

# FEMALE SHOPPERS' OUTLOOK OF FIRMS' FAIRNESS IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AND DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

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## **Abstract:**

*Consumers often experience injustice from the businesses which ignore fairness aspects in their marketing activities which can range from improper promotional campaigns to distribution bias and so on. As such, it has been of immense importance for the researchers to explicitly examine the role of virtuous marketing practices in shaping attitude of consumers. Accordingly, by means of a survey based investigation conducted with urban female consumers, this study probes the attitude of shoppers towards businesses' ethicality in their marketing activities. Results indicate that righteousness in marketing communications and fairness in distribution channels exhibit a positive relationship with the attitude of consumers which further impacts their intentions to purchase marketers' ethicalities while developing plans to buy cosmetics products. Furthermore, in an ethical marketing context, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control also influence consumer intentions significantly. It is also discovered that consumer lifestyle facets reflected by religiosity and women's role and perception exert no moderating influence over the attitude-intention link. Consequently, managers are recommended to take adequate measures towards ensuring that their promotional and distributive actions are seen by the consumers as fair, reasonable and virtuous.*

**Keywords:** *Uprightness in marketing communications, fairness in distribution, women role and perception, religiosity, PLS-SEM*

## **1. Introduction**

Appraising industry practices on the basis of ethics is not a new issue. Also, marketer's adherence to virtue ethics is deeply desired by the consumers. In that regard, it is useful to notice that primary focus of businesses is to reap profits but their survival and sustainability largely depend on maintenance of ethical standards and fairness to buyers (Chattananon, 2003; Piacentini, MacFadyen et al, 2000). As consumers are often seen to be concerned about potential losses in purchase decisions, it becomes imperative for the firms to understand behavior of consumers in connection with their purchase decision patterns, and strategies to

cope up with consumers' fears or risk factors (Koklic 2011; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shiu et al, 2006).

Studies reveal that firms that follow ethical practices in marketing enjoy favorable consumer attitudes towards them which in turn results into boosted sales of their products (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Gupta, Pirsch et al, 2010). Furthermore, it has also been reported that advertisements containing offending elements like religious offences or others have got negative impact on consumers' attitudes towards such firms (De Run, Butt et al, 2010). Also, consumers feel bad for firms' distributive injustice when they come to know that someone else paid less than them for the similar product from same outlet or even from some other outlet (Shehryar and Hunt, 2005). And this bad feeling is translated into their future buying intentions towards the products of such firms. For instance, it is useful to note here that firms producing cosmetics and beauty products are known to be prone to ethical issues and challenges under several circumstances.

In recent times, while crafting ethical marketing strategies, marketing experts are endorsed to take into due account the behavior of women consumers towards fairness aspects in distribution and marketing communications (Fernando, Suganthi et al, 2014). Also, there have been umpteen suggestions made for adding the aspects related to perceptions and sensitiveness of consumers towards firms' marketing practices to the existing body of marketing ethics knowledge (Green and Antoine, 2011; Kumar, Mokhtar et al, 2014). In consistency with the above, a serious need is recognized for modeling both supply and demand aspects along with consideration of ethical issues in consumer studies (Zhao, Zhao et al, 2011). Furthermore, Malaysia is a multicultural country consisting of many ethnic groups like the Malays, Indian, Chinese, and others. These groups show a symphonic interaction among themselves in their daily life, however, they also concurrently continue to practice their individual identity, culture, values and beliefs, and languages as well (Rashid and Ho, 2003). At the same time, studies also show that even if demographic characteristics like education or income of consumers are high or low, they still may not make their purchase decisions accordingly because of varying lifestyles, and as such, inclusion of demographic factors (Pharr, 2011) and lifestyle concerns (Chen, 2011) can potentially offer valuable insights and explanations relevant to consumer behavior studies.

Addressing the aforesaid issues, this paper begins with an extensive review of literature, and offers theoretical foundations for the research model. Thereafter, methodological aspects are presented which include instrumentation and data analysis results. Finally, findings, discussion and conclusive remarks are presented.

