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**Article**

## You reap what you sow: The role of Karma in Green purchase

Cogent Business & Management

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

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*Suggested Citation:* Chairy, Chairy; Syahrivar, Jhanghiz (2020) : You reap what you sow: The role of Karma in Green purchase, Cogent Business & Management, ISSN 2331-1975, Taylor & Francis, Abingdon, Vol. 7, Iss. 1, pp. 1-13,  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1798066>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/244910>

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To cite this article: Chairy Chairy & Jhanghiz Syahrivar | (2020) You reap what you sow: The role of Karma in Green purchase, Cogent Business & Management, 7:1, 1798066, DOI: [10.1080/23311975.2020.1798066](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1798066)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2020.1798066>



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Received: 15 April 2020  
Accepted: 18 June 2020

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Reviewing editor:  
Len Tiu Wright, De Montfort  
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## MARKETING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# You reap what you sow: The role of Karma in Green purchase

Chairy Chairy<sup>1\*</sup> and Jhanghiz Syahrivar<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** In line with the growing popularity of the green economy in recent years, green marketing is also gaining more prominence in the academic world. One interesting research direction in this area is the role of religion in the consumption of green products. This is the first study that investigates the role of “Karma” in the green purchase intention of Buddhist minority in Indonesia—most of them are Chinese descent. Karma, a doctrine most prominent in Buddhism, is the belief that one’s deeds in the present will influence his or her fate in the future or in the next life. In this study, spirituality and long-term orientation were predicted to mediate the relationship between karma and green purchase intention. For this study, we gathered 148 Indonesian Buddhists. We employed Composite Confirmatory Analysis via ADANCO PLS-SEM software to analyse the hypotheses and derive our conclusion. The results of this study reveal that 1) karma has a positive effect on green purchase intention, 2) There is a partial mediation of spirituality in the relationship between karma and green purchase intention and, 3) Karma has a positive effect on spirituality and long-term orientation. Theoretical contribution as well as managerial implications of this study, especially for green marketing practitioners targeting Buddhist consumers, are discussed.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chairy Chairy is an Associate Professor in Marketing and Management Studies at President University, Indonesia. He holds a PhD in Marketing from Universitas Indonesia. His research fields are in consumer behavior, branding, and strategic marketing. His research topics focus on green consumption, hospitality, and tourism marketing, and customer brand engagement. Prior to working in the higher education field, he worked for years in the property management industry.

Jhanghiz Syahrivar is an Assistant Professor in Marketing and Management Studies at President University, Indonesia. He is also a member of the European Marketing Academy (EMAC). He has secured multiple awards and scholarships, such as Education USA award (2015), Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship (2018-present), and Polish-Asian Bridge PROM scholarship (2019). He is currently taking a PhD in Business and Management at Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary. His primary research area is religious and spiritual marketing.

## PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The idea that every action in the present bears some consequences in the future is generally accepted by various walks of life. Good actions are expected to generate beneficial outcomes, whereas bad actions are expected to generate detrimental outcomes to the doers. In Buddhism, this idea is encapsulated in the doctrine of Karma—you reap what you sow. This study confirms that the belief in karma influences one’s preference toward environmentally friendly products or green products. People who believe in karma are concerned with the long-term implications of their consumptions. They seek to consume products which are environmentally safe in order to secure a good karma in the future. Moreover, people who believe in karma also possess a high level of spirituality. They have a deeper connection with the transcendent. Finally, those who possess a high level of spirituality also have a higher green purchase intention.

**Subjects: Consumer Behaviour; Green Marketing; Religiosity and Spirituality**

**Keywords: karma; spirituality; long-term orientation; green purchase intention**

## 1. Introduction

Research on green marketing has received the most attention in the past two decades. By knowing the antecedents of green purchase, it becomes less challenging for marketers of green products to design and tailor their marketing programs for specific market segments. Previous studies have identified the role of religion (religiosity) in green consumption (Davari et al., 2017; Khan & Kirmani, 2018). Many religions emphasize the protection and the preservation of the natural environment as a key indicator of righteousness and a way to attain salvation from the Almighty God (Khan & Kirmani, 2018; Shaw, 2018). In this regard, green consumption is in line with religious goals.

