



Green association in consumer buying decisions

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With the intensification of problems relating to the environment, a growing number of consumers are becoming more ecologically conscious in their preferences and purchases of goods. People all over the world have increasingly witnessed nuclear accidents, oil spills, mismanagement of solid and hazardous waste, depletion of resources, environmental deterioration, global warming, environmentally induced deadly diseases and other environmental problems since 1970s. With mounting awareness along with environmental problems, it was recognized that humans are not immune to ecological constraints and future generations and ecosystem are in jeopardy. Within the field of ethics and social responsibility environmental and green consumerism topics are the central topics, which are closely related to biodiversity and sustainability. Based on a comprehensive literature review, the study innovatively, provides an integrated and comprehensive set of framework of green consumer behavior. The objective of the study is to study the green movement and its impact on the consumption decisions and behaviors of consumers. Customers are ever more aware of the seriousness of the environmental degradation, resulting more ecologically consciousness and desire to purchase eco-friendly products and services, favoring businesses that prefer environmental practice. The findings of the study have important implications for shaping effective company offerings to consumers in target markets, as well as formulating appropriate policies at the governmental level to enhance environmental sensitivity among citizens.

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Introduction

"The most important human endeavor is striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depends on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to our lives" - Albert Einstein

The emergence of ecologically-conscious consumers was first noted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a response to the appearance of worrying signs (e.g., land degradation, animal extinction, atmospheric pollution) concerning the systematic maltreatment of the environment with the emergence of a new set of environmental problems in the 1990s (e.g., global warming, ozone hole, Exxon Valdez case), consumers began to seek environmentally friendly alternatives

in their purchases. In the 2000s, the ecological sensitivity of consumers has skyrocketed, reflecting increasing public concern to halt, and even reverse, the negative effect of the human factor on the environment.

In recent years, consumer interest in ecological issues has dramatically increased as demonstrated by an increasing: (a) involvement in environmental-caring activities, such as recycling packaging, energy saving, and composting foods; (b) acceptance of lower technical performance of the products purchased in exchange for better eco-performance; (c) reliance of purchasing decisions on environmental-related issues, such as biodegradable, CFC-free, and organically grown products; (d) willingness to pay higher prices for acquiring environmentally friendly goods; and (e) tendency to travel to non-traditional distribution outlets, such as organic food sellers, to purchase green products (Leonidou et al., 2010)

An increasing number of consumption goods such as organic food are perceived to be of higher environmental quality. Consumer's preference to buy goods from less polluting firms is well known, especially in developed countries, and is often revealed through increased willingness-to-pay for goods viewed as "green", that is, those produced with the help of environmentally friendly technologies or with the use of less polluting inputs.

The green consumer is generally defined as one who adopts environmentally-friendly behaviors and/or who purchases green products over the standard alternatives. In this study, the terms 'green', 'environmentally-friendly' and 'ecologically-conscious' are used interchangeably. Green or environmentally-friendly products are broadly defined as products "that will not pollute the earth or deplete natural resources, and can be recycled or conserved" (Shamdasani et al., 1993).

Review of literature

The related literature related to green consumers and their behaviour, preference towards organic products etc. have been studied as follows:

Chander and Muthukrishnan (2007) analyzed the effect of collective action by green/environmentally aware consumers on ambient environmental quality and market equilibrium. The study considered a model with two types of consumers who differ in their willingness-to-pay for a good available in two different environmental qualities, and two competing firms: one selling the good of high environmental quality and the other of low environmental quality. The study showed that collective action by green consumers reduces competition and leads to higher prices for the good of both qualities.

Erdogan (2009) tested the consistency and dimensionality of the NEP (New Environmental Paradigm) scale through assessing the students' environmental worldviews and to examine the extent to which university students in Turkey are endorsing the NEP. Findings from the study indicate that there is no widespread support for the NEP: 56.0% of students hold pro-NEP views while 24.9% embrace pro-DSP views and 19.1% have ambivalent views. It was found that the NEP scale has low consistency and four dimensions, thus, the NEP items should be taken cautiously as a single (unidimensional) internally consistent measuring device. It was concluded that the NEP scale should be carefully constructed and evaluated according to the historical and cultural context and characteristics of the population under study.