## **2. Literature Review**

Making sincere efforts towards gaining consumers' collective trust is strongly suggested for the firms' marketing successes (Audi, 2008; Fulmer and Gelfand, 2012). In a study conducted by Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004), it was found that 91% of Finnish consumers visibly stated that they always keep in view ethical standards of the firms and consequently, they expect reliable information about the same for making their purchase decisions. Basically, consumers start to form favorable attitude with increase in knowledge about products and firms' ethical values, and if they have got any doubt about transparency of firms, they may cease to contain positive opinion towards such firms (Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire,

2011). In line with the aforesaid aspects, Smith (1995) suggested several ethical issues in context of consumer marketing while perusing a firm's marketing practices as shown in Figure 1.

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### **Marketing Communications Related Aspects**

#### Personal Selling

- Questionable/psychological sales techniques (e.g., high-pressure selling)
- Overselling (e.g., overestimating customer's problem, overpromising product performance, overspecifying product requirement)
- Misrepresentation (i.e., beyond permissible puffery, including by omission)
- Conflicts of interest (e.g., incentives to push products not best suited to customer)

#### Advertising

- Deceptive/misleading advertising (including puffery that amounts to "soft core deception")
- Advertising that "manipulates" behavior (i.e., advertising as "hidden persuader" that creates "false" needs leading to unnecessary/harmful demand)
- Advertising to children
- Sales Promotion
- Deceptive/misleading sales promotions
- Bait-and-switch
- Direct Marketing
- Misrepresentation of products (i.e., misleading advertising via direct mail, etc.)
- Violations of consumer privacy (e.g., unauthorized use of mailing lists)
- No intention of fulfilling orders (i.e., fraudulent practices)

### **Channels of Distribution Related Aspects**

- Discrimination (e.g., "redlining", selective direct marketing)
  - Restricted availability (e.g., supply shortages)
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## **Figure 1. Consumer Marketing: Evident Ethical Concerns**

*Source: Adapted from Smith (1995)*

Clarity on the role of virtuous marketing practices in impacting the extent of attitude formation among consumers is supposed to be of immense use and significance for the marketers in a hyper competitive era like now. Therefore, most of the aforesaid ethical aspects are considered in the current study wherein ethical marketing practice is characterized and appraised by two factors: uprightness in marketing communications; and fairness in firms' distribution channels. When an outcome or the process of reaching that outcome is largely believed as suitable, reasonable and just, it generally signifies fairness or uprightness (Bolton, Warlop et al, 2003).

### ***Uprightness in Marketing Communications***

There is some evidence that when consumers carry a positive view towards ethical products, companies might get benefit through product promotions by using its main strengths as well as by stressing on its ethical sides facilitated through slight modifications in the traditional marketing mix essentials (Luchs, Naylor et al, 2010), which was also reinforced by Schlegelmilch and Oberseder (2010). At times, it might be difficult for marketers to explicitly understand the stage wherein they are overpassing the ethical limits. But then, it is also true that if firms do not take consumers' opinions into consideration, they will not be able to capture nuances of ethical marketing issues relevant to them from a practitioner oriented viewpoint (Al-Khatib, Stanton et al, 2005; Deng, 2012).

As viewed from a practitioner perspective, firms unceasingly seek to maintain a balance in their ethical obligations in different markets and cultures which is possible with ease when their ethical values are properly communicated to the audience (Donaldson, 1996; Grein and Gould, 2007). The prominence of marketing communications is highlighted from the fact that consumers greatly value and rely on the information furnished by the firms through their promotional activities for making buying decisions in different scenarios (Koklic, 2011) and therefore, firms should be honest in sharing necessary information with the consumers.

### ***Fairness in Firms' Distribution Channels***

Marketers are seen to possess strong urge to attract customers, and which is why they always try their best to improve consumers' perceptions towards their firms through various marketing deeds (Friestad and Wright, 1994). However, even if consumers do not have any intention to buy the products of a firm, still unethical activities undertaken by a firm attracts their attention to seek more knowledge about the firm and its products on account of mere curiosity (Bell and Main, 2011). In that regard, mentioning distributive aspects, Brown (2001) opined that sometimes firms limit quantity of product, or change timing or channel of product availability. Fairness in distribution aspects can be achieved only when both consumers and marketers experience their interests being entertained with due appropriateness and integrity (Khandelwal and Bajpai, 2012).