One aspect of religion that is rarely examined in the consumer decision-making process, especially in the context of green consumption, is the belief in karma. A study by Kopalle et al. (2010) suggests that the belief in karma increases consumers' expectations on product performance. Other studies also suggest that consumers who believe in karma will also take into accounts the long-term implications of consuming certain products before purchasing them (Chen et al., 2019; Sreen et al., 2018). This study aims to investigate whether karma has a role in green purchase intention. Moreover, spirituality and long-term orientation, the two variables often associated with the belief in karma, are also investigated. To our best knowledge, this is the first study to link the belief in karma with green purchase intention by investigating the Buddhist minority in Indonesia, a Muslim majority country.

The protection of the natural environment is pivotal in Buddhism. In one of his religious sermons on environmental protection, XIV Bstan-'dzin-rgya (1995) connected the role of trees with the life of the Buddha:

"In the context of Buddhism, trees are often mentioned in accounts of the principal events of our teacher Buddha Shakyamuni's life. He was born as his mother leaned against a tree for support. He attained enlightenment seated beneath a tree, and finally passed away as trees stood witness overhead." (p. 278)

Environmentally friendly behavior, one of which is manifested in the form of consuming environmentally friendly products or green products is increasingly popular in various parts of the world. One comprehensive study on the consumption behavior of green products was conducted by Joshi and Rahman (2015). They evaluated 53 empirical articles discussing green product consumption behavior published between 2000 and 2014. Their study shows that determinants of green product consumption behavior can be classified into two broad categories, namely, individual factors and situational factors. Previous studies have asserted the vital role of individual factors, such as environmental beliefs, attitudes, values, and concerns, in the purchase decisions of green products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Kim, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2019). Consumers will gravitate towards green products if they believe such products offer more advantages than conventional ones (Delafruez & Goli, 2015). Only when individuals are united in their environmental beliefs and attitudes, they can bring significant contributions to the environment.

Green consumption also gains increasing popularity in Indonesia. According to Chairy et al. (2019), everything that uses the word "green" tends to get more attention in the country, such as green building, green campus, green economy, green consumer, and green product. In the academic sector, a green campus competition also gains popularity. The campus that carries the concept of green is believed to be more attractive to prospective students and their parents. Meanwhile, in the business sector, various products that are environmentally friendly can be sold at a higher price. For example, products with organic concepts are preferable because they do not use artificial fertilizers that can reduce environmental quality. Moreover, consumers believe that

the absence of artificial fertilizers in organic products means better quality, greater health benefits, and various other advantages. Therefore, consumers are willing to pay more for organic products compared to non-organic ones. (Krystallis & Chrysoschoidis, 2005; Sriwaranun et al., 2015; L. Wang et al., 2019).

Based on consumer segments, green products are also preferred by the young generation (e.g., Millennials) who are knowledgeable and concerned about the state of our natural environments. Studies by Joshi and Rahman (2019) and Lasuin and Ng (2014) suggest that youngsters have a high interest in environmentally friendly consumption and green lifestyle. Some of them are motivated to purchase upcycled clothing in order to reduce textile waste (Bhatt et al., 2019). A so-called “green traveller” among millennials would place high importance on green certification and visible green advertisement when they stayed in a hotel (Huh & Chang, 2017). Millennials are also more likely to voice their green consumptions through social media platforms (J. Wang et al., 2018). Overall, they are a lucrative market for green products (Chairy, 2012; Chairy & Alam, 2019; Mufidah et al., 2018).

According to PewResearch (2020), Buddhists make up roughly 7% of the world’s population and most of them live in Asia-Pacific regions. In Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim majority country, Buddhists account for less than 1% of the total population. Most Buddhists in the country are Chinese-Indonesians who are also an ethnic minority. However, Chinese-Indonesian minority group is known to be an affluent segment. According to Efferin and Hopper (2007), Chinese-Indonesians own much of Indonesian private capital despite only representing less than 5% of the total population. Based on Forbes (2019), the majority of 50 richest people in Indonesia are of Chinese descent (the top three richest are also of Chinese descent). Often pictured as being the elite ruling minority, Chinese-Indonesians have long been subjects of racial sentiments as well as various stereotypes, such as being greedy, oppressive or exclusive (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020). All in all, combined with their status as Buddhist minority, Chinese-Indonesians remain an attractive but less investigated market segment.

