

**Research Article**

# The Role of Product Knowledge and Source Credibility in the Relationship between Price and Skepticism of Organic Products: Conceptual Review

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explain the influence of product knowledge and source credibility in the relationship between price and skepticism. This study presents a conceptual review sourced from empirical research published in journals relating to prices, product knowledge, source credibility and skepticism. The findings in this study indicate that product knowledge and source credibility are conceptualized as variables which can influence the relationship between price and skepticism. This study implies that high prices have the potential to reduce skepticism when consumers have high product knowledge and high source credibility. Meanwhile, when product knowledge is low and source credibility is low, high prices can lead to increased skepticism. The values offered in this study are expected to provide new insights in the relationship between product knowledge, source credibility, price and skepticism.

**Keywords:** Price, Product Knowledge, Source Credibility, Skepticism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Skepticism is a study that is still interesting to study in the field of marketing. This is indicated by the increasing number of skepticism studies in the last two decades. This skepticism in this study is based on the phenomenon of consumer behavior towards organic products. Previous studies have examined skepticism in the context of advertising. Advertising skepticism is consumer doubt and distrust caused by messages in advertising (David & Gregory, 1994; Feick & Gierl, 1996; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Obermiller *et al.*, 2005; Castro & Botelho, 2012). Another study states that skepticism as consumer doubt about the benefits or environmental performance of green products (Albayrak *et al.*, 2011; 2013). But in the context of organic products, skepticism arises because the price of organic products is perceived to be expensive by consumers. The price of premium organic products is less understood by consumers so consumers are skeptical about buying organic products (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2007; Atanasoaie, 2012).

Premium prices are considered by some consumers as an obstacle. This causes consumers not to immediately buy organic products. Even though

consumers have middle to upper income, consumers are still not willing to buy organic product (Suharjo *et al.*, 2013; Xie *et al.*, 2015). The price of organic products which are considered more expensive than conventional products is the reason consumers still doubt the product. This is supported by study Fotopoulos & Krystallis (2002); Effendi *et al.* (2015); and Li *et al.* (2019) that price is still one of the obstacles in purchasing organic products. Therefore high prices are indicated to be the cause of consumer skepticism so that marketing organic products is considered less developed.

On the other hand, consumers evaluate positively the organic product itself. This can be seen from study Tsakiridou *et al.* (2007); M. F. Chen (2009); Phuong (2013); Bilal *et al.* (2015); Jovanovic *et al.* (2017); Fathia *et al.* (2018) that consumer have positive attitudes toward organic products. But this positive attitude is not followed by the actual buying behavior caused by consumer skepticism (Tsakiridou *et al.*, 2007; Suharjo *et al.*, 2013). This is supported by the study of Padel & Foster (2005) which states that some consumers positively evaluate organic products as healthy products, less contaminated, no chemicals / pesticides, tastes good and price. While some other

consumers negatively assess organic products associated with high price.

Previous studies that revealed correlations between prices and attitudes also still indicate inconsistent results. On the one hand, studies show there is a negative correlation between price and attitude (Huang *et al.*, 2004; Chang, 2011). On the other hand, studies show a positive correlation between price and attitude (Bing *et al.*, 2011; Delafrooz *et al.*, 2014; Khare *et al.*, 2014). Even a previous study stated there was no correlation between price and attitude (Irianto, 2015; Effendi *et al.*, 2015). In the context of organic products, skepticism is a dilemma in which consumers have a positive attitude towards organic products, but not followed by buying intentions caused by consumer skepticism about high prices of organic products. This is supported by Chang (2011) which states that high prices cause consumer ambiguity so that consumers are skeptical.

The relationship between price and attitude has been widely studied. This study wants to fill the gap and broaden the price relationship with other affective variables, namely skepticism which has not been explored in previous studies. Previous studies focused on the relationship between skepticism and its antecedents (Castro & Botelho, 2012; Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014) as well as the consequences of skepticism (Albayrak *et al.*, 2011; Albayrak *et al.*, 2013; Anuar *et al.*, 2013). Thus this study proposes price as a motivating variable for consumer skepticism towards organic products.

