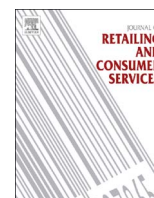




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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jretconser

Pro-environmental purchase behaviour: The role of consumers' biospheric values



The Ninh Nguyen*, Antonio Lobo, Steven Greenland

Swinburne Business School, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 April 2016

Received in revised form

22 July 2016

Accepted 19 August 2016

Keywords:

Pro-environmental purchase behaviour

Biospheric values

Past purchase behaviour

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a unique model which investigates the effects of consumers' biospheric values on their purchase behaviour of energy efficient household appliances. Data were obtained in Vietnam from 682 shoppers in large electronic appliance stores. The findings reveals that biospheric values encourage active engagement in pro-environmental purchase behaviour by enhancing consumers' attitudes towards environmental protection, their subjective norms and environmental self-identity, and by mitigating their perceived inconvenience associated with eco-friendly products. Additionally, these findings were moderated by consumers' past purchase behaviour. The implications for retailers, marketers and other stakeholders are discussed and future research directions presented.

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1. Introduction

Climate change risks and impact will increase significantly over the next decade (UNEP 2014a), with annual climate change adaptation costs projected to reach US \$300 billion by 2050 (UNEP, 2015). Energy consumption, particularly in relation to carbon dioxide emissions, is the major contributor to rising global temperatures and many associated environmental problems (Gardner and Stern, 2002). The promotion and adoption of lower energy consuming lifestyles is therefore imperative for environmental sustainability (Bhate, 2005; Pothitou et al., 2016; UNEP, 2015), particularly in emerging markets with their faster electricity demand growth rates (UNEP, 2014b). In such low-income countries, the economic aspirations of billions of inhabitants are often facilitated by "unprecedented levels of energy consumption" (Smil, 2013, p. 145).

Growing global public awareness of sustainability issues has been widely reported in documents about climate change (e.g. IPCC, 2014; UNEP, 2015), and numerous global initiatives such as the Efficient Appliances and Equipment Partnership (UNEP, 2014b) seek to accelerate the transition to more sustainable consumption behaviour. However, educating consumers about sustainability is challenging, not least because awareness of and concerns about environmental issues frequently fail to translate into sustainable behaviours (Tsarenko, 2013). Olander and Thøgersen (1995, p. 345)

believe that better understanding of the determinants of environmentally friendly behaviour is a "prerequisite for environmental protection", and in this regard research into pro-environmental consumer behaviour has a critical role to play. That is, if the drivers of sustainable energy consumption behaviour are better understood, then it should be possible to design more effective public campaigns that raise awareness of environmental issues and most importantly translate this awareness into action (i.e. sustainable consumption).

One avenue of pro-environmental behaviour research that has received increasing attention concerns biospheric values (e.g. De Groot et al., 2012; Lee and Jan, 2015; Nilsson et al., 2016; Ruepert et al., 2016). The biosphere is 'the thin outer shell of the earth and the inner layers of its atmosphere; the place where all living systems are found' (Hirsch et al., 2002, p. 526); and biospheric values are fundamental beliefs that reflect concern with the biosphere (Stern et al., 1993) and emphasise the quality of nature and the environment independently from the benefits it provides for human beings (Steg and De Groot, 2012). People who endorse biospheric values therefore assign importance to the intrinsic value of the ecosystem, which translates into a moral imperative to act pro-environmentally (Stern and Dietz, 1994).

This study makes a major contribution to the body of research on pro-environmental consumption behaviour by presenting, and then testing, a new biospheric model of energy efficient electrical appliance purchase behaviour. This holistic model is based on a critical review of relevant literature and adopts an integrative perspective by examining the dynamic relationships between biospheric values and other influencers of pro-environmental

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: theninhnguyen@swin.edu.au (T.N. Nguyen), alobo@swin.edu.au (A. Lobo), sgreenland@swin.edu.au (S. Greenland).

purchase behaviour. Notably, given the paucity of knowledge relating to pro-environmental behaviour in developing countries (Ramayah et al., 2010), this study makes further contribution by focusing on Vietnam. The growing economic significance of emerging markets has been widely acknowledged (Greenland and Kwansah-Aidoo, 2012; Paul et al., 2016), and Vietnam is typical in this regard with a doubling of carbon dioxide emissions over the last decade (World Bank, 2016) and energy demands that are estimated to triple over the next 10 years (VNEEP, 2012).

2. Literature review and development of conceptual framework

2.1. Pro-environmental purchase behaviour

Pro-environmental behaviour refers to “any action that enhances the quality of the environment” (Steg et al., 2014, p. 104), and has received increasing attention from consumer behaviour scholars, e.g. (Barbarossa and De Pelsmacker, 2016; Chen, 2015; Griskevicius et al., 2012; Mancha et al., 2015; Parsa et al., 2015; Tjärnemo and Södahl, 2015). Stern et al. (1999) categorised pro-environmental behaviour as belonging to two categories, i.e. public and private spheres. The public sphere encompasses committed activism (e.g. working in environmental organisations), good citizenship (e.g. petitioning on environmental issues) and support for environmental policies (e.g. stated approval of environmental regulations). Private-sphere behaviour, which is the main focus of consumer research, consists of the purchase, consumption and disposal of personal and household products that impact on the environment (Stern, 1999). Hence the purchase of eco-friendly products has the most direct positive impact on environmental problems (Mostafa, 2007).