The rest of this paper will be presented as follows: first is the literature review where the core theories of variables presented in this study as well as their hypotheses are discussed. Second is research methodology where we detailed our sample, measures, and the main method to analyze the data. Third is findings and discussions where we discussed the results. Lastly, is the conclusion where we presented, among others, our theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

## 2. Literature review

Green purchase intention is defined as the likelihood that a consumer will purchase green products in the future. In the literature dealing with green intention-behavior gap, the intention to purchase or switch to green products is used as an approach to predict consumer behavior towards green products (Sajjad et al., 2020; Testa et al., 2019; Y. Wang et al., 2019). The high and low intentions of purchasing green products are assumed to manifest—though not automatically—in their actual buying behavior when exposed to green products in the future.

Consumption and belief are two things that are often inseparable. Consumption activities can be geared towards the preservation of one’s faith (Davari et al., 2017; Khan & Kirmani, 2018). For instance, certain sects in Buddhism observe vegetarian traditions as they see meat consumptions lead to bad karma (Stewart, 2019). Moreover, Buddhism teaches its followers to feed and release animals (e.g., fish) as a way to gain good karma (Von Eschenbach, 2020).

Karma is one of the important doctrines in both Hinduism and Buddhism. Karma can be summarized as “*you reap what you sow*” (Agarwala et al., 2019). According to Kopalle et al. (2010), the belief in karma has four important aspects, namely (1) the spiritual nature of the universe in which we live, (2) the continuous cycle of the universe, (3) the consequences of one’s good/bad deeds in the present to one’s future, and (4) the existence of reincarnation. In their work,

Agarwala et al. (2019) argued that consumers who believe in karma will have lower intention to behave unethically. This important aspect of karma makes those who believe in it tend to behave well in the present in order to obtain blessings and a better life in the future or the next life. Moreover, the belief in karma is also associated with good deeds, such as charity or donation behavior (Baek et al., 2019; Kulow & Kramer, 2016).

Believers of karma tend to pay attention to the consequences of their actions, such as what they purchase and consume. According to Kopalle et al. (2010), the doctrine in karma is believed to influence consumer evaluations of a product. Consumption of green products is a behavior that takes into account the impact of one's consumption activities on the environment in the future. Therefore, it is estimated that consumers who strongly believe in karma also have stronger intention to purchase green products. The hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H1:** Karma has a positive effect on green purchase intention.

Religion is considered as one of the important elements in culture. As with other cultural elements, religion is considered to be able to influence the behavior of each individual directly through rules and taboos, and indirectly through norms in society (Sood & Nasu, 1995). In a study by Hill et al. (2000), there seems to be an overlap between religion (religiosity) and spirituality. Nevertheless, they provide the following criterion for spirituality:

“The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term “search” refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term “sacred” refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.” (p. 66)

People with high spirituality tend to be selfless and they do not see money as means of gaining power and prestige (Lambert et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2004). Moreover, spirituality is one aspect of religion that can drive consumers towards responsible and sustainable consumption, such as in the case of green consumption (Chairy, 2012; Joshi & Rahman, 2019; Sharma & Sharma, 2017; Werner et al., 2020).

Consumers who have a strong belief in karma are also expected to have a high level of spirituality. A study by Suchday et al. (2018) among 361 Indian students suggests a positive correlation between karma and spirituality. In terms of consumption, consumers who consume green products are consumers who tend to be unselfish and they pay attention to the impact of their consumption activities on the environment and the society. Previous studies affirmed the relationship between spirituality and green consumptions. For instance, a study by Joshi and Rahman (2019) among 425 young consumers reports a positive relationship between spirituality and sustainable (green) consumption. Similarly, a study by Werner et al. (2020) among 621 respondents from India and 622 respondents from the USA report a positive relationship between spirituality and sustainable (green) dietary. We also predict that spirituality mediates the effect of karma on green purchase intention. Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

