



The influence factors on choice behavior regarding green products based on the theory of consumption values

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ABSTRACT

This study applies the theory of consumption values to determine the influence factors on consumer choice behavior regarding green products, and examines whether there are significant differences in consumption values and choice behavior between consumers with different outlooks on environmental concerns. One-way analysis of variance and multiple regression is used to assess data collected by a questionnaire survey. The results indicate that consumers with high environmental concern support green products more, and show greater readiness to choose them. This study concludes that the main influence factors on consumer choice behavior regarding green products include psychological benefit, desire for knowledge, novelty seeking, and specific conditions, and do not include functional values, price and quality. This study contributes to preliminary but vital insights in effective promotion of green products.

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1. Introduction

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009), green products reflect what is achieved to prevent, limit, reduce, or correct harmful environmental impacts on water, air, and soil; they constitute at least one means of resolving problems related to waste, noise, and general detriment to the ecology, and are an avenue for generating beneficial products and services. Although a great amount of effort has been invested in making the eco-labeling of green products more effective and efficient, their market share is still low (Rex and Baumann, 2007). The importance of the attitude–behavior gap or values–action gap was found, and 30% of U.K. consumers report concern over environmental issues, but were slow to translate such concerns into actually going green (Young et al., 2009). A more thorough understanding of the relationship between concern and behavior is necessary if marketers and public policy makers are to reduce environmentally negative behavior and address the attitude–behavior gap. When concern increases, consumption behavior might become more environmentally sensitive, and consumers may change purchase patterns, tilting them toward going greener (Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008).

Information regarding the environment and worsening weather patterns has an impact on the daily behavior of consumers. Consumer research recognizes knowledge as a characteristic that influences all phases of the decision process (Laroche et al., 2001). Consumers seeking novelty may do so in an effort to add their data banks of potentially useful knowledge and problem-solving skills (Hirschman, 1980). Thus, consumers may go green in response to moves to tackle environmental problems. The characteristics of green products (for example, recycling potential, low pollution, and economy of resources) may also arouse consumer emotions, such as protective feelings toward the environment (Bei and Simpson, 1995) or a general impulse to do good (Arvola et al., 2008). In addition, governments and green groups provide subsidies or promotions that encourage people to go green. Consumer decisions of an environmentally friendly nature may also be affected by peer opinion (Straughan and Roberts, 1999) or personal factors (Shamdasani et al., 1993; Kalafatis et al., 1999). Although consumers purchasing recycled products also consider price and quality (Bei and Simpson, 1995), an increasing number of people are willing to pay extra for green products (Laroche et al., 2001). The underlying meaning and motivation of consumption may depend on consumption values, and it is commonly accepted that effective marketing communications must recognize the relationship between consumer values and motivation. The theory of consumer choice of values is able to contribute to the general understanding of consumer choice behavior and assist practitioners, policy makers, and academic researchers in determining what motivates specific choices (Sheth et al., 1991).

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This study applies the theory of consumption values to green products as the theoretical basis for verifying the influence factors on consumer choice behavior. The theory describes behavior as influenced by functional, social, emotional, conditional, and epistemic values. Functional value is measured for consumer perception of green products, their price, and their quality. Social value concerns the measure of utility for consumers, as influenced by peer opinion. Emotional value is the measure of consumer emotions toward green products. Conditional value is the measure of utility according to a specific situation. Epistemic value concerns measuring consumer inclinations to desire knowledge and seek novelty. Therefore, the theory is designed to increase understanding of consumer choice behavior and assist practitioners, policy makers, and academic researchers in determining what motivates specific choices. Studies analyzing the green consumers will continue to be of interest as environmental consciousness evolves over time, and therefore the findings of any particular study will not necessarily remain valid indefinitely. New research on green products should always aim to identify possible developments in consumer attitudes, intentions, and behavior (Chamorro et al., 2009). This study investigates consumer consumption values and choice behavior regarding green products, and aids in understanding what the important influence factors on the behavior of customer choice are.

2. Literature review

This section presents a review of the theory of consumption values and the literature related to environmental concern, and develops hypotheses.