Pro-environmental purchase behaviour or ‘green consumerism’ generally refers to purchasing products that are environmentally beneficial (Mainieri et al., 1997). More specifically, Stern (2000) subdivided such behaviour into two categories according to its environmental impact during the stages of production and consumption. That is, green consumerism reflects purchasing practices that consider the environmental impact of future production demand such as buying organic food and recycled products, while the purchase of major household goods and services such as automobiles and household appliances tends to have more environmental impact during the consumption stage (Stern, 2000). This latter stage of green purchasing has more of a direct impact on the environment (Olander and Thøgersen, 1995; Stern, 2000), particularly in relation to carbon dioxide emissions and climate change.

2.2. Key determinants of pro-environmental purchase behaviour

Several pro-environmental behaviour studies have been underpinned by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), which have proven effective in predicting sustainable behaviours such as recycling, using biodegradable packaging, and purchasing eco-friendly products (e.g., Paul et al., 2016; Stavros et al., 1999; Tilikidou and Delistavrou, 2014). These TPB-based studies suggest that consumers are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviour if they believe it provides them with positive consequences (favourable environmental attitudes) and social approval (subjective norms), together with greater control over performing the behaviour (perceived behavioural control) (Kalfatis et al., 1999). Other pro-environmental consumption behaviour studies (e.g. Barbarossa and De Pelsmacker, 2016) have focused on the latter control dimension and demonstrated that the perceived inconvenience associated with environmentally friendly

product purchases can impact negatively on future purchase behaviour.

Despite its widespread use, the TPB approach is not without limitations, with Lindenberg and Steg (2007) arguing that this theory focuses primarily upon self-interest motives, in that pro-environmental behaviour is heavily influenced by the money, time and effort expended. The TPB therefore fails to adequately acknowledge other significant determinants of pro-environmental behaviour, such as personal values and self-identity. Self-identity influences pro-environmental behaviour at both generic and behaviour-specific levels (Dean et al., 2012; Whitmarsh and O'Neill, 2010). While the former refers to an individual's self-identification with green consumerism (Gatersleben et al., 2012; Sparks and Shepherd, 1992), the latter denotes how individuals see themselves as someone who performs a specific pro-environmental behaviour (Van der Werff et al., 2013b), such as recycling (Mannetti et al., 2004; Nigbur et al., 2010). Essentially, individuals with strong environmental self-identity tend to act in a pro-environmental manner at both the generic and behaviour-specific levels.

Some other studies extending the TPB suggest moderating effects of past behaviour on the relationship between behaviour, intention and their determinants (Dean et al., 2012; Sommer, 2011; Terry et al., 1999). Such moderating effects support the common argument that past engagement in a behaviour elicits changes in consumers' deliberative processing of information and heuristic processing of contextual cues relating to that behaviour (Kidwell and Jewell, 2008; Wood et al., 2005).

Another key area of the growing green consumer literature concerns the role played by personal values in determining pro-environmental behaviour (Follows and Jobber, 2000; Soyez, 2012; Steg and De Groot, 2012; Van der Werff et al., 2013b). Such a nexus is grounded in the conventional wisdom that values are concepts or beliefs that serve as standards or criteria for evaluating actions, people and events (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987). Given that pro-environmental purchase behaviours often involve a conflict between individual-collective gains and short-term-long-term focuses, consumers will often make decisions based on the values they personally endorse (Steg et al., 2014). Such values express motivational and normative qualities that guide the consumer's mode of conduct. Although several studies have identified a direct relationship between personal values and the purchase of environmentally friendly products, most researchers agree that such values typically influence green purchasing indirectly (see review in Steg and De Groot (2012)).

Previous research has produced numerous typologies of personal values, including the human value theory (Schwartz, 1992, 1994), the environmental value orientations of egoistic, altruistic and biospheric (Stern et al., 1993), and the ecocentric-anthropocentric approach (Thompson and Barton, 1994). Yet there is as no clear consensus on how these personal values affect different types of pro-environmental behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2015).

In a recent review of related literature, Steg and De Groot (2012) emphasised that biospheric values appear to be more effective predictive determinants of pro-environmental behaviour than the rest. This suggests there is a need to better understand how personal values, and more specifically biospheric values, drive pro-environmental behaviour.

2.2.1. Biospheric values and attitudes towards environmental protection

Consumers with strong adherence to biospheric values are generally more concerned about the environment (De Groot and Steg, 2008; Stern, 2000), and place emphasis on how the purchase of eco-friendly products protects it. Perlaviciute and Steg (2015) demonstrated that consumers who strongly endorse biospheric values are more likely to assign more importance to

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