Furthermore, in this study, product knowledge is proposed as a variable that has a role in the relationship between price and skepticism. High product knowledge is expected to reduce skepticism caused by high perceived organic product prices. The benefits of organic products can be developed through product knowledge to change consumer behavior (Shafie & Rennie, 2012; Iyer *et al.*, 2016; Ćinjarević *et al.*, 2019). Product knowledge is indicated to be effective in reducing consumer uncertainty, which in turn can increase consumer attitudes and intentions to buy organic products (Wang, 2015). Thus, knowledge of organic products can be communicated through stimuli in the form of product benefits (Ham *et al.*, 2016).

Source credibility is another variable that is proposed as a variable that has a role in the relationship between price and skepticism. High source credibility is expected to reduce skepticism caused by high prices. A credible source of information can influence attitudes towards organic food (Wang, 2015). Skepticism can be reduced through increasing the credibility of messages communicated to consumers (Fenko *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, in this study, source credibility is considered effective in reducing consumer skepticism.

This study aims to propose product knowledge and source credibility as variables that can moderate the relationship between price and skepticism. Both variables are expected to be effective in reducing skepticism caused by high prices of organic products. This has the reason that the high price of organic products is considered a cause of skepticism which ultimately does not drive an immediate product purchase decision. Therefore, consumer skepticism in this study is positioned as an objective variable that is directly influenced by price. This study is a consequence of the expansion of previous studies.

### Theoretical Framework

The reason for this research is on behavioral and paradigm based views that are extended from affective structures in attitude change to propose a conceptual framework. This change in attitude shows a modification of the perception of an individual's general evaluation of a stimulus. In the context of organic products, prices are a source of stimulation that can affect attitude change. However, before the purchase action occurs another dimension of attitude emerges which holds back the action, namely skepticism.

This study is based on cognitive theory which postulates that behavior is controlled by attitudes and changes in attitude can be done through strengthening attitudes. Cognitive theory is a psychological approach that explains human behavior by understanding consumer thought processes through learning. Strengthening is part of cognitive learning that arises from consumer awareness (Assael, 2001). Consumer behavior can be influenced when consumers get information (Pachauri, 2002).

The theoretical approach shows that attitude and skepticism are affective components but both are different constructs. Attitude is interpreted as an evaluation of an object of thought by involving individuals' likes and dislikes towards an object (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Another definition states that attitude is a general and enduring evaluation of several people, objects or problems (Krosnick *et al.*, 1991). While skepticism is interpreted as individual doubts about a product (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Skepticism is a type of affective response that is related to one's emotions (Peter & Olson, 2002). Skepticism is used to broaden the notion of evaluation by including consumers' feelings and beliefs and finding the root causes (Nolder & Kadous, 2018).

Skepticism can also be conceptualized as both a mindset and attitude. Information processing for critical thinking is an important component of skepticism. Critical thinking influences the formation and strength of one's skepticism. While skepticism as an attitude concept emphasizes proper evaluation, both cognitive and affective (Griffith *et al.*, 2018). In this study, skepticism is conceptualized as attitudes that can

be changed through the relationship between feelings and beliefs. When beliefs and feelings have consistent valence, attitude can predict behavior. However, inconsistent beliefs and feelings reduce the predictability of the relationship between attitude and behavior. Therefore changing consumer behavior can be done by focusing on changing emotions rather than beliefs (Nolder & Kadous, 2018).

This study also uses the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theory to explain the role of product knowledge and source credibility in the relationship between price and skepticism. ELM theory is the theory of the process to produce persuasive communication and the strength of attitude from the process. ELM is also used to persuade information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The central route is used in the application of ELM theory by involving cognitive activity, where individuals focus on relevant advertising information messages, and utilize prior knowledge to assess the information presented (Lien, 2001). Thus the ELM theory is used to explain the role of product knowledge and source credibility in the relationship between price and skepticism.

### **Proposition and Development Theorem**

#### **The Role of Product Knowledge between Price and Skepticism**

Product knowledge is defined as a number of accurate information about a product that is stored in memory (Rao & Monroe, 1988). Product knowledge is also an individual's level of understanding of information related to the benefits and uses of a product (Cowley & Mitchell, 2003). Product knowledge can be distinguished in subjective and objective knowledge. Subjective product knowledge is an individual's perception of what is felt and known about a product. While objective product knowledge is a series of information stored in memory about a product that is related to the appearance and experience of previous products (Ghalandari & Norouzi, 2012; Saqib *et al.*, 2015). The product knowledge in this study is intended as an individual's perception of the benefits contained in organic products.