**H2:** Karma has a positive effect on spirituality.

**H3:** Spirituality has a positive effect on green purchase intention.

The concept of long-term orientation was discussed intensively by Hofstede (1984) in which he argued that long-term orientation is one of cultural dimensions. This cultural dimension is believed to encourage a forward-looking behavior. Bearden et al. (2006) highlight the crucial role of culture in the consumer's decision-making process in a society. The belief in karma which takes into account the impact of current behavior to one's future also reflects certain aspects of long-term

orientation. In other words, karma makes a person more long-term-oriented. In a study by Liu et al. (2019) among 1032 Buddhist entrepreneurs, they suggest a close relationship between the belief in karma and their long-term orientation hence leading to a better business performance compared to nonreligious entrepreneurs. A study by Kopalle et al. (2010) also shows that karma is related to long-term orientation; people who believe in karma have a long-term horizon and they pay more attention to the future consequences of their present actions, including their consumption activities. Therefore, we argue that long-term orientation plays a positive role in the green purchase intention. We also argue that long-term orientation mediates the effect of karma on green purchase intention. Therefore, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

**H4:** Karma has a positive effect on long-term orientation

**H5:** Long-term Orientation has a positive effect on green purchase intention.

### 3. Research methodology

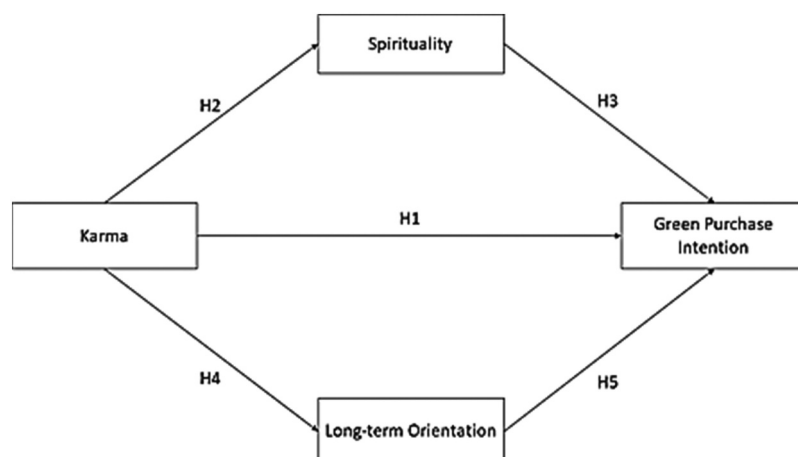
Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of this study. Karma is the exogenous variable, spirituality, and long-term orientation are mediators, and lastly, green purchase intention is the endogenous variable.

The population of this research were Buddhist students of several major universities in Indonesia. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. Based on Hair et al. (2013), 59 observations are needed for detecting R-squared values of at least 0.25 (with a 5% probability of error). We fulfilled the minimum observations required. Initially, we successfully gathered 200 respondents but in the end only 148 valid respondents with no missing responses were processed in this study.

All variables under investigation were measured using measurement scales from the previous studies. We adopted the measurement of green purchase intention from the work of Chan (2001); the measurement scale of karma was adopted from Kopalle et al. (2010); the measurement scale of spirituality was adapted from Stillman et al. (2012) and Worthington and Aten (2009). Lastly, the measurement scale of long-term orientation was adopted from Bearden et al. (2006). We also conducted a pre-test involving 30 respondents to assess the reliability of the measurement scales. The Cronbach's alpha of each variable is given in Table 1.

Since the sample is relatively small and that our data lacks the characteristics of normal distributions hence analyzing the data through PLS-SEM is more appropriate (Goodhue et al., 2012). Therefore, we processed the data using PLS-SEM ADANCO software. Specifically, we

