

# Mediating Effect of Sunnah Health on Consumer Behaviour towards Functional Food: A Conceptual Framework

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## Abstract

Food is the essential in daily life of a human being. Selection of suitable food is important to ensure that the body receives the nutrients and nutritions in need. Due to the increasing complexity of human lifestyle, the demand towards functional food with healthy nature is raising nowadays. Parallel to this development, food with the concept of *sunnah* is also popularized as a part of functional foods. Therefore, this study aims to suggest a research model to investigate the factors that influence the customer tendency to spend and consume the functional food. The TPB Model is chosen in the development of conceptual framework of this study to observe the relationship among the components of TPB with the behaviour of consumer by taking into consideration the Sunnah Health claims as the mediator for those relationship.

**Keywords:** Functional Food, Sunnah Health, Tpb, Mediator, Conceptual Framework.

## 1. Introduction

Food is the foremost necessity in human life. The function of food is not only limited for the purpose of fulfillment, but it has to be taken systematically to avoid negative effects of eating. The phenomena of disease caused by unhealthy eating has encouraged current consumers to consume healthier food. For this matter, the revolution in nutrition technology has been helping much the food industry to produce healthy food products known as functional food.

Functional foods are food that provides additional health benefits that may reduce disease risk or promote optimal health. Functional foods include conventional foods, modified foods such as fortified, enriched, or enhanced, medical foods, and foods for special dietary use. (De Jong, Ocke, Branderhorst & Friele, 2003). Thus, functional food can be categorised into two parts which are the food using the direct natural resource and secondly, manufactured food through technological renovation. However, limitation from the aspect of knowledge pertaining to types of plants and fruits beneficial for health, and the processing mechanism to obtain the nutrients have caused consumers to tend to use the already processed functional

food products. As a consequence, the production of functional food by the industry is rapidly growing.

The industry of functional food as food product is initially popularised in Japan. There are more than 5,500 types of functional foods in Japanese market today (Rezai, Teng, Mohamed & Shamsudin, 2012). High demand on functional food has increased the price and manufacturers are able to gain large profit especially on functional food that is trusted to cure certain kinds of disease (Gray, Armstrong & Farley, 2003). Since functional food is very significant in the current modern lifestyle of the society, this study focuses on the behaviour of the society towards functional food with the nature of Sunnah. Although abundant of research has been done on functional food, the aspect of sunnah has never been specifically studied. Sunnah food is a type of food mentioned in al-Quran and Hadith such as dates, honey, grapes, olives and others. Food manufactured using these ingredients is the alternative product offering the function and benefit of consumerism like any other existing functional products in the market. Hence, this study attempts to recommend the influence of healthy sunnah food as the mediating variable that effects the consumer behaviour or consumer expenditure on functional food especially in involving the Muslim society in Malaysia. From the finding of this study, a comprehensive behavioural model of sunnah functional food consumption can be developed specifically related to consumerism among Muslim community.

## **2. Literature Review**

Consumer expenditure on a product is influenced of many factors. In this study, the behavioural theory of Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) introduced by (1991) is employed. Through this TPB model, three core components are the influencing factors for consumer tendency to use a product or service namely attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

### **2.1 Attitude**

Attitude is a key factor in determining the behaviour of individuals in various activities. The attitude factor refers to the evaluation level of a person on a product (Yuhanis & Chok, 2012). As consumers must conduct evaluation before selection, it is found that there are two main aspects that influence the attitude which are price and knowledge. Generally, price plays important role in determining the consumer demand and is assumed to negatively affect towards the quantity. However, there are a few previous studies indicate that price perception among the consumers does not only effect the quantity but it is more complex. As an example, some consumers perceive that the price level is an indicator for the product quality level (Lichtenstein, Ridgway & Netemeyer, 1993). Therefore, consumers are willing to spend on a quality product which is able to fit the purpose (Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991). Over this factor, the consumption of functional food among the high income countries demonstrates an aggregate of 20% annual increase (Kotilainen, Rajalahti, Ragasa, & Pehu, 2006).

Apart from price, the level of society knowledge influences the behaviour of an individual to choose. Nowadays, customer is concerned not only on the appearance of the products but also on the nutritional information in making healthier choice (Hwang & Lorenzen, 2008). In relation to that, products marketed with unique features, such as improving health, are found to gain high demand from consumers (Golnaz, Zainalabidin, Mad Nasir, & Eddie Chiew, 2009). In this situation, consumers who have the information on the nutritional

ingredient of the product, selectively act in product selection (Phuah, Rezai, Mohamed, & Shamsudin, 2015). Research by Singla (2010) and Zul Ariff, Rezai, Zainalabidin and Mohamad Amizi (2015) and others discover that there is a significant relationship of labeling as the source of information for consumers to purchase a product. A study in US involving 1005 respondents found that the knowledge of consumers on the benefit of functional food determines the their attitude to practise the care for prevention of disease on their own (Childs & Poryzees, 1998).

## **2.2 Subjective Norms (SN)**

The second factor is the subjective norms that refers to the pressure from the surrounding which is influential towards the behaviour of an individual. The influence from the surrounding is caused by individuals or groups who are close to a person such as family, peers, neighbours and society. The practice and perception of the group effects the choice or action of a person to conduct an activity. Ravis and Sheeran (2003) and Ham, Jeger, and Ivković (2015) explicate that the current practice (known as descriptive norms) and perception (known as social norms) from the groups in the environment are able to give pressure to a person to also conduct it. For instance, an individual who has family history facing a specific disease is more willing to consume functional food at the early stage as prevention (Verbeke, 2005; Bech-Larsen & Scholderer, 2007). Newson, McFarland, Kaplan, Huguet and Zani (2005) also find that the practice of society that emphasizes the health aspect will bring others to join.

