



An empirical investigation of green purchase behaviour among the young generation



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ABSTRACT

Due to an increasing awareness in environmental impact, consumers are more sensitive towards green products when making their purchasing decisions. The young generation, who represents the future of our society, seems to have a different attitude and belief which enables them to reflect on their choice of green products. This research empirically examines the influence of ecological affect and ecological knowledge on the green purchasing behaviour of the young generation. A survey was administered to young consumers between the age of 18 and 30. Structural equation modelling was applied to test the hypotheses. The analysis result confirms that the ecological effect and knowledge are significant in determining young consumers' green involvement as well as their actual purchase.

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1. Introduction

The environmental concern has led to an increase in consumers' demand for environmentally-friendly products. This has created new environmental ethics, which have increased individuals' awareness and significantly changed their consumption behaviour (Jang et al., 2011). Companies have responded by introducing a variety of green initiatives such as green products and service design (Danjelico and Pujari, 2010; Chan et al., 2013), green supply chain management (Tseng et al. 2013a; Wang and Chan, 2013), and innovation practices (Chen et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2013; Tseng et al., 2013b). While some green products are widely advertised to have numerous attractive features to persuade consumers to try them, this is not sufficient to satisfy modern consumers and lead to actual purchases. This emphasises the way in which consumers have formed a relationship between the attributes of products and the environment. They are more concerned with green consumption than attractive advertising (Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). Furthermore, products with environmental consideration are no longer simply the choice of a few eco-conscious customers, but have now shifted into the mainstream market. The change in society's expectations motivates businesses to respond to the evolving consumer demand. While firms are eager to make inroads into this growing market, some may encounter failure when

representing their green position to consumers. It is a challenging and complicated task to deliver customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is critical to pay attention to the source of personal responses as well as consumers' level of judgement when responding to the establishment of sustainable competitive advantage (Ralston et al., 1999).

The young generation has a considerably different concept and attitude comparing to other generations. They are characterised as being fascinated by material consumption, seeing money as a representation of personal success (Chau and Ngai, 2010). They tend to react more flexibly than others, and enjoy collaboration and innovation fosters their consideration of society. Young buyers tend to search for more information before making an actual purchase. They find that technology can conveniently support their lifestyles. Moreover, they do not only consider the present, but are also concerned about the future effect of their present actions, preferring to become lifelong customers of the green market. Relative to their level of judgement, the young generation seems to have more ability to reflect on their choice of environmentally-friendly products. The freedom of personal commitment appears to encourage them to decide on their selection depending on their personal affective response. Studying the young generation green purchasing behaviour is important because they represent future consumers, workers and innovators, who represent the future of our society (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Heaney, 2006; Hume, 2010). The young consumers are the most powerful consumer group, because they have more disposable income than that of any previous generation

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(Frank and Chong, 2002). Investigation of this generation will allow a more sophisticated understanding of young people and the issues needed for the future e.g. environmental sustainability. Previous studies found that young generation are more ready than other generation to accept innovative ideas, and they are conscious socially, environmentally and culturally; purposeful in nature; require individual experiences and demand rationale due to a more sceptical nature than previous generations (Sheahan, 2005; Ottman et al., 2006; Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008; Hume, 2010). By developing an understanding of young consumers' green buying behaviours and factors affecting them, companies can develop sustainable marketing strategies targeting this important consumer group. For businesses that are keen to sharp the market, ultimately, the commitment of the green revolution needs to be strengthened with an understanding of consumers' behaviour. Communicating with this substantial group of consumers and fulfilling their needs may be the edge of market positioning in this century. The young generation, who constitutes a large group of supporters for the consumption of green products and services, have rarely been examined. This paper therefore attempts to fill the gap by addressing several key questions:

- (1) What are the important factors which affect green purchasing behaviours of the young generation?
- (2) How does the degree of fundamental knowledge and personal response of the young generation influence their intention to purchase green products?