**Figure 1. Theoretical framework.**





**Table 1. Measures**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Reliabilities</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Green Purchase Intention The degree of one's intention to purchase environmentally friendly products.	(1) I am considering buying a green product because it is environmentally friendly. (2) I am considering switching to an environmentally friendly brand for ecological reasons. (3) I will switch to the green version of the product I used to buy.	5-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	0.843	Chan, 2001
Karma A religious doctrine which says that a person's good and evil deeds in the present will affect his or her future or the next life.	(1) I believe in reincarnation. (2) Good deeds in the present will produce a positive fruit in the future and life to come. (3) Evil deeds in the present will produce a negative fruit in the future and life to come. (4) The world was created in a continuous cycle. (5) The world was not formed in a single act of creation. (6) There is no beginning or end to this universe.	5-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	0.879	Kopalle et al., 2010
Spirituality The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that arise as a consequence one's deep connection with the transcendent.	(1) I feel the presence of a higher power in my life. (2) I experience a connection with a higher power in every aspect of my life. (3) I have never felt alone because I am always being watched over by a higher power in my life.	5-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	0.721	Hill et al., 2000; Worthington & Aten, 2009; Stillman et al., 2012

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued)				
Variables	Items	Measures	Reliabilities	Sources
Long-term Orientation An individual's tendency to look ahead in various actions.	(1) I always plan everything for the long term. (2) I always work hard for my success in the future. (3) I don't mind enduring hardships in the present in order to be successful in the future.	5-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	0.710	Bearden et al., 2006

employed Composite Confirmatory Analysis (CCA) to test our hypotheses and derive our conclusion. According to Hair et al. (2020), CCA has been used as an alternative to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) because it has several benefits, such as higher retained items hence improving construct validity. In this regard, PLS-SEM was used because of its ability to model composites (Henseler et al., 2016). We follow the guidelines prescribed by Henseler et al. (2016) and Hair et al. (2020). Moreover, a bootstrapping method involving 5,000 random subsamples from the original data set was also employed in this study.

Table 1 contains a brief description of the description of variables, indicators, and measurements of each research variable.

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

Based on Table 2, The Standard Deviation (S.D) of the data is less than 1 indicating that more of the data is closer to mean. In general, we conclude that the belief in karma, spirituality, long-term orientation and green purchase intention of our respondents are modest.

##### 4.1. PLS-SEM model

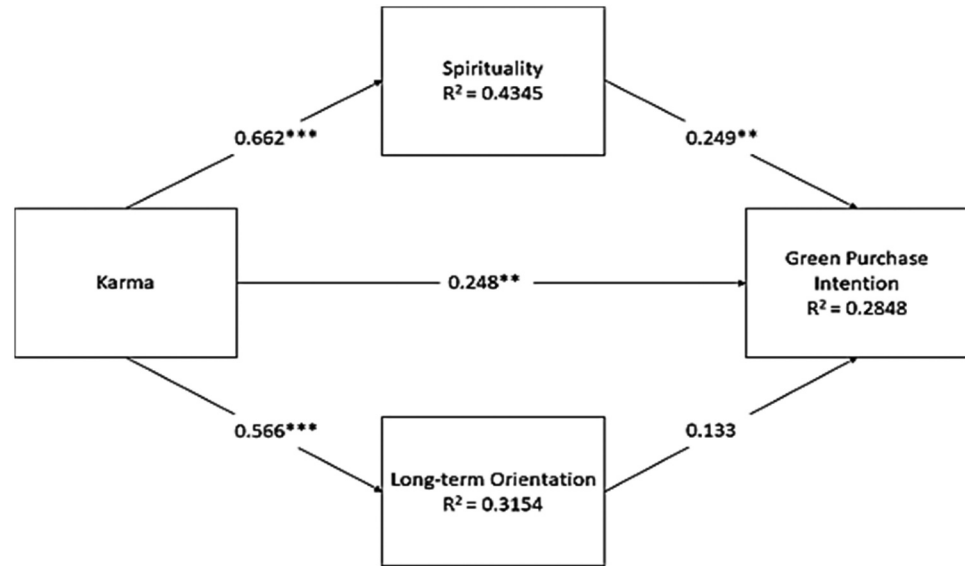
Based on Figure 2, the effect of karma on green purchase intention is positive and significant ( $p < 0.01$ ; t-value:  $8.6865 > 1.96$ ;  $f^2 = 0.0451$ ), the effect of karma on spirituality is positive and significant ( $p < 0.001$ ; t-value:  $13.4446 > 1.96$ ;  $f^2 = 0.7805$ ), the effect of spirituality on green purchase intention is positive and significant ( $p < 0.01$ ; t-value:  $2.6641 > 1.96$ ;  $f^2 = 0.0439$ ), the effect of karma on long-term orientation is positive and significant ( $p < 0.001$ ; t-value:  $10.2104 > 1.96$ ;  $f^2 = 0.4707$ ). Meanwhile, the effect of long-term orientation on green purchase intention is not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ; t-value:  $1.3776 < 1.96$ ;  $f^2 = 0.0151$ ).