Leonidou et al., (2010) focused on the factors that shape consumer environmental attitudes and behaviour, as well as on the resulting outcomes. The findings confirmed that both the inward and outward environmental attitudes of a consumer are positively influenced by his/her degree of collectivism, long-term orientation, political involvement, deontology, and law obedience, but have no connection with liberalism. The adoption of an inward environmental attitude was also found to be conducive to green purchasing behaviour that ultimately leads to high product satisfaction. On the other hand, an outward environmental attitude facilitates the adoption of a general environmental behaviour, which is responsible for greater satisfaction with life. The findings of the study have important implications for shaping effective company offerings to consumers in target markets, as well as formulating appropriate policies at the governmental level to enhance environmental sensitivity among citizens.

Shamdasani et al., (1993) examined differences among ecologically-concerned and non-ecologically-concerned consumers with respect to their personal and social characteristics, and their perceptions of the marketing of green products. Significant differences were found in terms of attitudes and personality traits among green and non-green consumers. There was a perceived lack of marketing effort for green products and services, green consumers were more aware of green alternatives and were willing to pay higher prices and expend more time and effort to adopt environmentally-friendly consumption behaviors.

Zagata (2012) discussed by providing empirically-based information how consumers approach organic in a selected post-socialist country. The study brings evidence from the Czech Republic, which is an example of a post socialist country with a fast-growing organic sector that has been established in the early 1990s without previous connections to the organic movement. explain behaviour of the organic consumers in the Czech Republic and provide an insight into how consumers make decisions about organic purchases. The empirical study was framed by the theory of planned behaviour. The study tested the behavioural model, which accounts for people's intentions towards organic food consumption by examining their attitudes, subjective norms and perceptions of control.

Chou et al., (2012) proposed an integrated model that combines the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and the innovation adoption theory to investigate the attitudinal and behavioural decision factors on adopting green practices in the restaurant industry in Taiwan. The results demonstrated that attitude and perceived behavioural control have positive effects on behavioural intention while social influence is insignificant. The study revealed that perceived innovation characteristics have direct positive effects on attitude and indirect positive impacts on behavioural intention to adopt green practices.

Green Consumer behaviour and satisfaction

Green purchasing behaviour refers to the preference and use of products that are friendly to the environment and/or have been produced using ecological processes and materials (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). A number of benefits are derived from the adoption of eco-friendly purchasing behaviour, such as health, safety, symbolism, and status (Ottman et al., 2006). Consumers performing environmentally-friendly actions tend to think highly of themselves as the kind of persons who care for the environment.

Green consumption has become widespread in all facets of our lives. In line with this trend, there is growing interest in environmentally friendly cars. While “environmentally friendly” is a familiar term, “green consumption” is lesser known and may take various forms. We classified green consumption patterns into six categories.

- An “environmental enhancer” tries to consume products that do not generate pollutants under the belief that active efforts should be made to protect and improve the environment. Natural burial, like under trees, is a good example of practicing environmental stewardship until the very end.
- A “health-oriented consumer” seeks to protect oneself and one’s family from environmental pollution. The use of an air purifier to create a clean home indicates that a person is sensitive to issues that directly affect his/her health and the wellbeing of family members.
- A “mental-oriented consumer” derives satisfaction by moving away from a polluted setting and creating healthy surroundings. Specifically, the person may choose interior designs or furniture featuring nature as the motif for the home and office.
- A “trend observer” perceives environmental awareness as a trend, and either sets or follows the green movement. London designer Anya Hindmarch’s “I’m not a plastic bag” is an example in which environmental awareness is being used as a fashion icon.
- A “passive adapter” consumes green products and services not for their environmental values, but for other reasons such as functionality, design and price.
- An “eco-fatigue consumer” refers to a person who has become weary and averse amid diffusion and differentiation of environmental values. This can be seen as an anti-trend amid expansion of the green movement.

So how does each consumption group respond to environmentally friendly cars? Environmental enhancers may prefer eco-friendly vehicles as a means of reducing pollution, while trend observers may try to use the cars to make a fashion statement. Passive adapters may choose green cars for their design or fuel efficiency. On the other hand, health- and mental-oriented consumers may base their decisions on the car’s interior rather than environmental technology.

The social influence on green adoption intention may vary with social awareness of green imperatives. Consumption of green goods often generates both private and public benefits. For example, a consumer benefits directly from consuming organic food because it is more nutritious and healthier with fewer risks to personal health from pesticides and herbicide residues. Such private benefits from the consumption of a green good can induce consumers to pay more for it and firms to invest in cleaner technologies.