Furthermore, product knowledge plays a role in reducing high perceived prices, which in turn has an effect on reducing skepticism. This is supported by the study of Effendi *et al.* (2015); Gracia & De Magistris (2007); and Bagher *et al.* (2018) which states that high product knowledge owned by consumers can increase consumer attitudes and purchase intentions towards organic products. This means that the higher the product knowledge consumers have, the more attitudes and consumer purchase attitudes towards organic products. In this study, high product knowledge is expected to weaken the influence of perceived high prices of organic products which in turn can reduce consumer skepticism. Meanwhile, when consumers have low product knowledge will strengthen the influence of

price variables on skepticism. This is supported by Chiou (1998) which states that high subjective knowledge can moderate but in the relationship between subjective attitudes and norms with consumer purchase intentions. Other studies also show that product knowledge can act as a moderator even though in the relationship between countries of origin of production on the willingness to buy individuals (Ghalandari & Norouzi, 2012), as well as between attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral control and green purchase intentions (K. Chen & Deng, 2016). Based on the explanation above, the propositions proposed in this study are as follows:

**Proposition 1:** At high product knowledge, high prices cause lower skepticism than low product knowledge.

#### **The Role of Source Credibility between Price and Skepticism**

Objective information depends on the degree of credibility of the information source (Assael, 2001). Credibility refers to the truth of information perceived by someone. Thus credibility is a tendency to trust with little or no doubt (Umeogu, 2012). Source credibility is defined as the ability or perceived motivation of a message source to provide accurate and true information (Tormala & Petty, 2004).

Sources of high credibility often produce more attitude changes than sources of low credibility. Source credibility can have the effect of persuasion through various fundamental processes that depend on cognition. This is supported by the study of Johnson & Scileppi (1969) and Sternthal *et al.* (1978) which states that the source of information that has high credibility will affect attitude change than the source of low credibility. In addition, source credibility can also influence persuasion through one's trust in response to messages (Brinol & Petty, 2009). Source credibility can also shape or change individual attitudes, and provide highly credible information (Luo *et al.*, 2013). High source credibility is more effective in a product than low source credibility. Consumers have less risk perception in product advertisements that are communicated with high source credibility (Purwanto, 2014).

Previous studies have indicated that source credibility can act as a moderator in the relationship between price and perceived risk of consumers (Grewal *et al.*, 1994), as well as between persuasion of recommendations and the completeness of recommendations on the credibility of recommendations (Luo *et al.*, 2013). However, in this study, source credibility acts as a moderator in the relationship between price and skepticism. Furthermore, this study develops source credibility to elaborate high perceived prices, which in turn has an effect on reducing consumer skepticism. When consumers are

indicated to have high source credibility, this will weaken the relationship between price and consumer skepticism. Conversely when source credibility is low it will strengthen the relationship between price and consumer skepticism. Based on the explanation above, the propositions proposed in this study are as follows:

Proposition 2: At high source credibility, high prices lead to less skepticism than low source credibility.

### Conclusions, Implications and Future Studies

This study develops a conceptual model derived from empirical studies to explain the role of product knowledge and source credibility in the relationship between price and skepticism. The conceptual model developed in this study is as follows: that price has the potential to have a negative influence on skepticism when consumers have a high level of product knowledge. Likewise, prices will have a negative impact on skepticism when consumers have high source credibility with the media used to inform organic products.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development and expansion of theories related to consumer attitudes between cognition and affection. The conceptual model developed in this study is expected to provide insight to business practitioners by developing stimulus to consumers to reduce consumer skepticism about organic products.

The price of organic products perceived to be expensive can be elaborated to reduce consumer skepticism by considering product knowledge and source credibility. This is done so that consumers who are still skeptical are motivated to consume organic products. If product knowledge is developed through the proper communication of the benefits of organic products, a decrease in skepticism is expected. Likewise, sources of information used to inform organic products that are considered high credibility also have the potential to reduce consumer skepticism.

Future studies are expected to test the conceptual models and propositions in this study in the form of empirical studies. In addition, empirical studies proposed and suggested for future research can use experimental designs to further explain the effect of prices on skepticism, including product knowledge and source credibility as a moderating factor. This is expected to be a follow-up to testing the initial concepts of the conceptual models and proposals that have been developed. In addition, it is important to look at the causal relationship between price and skepticism. With the experimental design it is expected that treatments can be carried out on price variables, product knowledge and source credibility to measure how well the role of these variables in reducing skepticism. It is

very important to contribute and expand the existing attitude models in the development of science.

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