## **2.3 Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)**

In TPB model, the perceived behavioral control factor or PBC is a crucial factor in differentiating the initial model which is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). PBC refers to the level of confidence, to be willing or not in conducting a behaviour (Sharifudin, Ramalingam, Mohamed & Rezai, 2014). Ajzen (2002) explains that individual confidence is not only measured on self perception from the aspect of convenience of doing, but also on the capability to receive and control the effect of the result of the choice to conduct (or not). According to Ajzen (2002), the perceived control component of PBC involves people's beliefs that they have control over the behavior, that performance or non-performance of the behaviour is up to them. In conjunction to that, there are a few elements that become the measurement for the PBC variable which is the people's confidence that they can perform it if they want to do so (known as perceived difficulty, PD) (Bandura, 1998), how confident the actor is that they can perform the behaviour if they wanted to (CON), perceived control over behavioural performance (PC) (Ajzen, 2002), dan what appears to us to be a locus of control (LOC) (Armitage & Conner, 1999).

## **2.4 Sunnah Health**

Health motivation factor spread by the product marketing is found to be significant in determining the individual behaviour towards the consumption of functional food (Verbeke, 2005). Thus, Chen (2011) finds that this factor is significant as a mediating of individual behaviour towards healthy lifestyle practice. In a study by Niva and Makela (2005) in Finland reveals that this health motive is essential to encourage consumers to prioritize the health quality through lifestyle emphasizing the healthy food intake.

Due to the growing of sunnah food in the market especially for Muslim consumers, the health benefit publicized is found to function as a mediator that influence the consumer selection, purchase and consumption of the needed functional food. A study by Nur Syazana, Mohd Dzulkhairi, Zarina and Muhammad Shamsir (2016) uncover that consumers tend to choose sunnah food such as dates which are believed to give health benefit during fasting. In regard to this, Muslim consumers believe that there are a lot of health benefits gained from various food states in al-Quran and hadith. Functional food products combined with sunnah food and capable in fulfilling the health objective as conventional; products do can build confidence in consumers to continuously consume it.

### 3. Research Conceptual Framework

The paper aims to develop a conceptual framework to determine the relationship between the components of the TPB towards dependent variable which is functional food consumption behaviour. Moreover, this paper posits sunnah health as a mediating variable.

The research conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1. The influence of the independent variable of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behaviour on consumption of sunnah functional food is measured in this study. The figure shows the direct and indirect relationship between the TPB components, while sunnah health acts as a mediator variable. The attitude factor comprises of two components of knowledge and perception on the price of functional food. While subjective norms consist of descriptive and social norms, and perceived behavioural control is made of four elements.

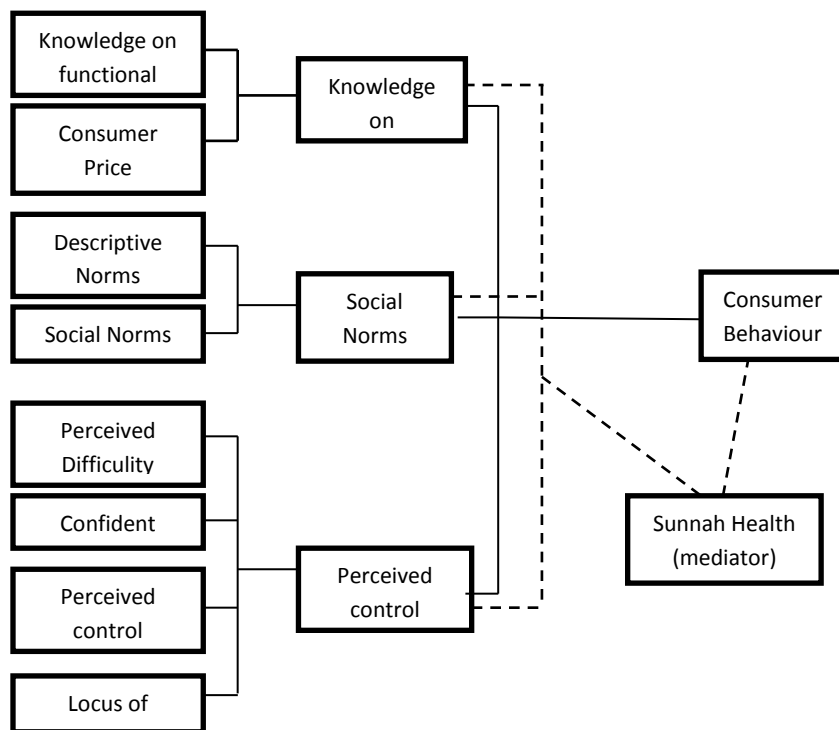


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of TPB with mediator variable towards consumption of functional food behaviour.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study suggests a conceptual framework to analyze the consumer behaviour towards the functional food product produced from sunnah food. Due to the fact that this product is marketed together with the conventional functional food products, thus an investigation must be done to identify the influence of sunnah as the mediator that influences the consumer tendency to consume the products. Through this variable, the manufacturer claim that sunnah food also offers health benefit as other functional food can be determined its influence towards the level of consumer behaviour. Due to the conceptual type of this research, the evidence to explain the position of sunnah health food can be proven in future research through the developed conceptual framework.

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