Besides the direct private benefits to individual consumers, consumption of green goods also generates indirect public benefits as it helps in preserving the environment. Continuing with the example of organic food, organic farms are more sustainable and environmentally better than conventional farms because they do not release synthetic pesticides or herbicides into the environment. Thus, consumption of organic food not only directly benefits a consumer, but also helps in preserving and sustaining diverse ecosystems which indirectly benefit all consumers (Chander and Muthukrishnan (2007)).

D. Guidelines for Green Consumer

- 1) Only buy what you need: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refuse, Repair, Rethink
- 2) Positive Purchasing - favouring ethical products, e.g. energy saving light bulbs
- 3) Negative Purchasing - avoiding unethical products, e.g. battery-farmed eggs or gas-guzzling cars
- 4) Company-based Purchasing - targeting a business as a whole, and avoiding all the products made by one company ('boycott'). Boycott companies that directly damage the environment or support activities that destroy habitat. Only deal with ethical companies.

Several tips for being a Green Consumer

- 1) Buy organic – a vote for environmental sustainability!
- 3) Buy local – support local business and reduce food miles
- 5) Avoid non-biodegradable and/or toxic chemicals – choose eco-friendly, natural, non-toxic chemicals instead
- 6) Avoid GM food – choose non-genetically modified products
- 7) Avoid products with extensive packaging – avoid buying products with lots of packaging (e.g. polythene wrapping)
- 8) Choose recycled paper (chlorine-free) – this reduces the amount of trees that need to be cut down, and avoids the use of toxic chemicals in bleaching paper
- 9) Avoid products that test toxic chemicals on animals
- 10) Avoid food that has harmful additives – e.g. preservatives, flavour enhancers
- 11) Choose eco-friendly alternative materials - e.g. bamboo, hemp, coconut
- 12) Being a Green Consumer is not only about what goods you choose to buy, but what services you use, e.g. investments, banking, recreation, leisure etc.

Environmental behaviour includes all those elements in the psychology of an individual that reflect his/her sensitivity to environmental issues, such as saving energy, keeping places clean, and avoiding waste. Such behaviour is expected to make the consumer generally satisfied with his/her life, because of a belief that s/he has contributed, at both an individual and group level, to protecting the environment. It is also argued that people derive a sense of well-being from feeling connected to nature, and those who are more connected to it experience a higher level of life satisfaction. Individuals are satisfied with their lives when they rationally harmonize their outer and inner world so as to live in a self-sufficient way, and the adoption of environmentally-friendly behaviour helps toward achieving this harmonization.

Five parties are identified as the key players in the movement toward green consumption: governments, businesses, academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and consumers. Governments set laws and regulations, establish incentives and infrastructure, provide information, lead through public procurement, and measure overall progress within the country. Businesses are manufacturers, retailers, and financiers and providers of products and services. They are also very important consumers. Academia develops technology and tools to help businesses supply green products and services. NGOs, particularly environmental, consumer and social NGOs, monitor government and business behavior. They are usually the promoters of initiatives too. The consumers, being also voters, householders, and workers, are the key to success.

An individuals' green behavior contributing to the welfare of the community they belong to might effectively encourage people to act proenvironmentally.

Conclusion

Consumers who adopt an eco-friendly attitude believe that the ecological situation on the planet is deteriorating and, therefore, it is necessary to take drastic measures toward protecting the environment. Although such a pro environmental attitude incurs inconveniences (e.g., extra effort to recycle goods), additional costs (e.g., more expensive green products), and lower levels of product performance (e.g., cars with lower horsepower), consumers having this attitude are more likely to engage in an ecologically friendly purchasing behaviour, such as avoiding non-disposable merchandise, looking for recyclable products, and buying biodegradable goods.

During the very recent periods, it can be observed that the current environmental dreadful conditions are ever more menacing consumer health and wellbeing globally. Therefore, consumers are becoming more sensitive in their environmental attitudes, preferences and purchase. Over the past few decades, environmental problems and issues have been extensively recognized and discussed. Customers are ever more aware of the seriousness of the environmental degradation, resulting more ecologically consciousness and desire to purchase eco-friendly products and services, favoring businesses that prefer environmental practice. Few studies found that attaining a high level of environmental knowledge produces much better pro-environmental behavior and environmental knowledge has a significant impact on the consumers' intention to buy green products.

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