The above model has SRMR 0.0703 ( $< 0.08$ ), dULS 0.0495, and dG 0.0254. The Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) values of green purchase intention, spirituality and long-term orientation are 0.4881, 0.6621, and 0.5657 consecutively which are significantly less than 1, indicating discriminant validity. The Adjusted R-squared of green purchase intention, long-term orientation, and spirituality are 0.2848, 0.3154, and 0.4345 consecutively. The results were achieved through a bootstrapping method involving 5,000 random subsamples from the original data set.

**Table 2. Descriptive Analysis**

Items	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
KRM1	148	2	5	3.73	0.829
KRM2	148	2	5	2.95	0.763
KRM3	148	2	5	3.31	0.902
KRM4	148	2	5	2.98	0.925
KRM5	148	2	5	3.33	0.877
KRM6	148	2	5	2.86	0.846
SPR1	148	1	5	3.51	0.907
SPR2	148	2	5	3.18	0.867
SPR3	148	2	5	3.93	0.862
LTO1	148	1	5	3.18	0.971
LTO2	148	2	5	3.50	0.892
LTO3	148	2	5	3.48	0.760
GPI1	148	1	5	3.03	0.976
GPI2	148	2	5	3.26	0.809
GPI3	148	1	5	3.31	0.932

**Figure 2. PLS-SEM Model (ADANCO).**

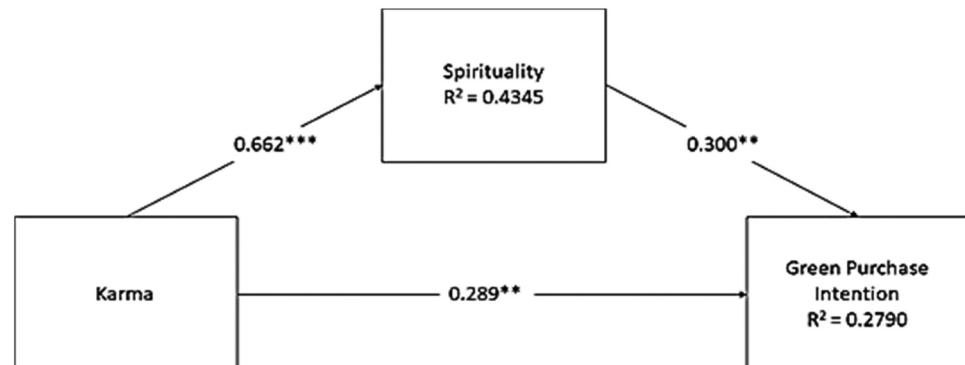


#### 4.2. Refining the model

Since the SRMR of the initial model is very close to the threshold of 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2016) as one of the indicators of acceptable fit, we decided to refine our model in order to improve the overall goodness of fit. In this effort, we eliminated the long-term orientation variable since it has the least effect towards green purchase intention. The trimmed model (see Figure 3) indicates that the effect of karma on green purchase intention is positive and significant ( $p < 0.01$ ; t-value: 3.6405 > 1.96;  $f^2 = 0.0661$ ), the effect of karma on spirituality is positive and significant ( $p < 0.001$ ; t-value: 13.4420 > 1.96;  $f^2 = 0.7805$ ), and the effect of spirituality on green purchase intention is positive and significant ( $p < 0.01$ ; t-value: 3.6340 > 1.96;  $f^2 = 0.0711$ ).

The above model has SRMR 0.000, dULS 0.000, and dG 0.000 (<95% bootstrap quantile or HI95 of SRMR, dULS and dG) indicating a perfect fit. The Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) values of green purchase intention and spirituality are 0.4881 and 0.6621 consecutively which are significantly less than 1, indicating discriminant validity. The Adjusted R-squared of green purchase intention and spirituality are 0.2790 and 0.4345 consecutively. Just like the original model, the results of the trimmed model were also achieved through a bootstrapping method involving 5,000 random subsamples from the original data set.