### ***Theoretical Foundations***

Purchase intention of consumers has been considered to possess a significant relationship with virtuous practices of the firms and also with the firms' ability to meet expectations of the consumers (Creyer and Ross, 1997; Ozbek, Alniacik et al, 2012). The aforesaid matter can also be presented as the reason behind willingness of consumers to pay higher than normal rates for ethically produced goods and services (Auger, Burke et al, 2003). Also it is in agreement that there is a need to identify the effects and roles of businesses' ethicalities in persuading consumers which can potentially trigger business development to a reasonable extent (Viriyavidhayavongs and Yothmontree, 2002).

Keeping abreast with the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985), it was asserted that the subjective norms are generally backed by two aspects with first being normative beliefs based on expected reaction of family, peers and friends or others, and the second being the degree of motivation to comply with what those known ones' suggest (Ramayah, Nasurdin et al, 2004). Usually, women are seen to be markedly concerned about their beauties. And to feed such enthusiasm, they seriously consider the suggestions of their family and friends in that regard especially of those who have got glowing or glamorous skins and beauties. Also, it is argued that enactment of behavior is contingent upon perceived behavioral control (PBC) which fundamentally denotes "perceived availability of opportunities and resources to perform the behavior" (Steinmetz, Davidov et al, 2011). Thus, attitude is not the only single variable that determines intention, and hence, in line with the TPB, inclusion of PBC and subjective norms in predicting intentions is traditionally said to explain the consumer behavior models with enhanced precision.

### ***Probable Moderating Influences***

Moreover, it is quite pertinent for the marketers to have sufficient understanding of the reality that the format of retailing desired by consumers is the one which handsomely aligns with consumers' lifestyles and their shopping habits (Forsythe, Liu et al, 2006). Also, diverse cultural values and norms have been seen to exert a significant influence on female consumers' attitudes towards their beauty as well as their appetite to purchase cosmetics products (Koubaa, Ulvoas et al, 2011). Similarly, at times, religiosity or religious inclinations are also observed to play a significant role in shaping the consumer behavior and buying decisions (Mutsikiwa and Basera, 2012). As such, lifestyle of women consumers can be reflected by aspects like women role and perception (Tai and Tam, 1997), and religiosity (Pharr, 2011) which has been seen to exert moderating influence in the consumer behavior based studies (Chen, 2011; Chuang, Tsai et al, 2009). Taking into consideration the aforesaid aspects in overall terms, the aim of this study was to describe and examine the relationship between virtuous practices in marketing and attitude of shoppers.

### **3. Model of the Study**

As per the arguments presented in the previous sections, and underpinned with the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985) which has been the basis for several consumer studies conducted in an ethical context (e.g. Kim and Karpova, 2010; Shaw and Shiu 2003), the constructs of this study are proposed. Perceived uprightness in marketing communications, and perceived fairness in firms' distribution channels representing virtuous marketing practices of firms tend to impact attitude of consumers which further possesses a tendency of impacting consumer intentions. Afterwards, subjective norms representing social factors and perceived behavioral control signifying shoppers' perceived ease and difficulty aspects seek to impact their behavioral intentions. Furthermore, consumer income is postulated to possess moderating role in influencing the relationships of perceived uprightness in marketing communications and that of distribution channels taken with the attitude of consumers. Finally, lifestyle aspects like religiosity, and women role and perception are considered to exert moderating influences on the relationship prevalent between attitude and intention of consumers. It is in alignment with the consumer decision process model (Blackwell, Miniard et al, 2001) which highlights differing roles of lifestyle facets in influencing varying levels of consumer decision making process.

As discussed in the literature review section, shoppers expect to receive honest and truthful information from the companies in their marketing communications programs. However, the opposite is observed quite often, and it can be seen in form of deceptive or twisted information being used in various promotional campaigns (Wible, 2012). Similarly, integrity of distribution channels can boost a firm's profitability. However, also it is seen in practice that difficulties felt by consumers in connection with product availability/information influence their buying decisions unfavorably (Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). As such, in order to conduct further investigation in this regard, following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Higher perceived uprightness in marketing communications upheld by firms positively affects consumer attitudes towards such firms.

H2: Higher perceived fairness in firms' distribution channels positively affects consumer attitudes towards such firms.