The purpose of this research is to empirically investigate whether ecological knowledge and personal affective responses are factors which influence young consumers' intention to engage with environmental issues. The main contributions of this work include: (1) It extends the exiting literature by examining the key factors in influencing young consumers' green purchasing behaviour; (2) The research findings will help businesses to learn and understand the young consumers' green purchasing behaviour and perceptions, and therefore develop an appropriate strategy and practical marketing planning to sustain long-term success.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews more relevant literature and hypotheses are then developed. Section 3 includes sample and data collection, questionnaire development, and data analysis methods. In Section 4, data analysis is presented including validity and reliability test and hypotheses testing. Section 5 discusses the analysis result and its implications. Finally, we draw conclusions and highlight possible future work in Section 6.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

In this section, we draw on findings in the literature on consumers' adoption on green products as well as the literature on young consumers' involvement in environmental issues to argue the green purchase behaviour among the young generation. We organise our hypotheses around the moderating effect of ecological cognition and knowledge on young generations intention to buy green products and its consequential implications to actual purchasing activities.

Broadly speaking, various empirical investigations have concluded that ecological and behavioural practices are being encouraged by academics and practitioners (Austin, 2007). Evidence shows a close relationship between both variables in terms of a correlated consequence. However, as Sih et al. (2004) illustrate, "behavioural syndromes" are another significant indicator to understand the relationship between the human and environmental dimension. Emotion plays an important role in revealing individuals' correlated behaviour in each situation, and it seems that aggressive behaviour dominates their involvement in ecological and

environmental activities. In addition, Fraj and Martinez (2006) investigated whether personality reflects a greater consistence of environmental events through time, and the results demonstrated an independent view of these exceptional variables and ecological effects. Notwithstanding emotion and personalities, attitudes do exist in terms of the intention to become involved in ecology. In fact, there is a positive and strong correlation between affect and ecological involvement (Fraj and Martinez, 2007). Attitudes are significantly affected by past experience, which initially constitutes a greater desire to engage in environmental conservation (Carrus et al., 2008).

There is generally a belief among researchers that most events can be dominated by strong attitudes (Chaubey et al., 2011). Attitudes are the most notably consistent explanation to envision human willingness to both become involved in, and purchase, to fulfil ecological objectives (Chyong et al., 2006). From another perspective, attitudes and ecological effects are correlated by an ecocentric interest in the environment, which dedicates greater concern to the ecological dimension (Thompson and Barton, 1994). To understand the ecological affect, it is necessary for researchers to observe motives and values on which those attitudes are based. This could lead to a better understanding of related behaviour and reveal new aspects to strengthen the effects of environmental and ecological conservation.

Liere and Dunlap (1980) studied people's motivational factors for the environmental concerns and the results showed that age, education and political ideology were strongly related, and concluded that younger, well-educated and liberal people seem to be more concerned about environmental quality. Meanwhile Schultz (2001) demonstrated that the biosphere was another reason for people to be more concerned about the surrounding environment. The study found a positive association between the "interconnectedness" of the self, nature and biospheric environmental concern. Kim and Choi (2005) also studied the effect of collectivism on green concerns and found that individualistic or collectivistic orientations influence a variety of social behaviours. However, collectivists seem to engage in recycling behaviour much more than individualists. With the self-openness of collectivists, green behaviour will flow through more attitudinal and cognitive concepts. Furthermore, Lee (2008) identified important factors that affects young consumers' green purchasing behaviour in Hong Kong. The top four predictors include: social influence, environmental concern, self-image, and perceived environmental responsibility. Having affective characteristics will have a positive impact on young customers' intention to engage with ecological products. To examine it, we test the following hypothesis:

H1. *Young generation customers with stronger affective responses to ecological/green issues will have a stronger intention to become involved in green purchasing.*

The difficulties of ecological concerns are diversities of variables. These cannot be explicitly concluded as being the main environmental motivators. Many researchers have been stimulated to conduct an in-depth study of human behaviour. Consequently, some studies have implied that age and considerable ecological knowledge are significant factors to motivate people to learn more intensely (Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Chan and Lau, 2000). Straughan and Roberts (1999) observed their demographic variables, behavioural indicators and also psychographic dimensions. They found that income and education have a significant influence on people's ecological and environmental attitudes. They used demographics as segmentation criteria, and found mid-to-high income and urban women tended to be one sector of green consumers. Meanwhile, Mazar and Zhong (2010) examined the "inter-personal interaction" between consumers as catalysts using green products. Communication and reactions are translated into peer behaviour, which

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