**Figure 3. PLS-SEM Trimmed Model (ADANCO).**



## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Studies concerning karma in marketing disciplines are rare. Karma-related studies in marketing context are mostly driven by the general idea that consumers' beliefs influence their behaviors and product preferences (Agarwala et al., 2019). A belief about something, such as the relationship between consumption and fortune, may have originated from religions or religious ideas. From Buddhism to Islam, dietary is a religious affair. Even one religion may consist of several denominations, each has its set of doctrines. In this regard, Karma is a part of a larger belief system (e.g., Buddhism and Hinduism) that influences consumer decision making. Moreover, Buddhist consumers remain an untapped market in Muslim-majority Indonesia. We thus outlined some results and contributions of this study.

The results of PLS-SEM support H1, H2, H3 and H4. Meanwhile, H5 is unsupported in this study. The positive and significant effect of karma on green purchase intention (H1) supports the arguments of Kopalle et al. (2010) and Agarwala et al. (2019); the positive and significant effect of karma on spirituality supports the work of Suchday et al. (2018); the positive and significant effect of spirituality on green purchase intention supports the works of Chairy (2012), Joshi and Rahman (2019), and Werner et al. (2020); finally, the positive and significant effect of karma on long-term orientation supports the works of Kopalle et al. (2010) and Liu et al. (2019). As for the reason why H5 is unsupported in this study, we argue that some mediating variables, which are not included in the model, are at play in the relationship between long-term orientation and green purchase intention, such as attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (Lobo & Greenland, 2017; Sreen et al., 2018). Indeed, previous studies attempted to link long-term orientation with green purchase intention via aforementioned mediating variables. Our study thus confirms the approach used by previous researchers. Moreover, we found that spirituality partially mediates the relationship between karma and green purchase intention. On the other hand, this study failed to prove that long-term orientation is a mediator in the relationship between karma and green purchase intention.

Based on the research findings above, we propose three theoretical contributions: 1) We manage to prove empirically the relationship between karma and green purchase intention. The relationship between karma and consumer behavior was only theorized in previous studies (Agarwala et al., 2019; Kopalle et al., 2010), p. 2) Previous studies affirmed a positive correlation between karma and spirituality. However, in our study, we go further by providing empirical evidence that karma is an antecedent of spirituality. It means that the belief in karma improves one's spirituality. Moreover, we provide empirical evidence that spirituality is a mediator in the relationship between karma and green purchase intention; 3) To our best knowledge, our model is novel hence it fills in the gap in the belief-driven marketing theories.

We propose three managerial contributions that we wish to address to green marketing practitioners: 1) Marketing communication channels should make a clear connection between karma and green consumption. For instance, portraying consumers who (symbolically) cultivate good karma via green consumption can be impactful to Buddhist consumers; 2) A clear connection should also be made between green purchase (consumption) and spirituality by emphasizing that green purchase and consumption is the way to connect with the Higher Power or the transcendent; 3) Owing to point 1 and 2, we think that it is necessary that green products are tailored to reflect certain religious themes or clues (e.g., Buddhist cuisine).

Our study has a limitation due to a relatively small sample hence we hesitate to generalize our findings to all Buddhist consumers in Indonesia. Some of our findings, however, validate the conclusions made by previous researchers hence adding weight of evidence. Though we hesitate to generalize our findings to all Buddhists in the country, we can justify and generalize the relationships among variables to some extent.

Future studies can replicate our study by involving more respondents hence adding weight to the results of our study. Future studies may compare between Hindu and Buddhist consumers as

they might have different attitudes towards karma (and spirituality). Finally, future studies may examine the relationship between karma and compensatory consumption, the idea that the consumptions of products (e.g., green products) can symbolically compensate for one's perceived self-discrepancy (e.g., ideal vs actual).

#### Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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#### Citation information

Cite this article as: You reap what you sow: The role of Karma in Green purchase, Chairy Chairy & Jhanghiz Syahrivar, *Cogent Business & Management* (2020), 7: 1798066.

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