Afterwards, shoppers might exhibit stronger willingness to purchase from companies that they perceive to behave ethically (Shehryar and Hunt, 2005). However, to substantiate such claims, it is also useful to investigate the extent to which consumers' favorable perceptions towards firms' uprightness actually transform into favorable intentions too. Moreover, in consistency with Ajzen (1991), shoppers' intentions towards firms' uprightness can also be simultaneously influenced by their perceived social pressure (Hanzaee and Taghipourian, 2012), or by volitional control related aspects (Ajzen, 2006). In accordance with the above, following hypotheses were postulated:

H3: More positive consumers' attitudes towards a company positively affects their intentions to take into account fairness aspects while planning to buy.

H4: There exists a positive relationship between subjective norms and consumer intentions towards taking into account fairness aspects while planning to buy.

H5: Consumers' perceived behavioral control significantly influences their intentions to consider fairness aspects while planning to buy.

Furthermore, female shoppers' lifestyles, habits, and decision making preferences might vary due to their religious orientations (Jafari and Suerdem, 2012), or due to their overall roles and perceptions (Tai and Tam, 1997). Likewise, their demographic backgrounds seek to further elaborate causes of such divergent inclinations (Jansson, 2011). Also, it is suggested to shed further light on understanding shoppers' thoughtfulness and consideration of firms' uprightness by including probable moderating variables (Hanzaee and Taghipourian, 2012). As such, following hypotheses were proposed:

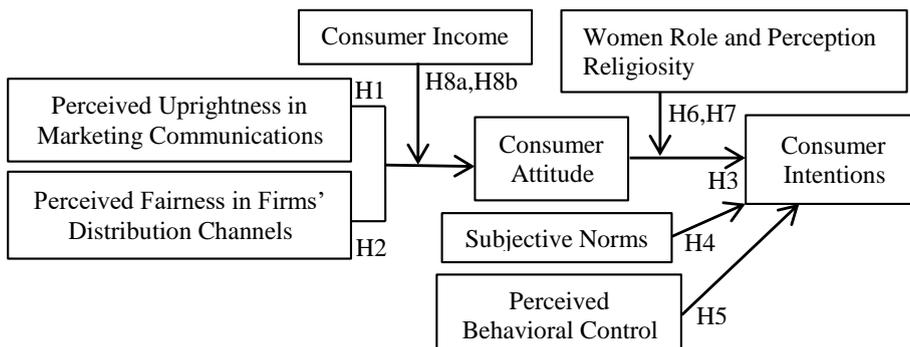


Figure 2. Research Model

H6: Women role and perception possess a moderating influence on the relationship between their attitude and intentions as witnessed in an ethical context.

H7: Religiosity possesses moderating influence on the relationship between attitude and intention of consumers as witnessed in an ethical context.

H8a: Level of consumers' income exerts a moderating influence on the relationship between perceived uprightness in marketing communications and the attitude of consumers in an ethical context.

H8b: Level of consumers' income exerts a moderating influence on the relationship between perceived fairness in firms' distribution channels and the attitude of consumers in an ethical context.

As such, taking into consideration all of the aforesaid constructs, the research model (Figure 2) proposed for this study was as follows:

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Sampling Procedure**

This study was carried out in the three cities of Malaysia namely Penang, Johor Bahru, and Kuala Lumpur. Following Sudman (1980) sampling approach, this study resorted to using a systematic sampling method covering consumers of various profiles reducing the chances of sampling bias. The respondents included 363 urban women consumers from these cities as it was assumed that consumers residing in city limits contain higher awareness to ethics related challenges often thrown by the marketers and accordingly, they can offer precise views about the fairness issues as addressed in this study. Researchers also aimed at collecting some additional responses from all of these three places in order to cope up with possible/conventional problems usually observed in surveys like returned empty responses, multi ticked responses, and so on. Moreover, in Malaysia, the working age of women is deemed to be 15 years or more. It signifies that females of 15 years and above are considered mature and legally employable by the government. As such, also in consistency with the study of Lappalainen, Kearney et al (1998), this research assumed that such mature females would be able to furnish useful insights in capacity of consumers on issues pertaining to fairness of firms.