2.1. The theory of consumption values

Three fundamental propositions are axiomatic to the theory of consumption values: (1) consumer choice is a function of multiple consumption values, (2) consumption values make different contributions in any given choice situation, and (3) consumption values are independent. The theory has been employed and tested in more than 200 applications, and has demonstrated consistently good predictive validity (Sheth et al., 1991). Sheth et al. (1991) applied it to buying decisions (smokers or non-smokers), product decisions (filtered or non-filtered cigarette), and brand decisions (Marlboro or Virginia Slim). Their results showed that emotional value is most influential in discriminating between smokers and non-smokers, functional value is most influential in discriminating smokers choosing filtered cigarettes, and social value is most influential in discriminating smokers who choose Marlboro. Long and Schiffman (2000) applied the theory to segment consumers according to their values and relationships with service providers to understand motivation and behavior. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) adopted functional value, social value, and emotional value to develop a perceived value scale to assess customer perceptions of the value of a durable commodity at brand level. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) did not adopt epistemic value and conditional value because these are potentially less important when considering the purchase of a durable, and the aim was to develop a general value measure. This study, after considering green product characteristics, adopts all five consumption values. The following section introduces the values and the relevant literature for each.

2.1.1. Functional value

Sheth et al. (1991) assessed functional value as the primary driver of consumer choice. Perceived utility for consumers relies on an alternative capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance, such as reliability, durability, and price. If price seems too high, a trade-off may be made as the consumer weighs factors

other than price in product selection and decision, but research trends indicate a lack of willingness to pay premium prices for green products (D'Souza et al., 2007). Bei and Simpson (1995) indicated that consumers consider both the price and quality of recycled products. The price effect derives from perceived price difference between a recycled and a non-recycled product. This perceived but not actual difference affects consumer willingness to buy recycled products because, in Bei and Simpson's (1995) study, actual price was held constant. For consumers of recycled products, quality is a further consideration. Recycled baby wipes and toilet paper are examples of low-priced items, but because of their perceived poor quality, consumers seem to eschew them. Laroche et al. (2001) conducted a range of surveys in the field over a period. In 1989, 67% of Americans stated that they were willing to pay 5–10% more for ecologically sound products. By 1991, environmentally conscious individuals were willing to pay between 15 and 20% more for green products. By 1993, in a mail survey in the U.K., 79% of female respondents expressed willingness to pay up to 40% more for a product that is identical in every respect to their usual brand but with proven green credentials. It is apparent that some consumers care enough regarding ecological detriment to choose to pay more for green products. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Functional value positively affects consumer choice behavior regarding green products.

2.1.2. Social value

Social value is the perceived utility derived from an alternative association with one or more specific social groups (Sheth et al., 1991). The subjective norm construct refers to perceived social pressure to approve and adopt a style of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Although subjective norms reflect external social pressure (personal perceptions of what peers think an individual should do) personal norms and moral attitudes constitute rules or values that inform motivation because of anticipated self-administered rewards or punishments (Arvola et al., 2008). It is suggested that environment-based marketing efforts should be linked explicitly to beneficial outcomes. Therefore, marketers must show how consumers who choose to go green are helping in the struggle to preserve the environment. The relative importance of altruism suggests that firms must not only be explicit in linking their environmental strategies with beneficial outcomes, but they must also show how people other than the firms are better off as a result (Straughan and Roberts, 1999). Consumers wishing to avoid negative outcomes are keen to pursue more information sources when facing with social risk. Expert opinion is seemingly a powerful way of reducing consumer perceptions of risk (Aqueveque, 2006). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Social value positively affects consumer choice behavior regarding green products.

2.1.3. Emotional value

Emotional value is the perceived utility derived from an alternative capacity to arouse feelings or affective states (Sheth et al., 1991). Goods and services are associated frequently with emotional responses. Unlike other measures, their constructs include both utilitarian and hedonistic components (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The importance of this combination can be seen in a comment by MacKay (1999), who noted that the appeal of a product or a service is an amalgam of rational and emotional factors and that emotions play a part in every purchase decision. Bei and Simpson (1995) found that most respondents (89.1%) usually feel that they are saving the environment when they purchase recycled products. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

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