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# Factors Affecting Green Purchase Behaviour and Future Research Directions



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## ABSTRACT

This study reviewed 53 empirical articles on green purchase behavior from 2000 to 2014. This is one of the first study that reviewed articles related to attitude - behaviour inconsistencies in the context of green purchasing. This review identified various prevalent motives, facilitators and barriers affecting purchase decision-making towards green products and provides possible explanations for inconsistencies reported in green purchase behavior. All These factors are divided into those unique to the individual decision maker and those considered situational in nature. Consumer's environmental concern and products functional attributes emerged as the two major determinants of consumer green purchase behavior. The paper informs about the main predictors of consumer's green purchase behavior. In this way, it will help policy makers and managers in formulating and implementing strategies to encourage green purchasing.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, consumer consumption of goods and services has increased tremendously across the world, leading to depletion of natural resources and severe damage to the environment (Chen and Chai, 2010). Some of the serious repercussions of environmental damage are global warming, increased environmental pollution, and decline in flora and fauna (Chen and Chai, 2010). Various countries across the globe are beginning to realize this threat and have started working towards minimizing the harmful impact of their business activities on the environment. This realization and concern towards the environment and society has led to the emergence of 'sustainable development' which emphasizes the need to promote sustainability and advocates that form of development which minimizes negative impact on the environment and society. Sustainable development further encourages eco innovation and green consumption. Eco innovation focuses on incorporating environmental sustainability practices at every stage of creation of goods and services (Veleva and Ellenbecker, 2001). 'Green consumption' on the other hand, is normally related to environmentally responsible consumption where consumers consider the environmental impact of purchasing, using, and disposing of various products, or using various green services (Moisander, 2007).

Environmentally responsible purchasing is vital as unplanned purchasing of goods can severely damage the environment. Grunert (1995) reported that consumer household purchases were responsible for 40% of the environmental damage. Consumers possess the capability to prevent or decrease environmental damage by purchasing green products. Previous research indicates that consumers have a positive attitude towards environmental

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protection (Arvola et al., 2008; Ellen, Webb and Mohr, 2006; Liu et al., 2012; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). In fact, consumers have, in the past, expressed their demand for green products to companies (Bockman, Razzouk and Sirotnik, 2009; Schmeltz, 2012). Although the number of individuals willing to purchase green products has increased in the last few years, there is little evidence to suggest that purchase of green products has increased; despite environmental concern and positive attitude of customers towards sustainability and green products, market share of green products remains confined to just 1-3% of the entire market (Bray, Johns and Killburn, 2011). This suggests that environmental considerations play a minor role in consumer purchasing decisions and people generally overlook environmental impacts of their purchases (Mohr, Webb and Harris, 2001).

While exploring green purchase behaviour, many studies have reported a discrepancy or “gap” between consumers’ expressed favourable attitudes and actual purchasing practices (Tanner and Kast, 2003; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008). Hughner (2007) found that while many consumers showed a positive attitude towards purchases of organic food products (67%), only a small number of consumers (4%) actually purchased those products. Similarly, Defra (2006) found that 30% of the consumers in UK have reported their concern towards the environment, but rarely translated their concern into a green purchase. It is thus clear that there exists a gap between consumers’ thinking and actual actions (Chen and Chai, 2010; Wheale and Hinton, 2007). This discrepancy or gap between consumers’ favourable attitude towards, and actual purchase behaviour of green products is referred to as ‘green purchasing inconsistency’ or ‘green attitude-behaviour gap’. It signifies that consumer positive attitude towards green products does not always translate into action. It is essential to examine why environmental attitudes have a weaker influence on consumer green purchase behaviour; there might be possible factors such as price and availability of the product, and social influences among others that lead to the discrepancy between consumer attitude and purchase behaviour. Once these factors are determined through proper research, steps can be taken to address these issues and encourage consumers to actually purchase green products. Although significant research on environmental consciousness and awareness of the consumer exists (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Schwepker and Cornwell, 1991) and studies have also concentrated on observing consumers’ consumption patterns and non-consumption behaviour (Follows and Jobber, 2000; Lee, 2009), yet the knowledge of factors affecting consumer green purchase behaviour remains limited. Previous studies have clearly shown that even though individuals understand the seriousness of environmental issues, their environmental attitudes do not necessarily lead to green purchasing (Bamberg, 2003; Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998; Nordlund and Garvill, 2002). Recently, Rokka and Uusitalo (2008) claimed that even consumers with the highest level of environmental consciousness do not always purchase green products; their choice of products depends on both ecological perspectives as well as their evaluation of the various product attributes. Further, situational factors can also hamper environmentally responsible purchasing and lessen the influence of a positive environmental attitude.

It is thus clear that previous research has not been able to recognize why a positive consumer attitude fails to convert into a green purchase (Gupta and Ogdén, 2009). Further, there has been no comprehensive investigation of the wide-range of factors and their influence on environmentally responsible purchasing (Memery et al., 2005). The authors did not find any review study on attitude-behaviour inconsistencies in the context of consumer green purchase behaviour, although empirical studies concerned with various dimensions of green consumption were found. The existing attitude-behaviour inconsistency and a lack of proper explanation thereof, along with an absence of a review addressing this issue, motivated the authors to review extant relevant literature on attitude-behaviour inconsistency in context of consumers’ green purchasing behaviour. In addition, damage to the environment (pollution, depletion of resources, etc.) and as a result increased emphasis on manufacturing sustainable products by firms has made it essential to identify the factors influencing green purchase behaviour of consumers, which provides additional motivation for the present research. A review of existing empirical studies would enable the identification of multiple factors motivating or hindering the green purchase behaviour of consumers. Further, these drivers and barriers may help in explaining the various reasons behind the existing attitude-behaviour inconsistency and the factors responsible for such inconsistent behaviour.

Academic literature has used words like “green purchasing”, “adoption of green product” and “green acquisition” to explain consumer environmental purchasing behaviour. In this paper, all these terms are used interchangeably. This literature review serves as a link between future research and existing studies on sustainable consumption. The present study analyses the available empirical literature on green purchasing and attempts to identify prevailing motives and factors influencing consumer attitude, purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour toward green products. It informs the reader about various factors (as covered by other studies) influencing consumer attitudes and behaviour, and provides a possible explanation for the observed attitude-behaviour gap. Results show that an individual’s environmental concern and knowledge, and the product’s functional and green attributes are major drivers whereas high price and inconvenience in purchasing the product are major barrier towards consumer green purchase behaviour. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: The next section gives a brief review of literature on green purchase behaviour and reported attitude-behaviour inconsistency. A description of the methodology and approach of the study follows. The section after that comprises findings and discussion. Finally, implications and conclusions are provided.

## 2. Literature review

Green purchasing refers to the purchase of environmentally friendly products and avoiding products that harm the environment (Chan, 2001). Green purchasing is most often measured as green purchase intention and behaviour. Green purchase intention refers to consumers’ willingness to purchase green products. Intentions capture the motivational factors that influence green purchase behaviour of consumers (Ramayah, Lee, and Mohamad, 2010).

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