### **4.2 Measurement of Study Variables**

This study relied on following a survey based investigation method, and as such, a seven point (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) interval scale type instrument was used after taking items from various sources deemed appropriate to measure the variables taken in this study. The measurement items for the variables taken under this study were ascertained to be of reflective type and they were adapted/adopted from various related sources after a thorough operationalization search. As such, the measurement items' sources included following— perceived uprightness in marketing communications: Vitell, Rallapalli et al (1993), Paul, Roy et al (2006), Green and Antoine (2011), Hanzae and Nasimi (2012); perceived fairness in firms' distribution channels: Gaski and Etzel (1986), Vitell, Rallapalli et al (1993), Paul, Roy et al (2006), Green and Antoine (2011), Ndubisi, Natarajan et al (2013); consumer intentions: Lin (2006), Kim, Lee et al (2012), Ozbek, Alniacik et al (2012); consumer attitude: Barksdale and Darden (1972), Forsythe, Liu et al (2006), Kim (2012); subjective norms: Lin (2006), Lee and Ngoc (2010), Hanzae and Taghipourian (2012); perceived behavioral control: Kidwell and Jewell (2003), Lin (2006), Lee and Ngoc (2010); women role and perception: Tai and Tam (1997); and religiosity: Vitell, Singhapakdi et al (2001). Fairness/uprightness in marketing communications in this study is related to the genuine concerns of marketers towards maintaining ethically admired values in advertising, promotion, personal selling etc. (Green and Antoine, 2011; Smith, 1995). Thereafter, fairness in distribution channels can be described as non-adherence to discrimination of any kind in the distributive aspects of businesses for example redlining, artificial supply shortages, etc. (Green and Antoine, 2011;

Smith, 1995). Furthermore, consumer intentions represent the motivation and willingness level of consumers towards deliberating virtuousness of marketers while making buying plans. Moreover, in the current study, attitude refers to consumers' overall favorable or negative approximation (Cho and Walton, 2009) of ethicality of marketers. Thereafter, subjective norms indicating social influences reflect shoppers' perceptions of being able to gain approval from the near and dear ones for taking ethicality issues under consideration while making plans for buying, consistent with Cho and Walton (2009). Afterwards, perceived behavioral control in this study refers to a consumer's "perception of how easy or difficult it would be to" (Ajzen, 1991) take into account the ethicality of marketers when making buying plans. Women role and perception refers to women's general orientation and inclination towards career, home, financial and social status, modern or traditional views etc. (Tai and Tam, 1997). Finally, religiosity in this study reflects the general religious and spiritual beliefs of women consumers as part of their lifestyle. As most of the adapted/adopted measures belonged to studies from developed countries, this study performed a pre-test before conducting the main survey. Instrument was shown to experts and the theoretical, scale related, and other key aspects of the instrument were cross checked with them. Also, some respondents were latter asked to opine on the clarity, wordings, etc. of the instrument.

#### **4.3 Data Collection**

The data collection process was administered personally by the researcher together with two enumerators roped in for this purpose. After the survey, some instruments were not used as they were found to contain some options unanswered out of the total 374 collected responses thus leaving the researcher with 363 responses for further perusal. There were few missing values found in these which were replaced with the mean. Approximately, Upto 48% of respondents were found to be possessing education of upto senior secondary school level and around 59% fell in the income range of 0-3000 Malaysian Ringgit (RM). Close to 83% of consumers was quite young falling in the age group of 15-25 years. Furthermore, in order to show the absence of a common method variance in this study, Harman's single factor test was conducted. It was ensured by the existence of more than one factor with adequate variances containing bigger eigenvalue than 1.0 as found in this study when factor analysis was run by selecting varimax option under principal component analysis.

#### **4.4 Analysis and Results**

The data was analyzed in this study using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS- SEM), and SmartPLS 2.0 software (Ringle, Wende et al, 2005) was used for the same which is considered to be a powerful tool for studying predictions. The use of PLS was considered noteworthy because it is a variance based and prediction oriented statistical tool which can be used for theory development and for complex models (Hulland, Ryan et al, 2010). Also, PLS has been used in several classic studies particularly in the branch of marketing. In PLS, for seeing the outer model's suitability, it is suggested to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the widely used practice is to calculate convergent and discriminant validity for the same. It was firstly ensured that the factor loadings are all either 0.50 or above (Hair, Black et al, 2010), Cronbach's alpha more than 0.60 (Hair, Black et al, 2010), and composite reliability more than 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) which can be seen in Table 1. Afterwards, when the average

variance extracted (AVE) values were calculated, it was discovered that these were less than 0.50 for two constructs viz. perceived uprightness in marketing communications, and consumer attitude. As such, few items were deleted from the perceived uprightness in marketing communications construct, and also from consumer attitude construct, and then the AVE was achieved to be more than 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) for all constructs showing the existence of convergent validity.

