high status symbol, environmental friendliness, ecology and protection of animal welfare, and ease of purchase due to easy access to the products, when purchasing organic food. The results were consistent with previous study by Honkanen et al. (2006). Therefore, it is important for marketers of organic food products to keep these objectives and values in mind when producing organic food, setting price, ensuring easy availability of organic food and designing their marketing communications and sales promotion activities to encourage more purchase of organic food products by the consumers. The results lead to theoretical contribution through the extension of Stimuli-Intervention-Response Model by confirming the perceived value as an element, as well as more precise element of perception in the intervention stage.

#### CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a conclusion, the three marketing stimuli variables of product attributes, availability and marketing communication have significantly influenced consumers' perceived value of organic food. Consumers' perceived value is positively correlated to the actual purchase of organic food. In contrast, price and sales promotion have no significant effect on consumers' perceived value of organic food.

However, this study on consumers' purchasing behaviour of organic food is limited to the five key marketing stimuli factors and perceived value. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of consumers' purchasing behaviour of organic food, other important influencing factors such as consumers' knowledge and awareness of organic food, lifestyle, demographic and cultural factors, should be considered for future studies.

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