**Table 1**

**Estimation of Convergent Validity**

Item Measurements	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
<b>Perceived Fairness in Firms' Distribution Channels</b>				
Availability of facial care products should not be manipulated by the marketers	0.666			
Companies selling through direct marketing should not be selective in choosing consumers	0.735			
		0.774	0.847	0.527
Marketers should not exert undue influence over the resellers' choice to handle a facial care product	0.759			
Sellers of facial care products should avoid discrimination by making products only for certain segments like, the rich	0.799			
Retail stores selling facial care products should serve their customers well	0.661			
<b>Perceived Uprightness in Marketing Communications</b>				
Advertisements of facial care products should not be false and misleading	0.686			
Marketers of facial care products should not create false and untruthful needs	0.750			
		0.711	0.822	0.536
Companies should not share my personal contact information for marketing purposes	0.754			
Sales promotions of facial care products that use deception or manipulation should be avoided	0.735			

<b>Perceived Behavioral Control</b>				
I would be able to buy facial care products of the brands which follow fairness in their marketing practices	0.765			
		0.725	0.845	0.646
Whether or not I buy such products is entirely up to me	0.857			
I believe I have the ability to buy such products	0.786			
<b>Religiosity</b>				
I like to go for prayer regularly	0.875			
		0.728	0.845	0.646
Spiritual values are more important than material things	0.815			
If Malaysians were more religious, this would be a better country	0.713			
<b>Consumer Attitude</b>				
I am afraid that I might be overcharged while buying a facial care product	0.710			
I can't examine the actual facial care product prior to buying it	0.769			
I prefer to buy a facial care product which seems to contain less harmful contents	0.712			
		0.805	0.860	0.507
Over the past several years, the quality of most cosmetics products has not improved	0.714			
It is exciting to receive a package offer for a facial care brand	0.710			
I hesitate to buy a facial care product if there is limited or little information available about it	0.654			
<b>Subjective Norms</b>				
People who influence my behavior would encourage me to buy facial care products of the brands which follow fairness in their marketing practices	0.722			
People who are important to me would approve my decision to buy such products	0.810	0.689	0.826	0.613
My relatives and friends think that I should buy such products	0.814			
<b>Consumer Intentions</b>				
I would love to buy facial care products of the brands which follow fairness in their marketing practices	0.693			
I plan to buy such products in future	0.762			
		0.787	0.855	0.542
I would be willing to recommend such products to other people	0.820			

I would be willing to buy such products for family and friends	0.760			
I would be willing to defend such products when others speak poorly about them	0.633			
<b>Women Role and Perception</b>				
Husband and wife should both share the housework	0.729			
Men and women should be treated equally at work	0.722	0.693	0.812	0.520
Women should seek their own careers	0.738			
On any major purchase, the husband and wife should decide together what to buy	0.693			

Afterwards, discriminant validity (Table 2) was estimated to show the items' representation to their own construct instead of other ones. In line with the criteria and suggestions made by Chin (2010), and Fornell and Larcker (1981), it can be seen in Table 2 that all diagonal values which are square root of respective AVEs are bigger than other values presented in their respective rows and columns and also that they are greater than 0.50. After ascertaining the convergent and discriminant validities as stated above, in order to establish the overall strength of the model, effect size was also calculated for the endogenous variables that ranged between 0.027 and 0.209 which indicates the effect to be upto medium and adequate. Conventionally, an effect size is represented as small, medium or large by the values 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 respectively (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 2**

Study variables	Discriminant Validity							
	CI	ATT	DC	MC	PRBC	REL	SN	WRP
Consumer Intentions	0.736							
Consumer Attitude	0.387	0.622						
Perceived Fairness in Firms' Distribution Channels	0.295	0.340	0.726					
Perceived Uprightness in Marketing Communications	0.360	0.348	0.406	0.732				
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.537	0.350	0.230	0.366	0.804			
Religiosity	0.207	0.121	0.113	0.204	0.208	0.804		
Subjective Norms	0.355	0.363	0.267	0.149	0.308	0.087	0.783	
Women role and perception	0.305	0.251	0.331	0.328	0.215	0.579	0.155	0.721

[CI: Consumer Intentions; ATT: Consumer Attitude; DC: Perceived Fairness in Firms' Distribution Channels; MC: Perceived Uprightness in Marketing communications; PRBC: Perceived Behavioral Control; REL: Religiosity; SN: Subjective Norms; WRP: Women Role and Perception]

Furthermore, in order to ascertain the predictive quality of the model, and following the trends of PLS based studies, the cross validated redundancies were calculated for all endogenous constructs which was achieved to be bigger than 0

(Fornell and Cha, 1994) showing the model's adequate predictability strength (Table 3).

**Table 3**

<b>Model's Predictive Relevance</b>			
Construct	R <sup>2</sup>	Cross-Validated Communality	Cross-Validated Redundancy
Consumer Attitude	0.169	0.508	0.084
Consumer Intentions	0.377	0.542	0.188

It permitted the researcher to move towards computing goodness of fit which was achieved to be 0.364 which is termed as large (Wetzels, Odekerken-Schroder et al, 2009). All of the aforesaid estimations led to attaining the inner model which was the basis for calculating path coefficients and t-values for getting hypothesis results. The model of this study was run in the SmartPLS with bootstrap sample of 500 and it was found that all of the direct hypotheses are being supported (Table 4).

**Table 4**

<b>Results of Direct Hypotheses</b>						
H.No.	Hypothesized Effect	Path coefficient	Std. Error	T- Value	P- Value	Decision
H1	Perceived Uprightness in Marketing Communications -> Consumer Attitude	0.251	0.070	3.595	0.000	Supported
H2	Perceived Fairness in Firms' Distribution Channels -> Consumer Attitude	0.238	0.073	3.256	0.001	Supported
H3	Consumer Attitude -> Consumer Intentions	0.151	0.072	2.110	0.018	Supported
H4	Subjective Norms -> Consumer Intentions	0.152	0.048	3.149	0.001	Supported
H5	Perceived Behavioral Control -> Consumer Intentions	0.403	0.064	6.314	0.000	Supported

In order to calculate the effects of moderating variables viz. women role and perception, and religiosity, interaction effects were generated in SmartPLS, and model was run which further showed that none of the two hypothesized effects were supported (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Results of Moderating Hypotheses (Interaction Effects)**

H.No.	Hypothesized Effect	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	Decision
H6	ATT * Women Role and Perception -> CI	-0.471	0.799	0.589	0.556	Not Supported
H7	ATT * Religiosity -> CI	0.763	0.823	0.928	0.354	Not Supported

ATT: Consumer Attitude; CI: Consumer Intentions

Finally, multi group analysis (MGA) was conducted for calculating the moderating effects of demographic variable income which was possible by splitting the whole data into two data sets, one for high income and another one for low income. And then the study model was run with these two distinctive data sets which led to allowing the researcher towards making comparisons between the two income groups. As such, the results were found as displayed in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
**MGA Results of Moderating Hypotheses**

Hyp. No.	Hypothesis	High Income (n=150)			Low Income (n=213)			Moderation	
		Path coefficient	Std. Error	T-value	Path coefficient	Std. Error	T-value	P-value	Decision
H8a	Marketing Communications -> ATT	0.194	0.104	1.866	0.298	0.082	3.621	0.215	Not Moderated
H8b	Distribution Channels -> ATT	0.371	0.098	3.778	0.157	0.083	1.885	0.048	Moderated

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Hypothesis H1 was found to be supported showing shoppers' fairness expectations from the businesses. It further reflects that abstinence from manipulations in promotional activities and advertisements leads to formation of stronger consumer attitude, abreast with the proclamations of Becker-Olsen, Taylor et al (2011), and Koklic (2011). Thereafter, hypothesis H2 was also discovered to be supported showcasing the importance of fairness in distribution aspects and representing further the role of absence of discriminatory channel actions in facilitating development of stronger attitude among the consumers, in line with the claims of Viriyavidhayavongs and Yothmontree (2002), and Yamoah (2014). It can also be seen in Table 4 that hypothesis H1 results consisted of bigger path coefficient and t-value than those of hypothesis H2. It shows that in current scenario, perceived uprightness in marketing communications has got greater influence on the attitude of consumers as compared to the impact of perceived fairness in firms' distribution channels. Moreover, hypothesis H3 was supported which seeks to show that firms' reliance on ethical practices in

marketing leads to shoppers forming stronger level of motivation to buy from such firms, in consistency with the assertions of Shehryar and Hunt (2005), and Niazi, Ghani et al (2012). Afterwards, hypothesis H4 was found to be supported which reflects that support of peers or close associates largely assists consumers in having stronger enthusiasm and motivation to purchase from firms sticking to ethicality in marketing, in alignment with the claims of Hyllegard, Yan et al (2012). Hypothesis H5 was seen to be supported reflecting that shoppers' convenience or inconvenience related perceptions with respect to considering marketer's ethicalities play key role in shaping their intentions, in line with Yoon (2011). However, hypothesis H6 was found not to be supported which indicates that differences in general career or home related beliefs of women do not lead to causing differences in their level of concerns in terms of considering marketers' ethicalities while making plans to buy, thus causing an inconsistency with the findings of Koubaa, Ulvoas et al (2011). Hypothesis H7 was also not supported which shows that women with varying spiritual or religious inclinations possess same level of readiness to deliberate firms' fairness aspects while buying, which is consistent with the claims of Ramly, Chai et al (2008). Furthermore, hypothesis 8a was not supported which shows that consumers with dissimilar levels of income show no difference in their attitude formed by examining fairness in marketers' promotional campaigns, in alignment with the prerogatives of Vitell and Paolillo (2003), and Newman and Bartels (2010). Finally, hypothesis H8b was found to be supported showing dissimilarity in the perceptions of consumers with varying incomes towards assessing firms' distributive fairness, contrary to the observations of Vitell and Paolillo (2003), and Newman and Bartels (2010).

It is evident from the aforesaid findings that ethical aspects are occupying prominent place in consumers' daily life and they are keenly resorting to investigating the ethical values and social orientations of the firms (Hanzaee and Taghipourian, 2012; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). Marketers are usually aware of the reality that shoppers always face some sort of risk in purchase decisions. However, in order to minimize their risk perceptions, shoppers often try to explore accessing maximum information about the products signifying the prominent role of product and brand image created through sound marketing communications in prompting consumer buying behavior (Eze, Tan et al, 2012; Zeithaml, 1988). It is also implied from the findings that the firms need to ensure that channel partners too are kept informed about their ethical obligations.

## **6. Conclusion**

In context of developing nations like Malaysia, there have been consistent suggestions to enrich business ethics literature by including ethical aspects of marketing in consumer studies. Accordingly, in addition to capitalizing on the predictive strength of the theory of planned behavior in this study, consideration of uprightness in market communications and that in distribution channels, and estimation of their relationships with urban women consumers' behavior in Malaysia is considered to be a significant contribution. Marketers might believe that attempting to offer harmless products is a sign of ethical adherence. But there are other issues too. This study empirically concludes that firms need to strictly follow fairness and ethics in designing their marketing communications programs and promotional activities. It is recommended that firms must offer safe products

and simultaneously reveal all the required information regarding costs and benefits so as to assist the shoppers into taking proper buying decisions. Also, it is duly recognized that marketing managers avoid misleading and dishonest tactics and discriminatory distribution practices as these may have repercussions on the efforts undertaken towards winning consumer trust. The study was limited to urban female shoppers only because they are seen to be the major users of cosmetics. As such, from the study findings, due care and diligence should be preserved while making generalizations for rural female consumers or male users who also use cosmetics worldwide, though they might supposedly have different levels of attitude towards businesses as compared to urban females. It is suggested to the future researchers that they test other theories and consider evolving issues in consumer behavior in relation with the elements of unfairness or fairness or other contemporary ethical issues arising from the marketers particularly in developing economies context. As a whole, firms and marketers need to uphold reasonable standards of ethics as this will potentially facilitate their sustenance in the marketplace through an enhanced trust of consumers towards such firms.

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