



Analysis

Theory of planned behavior approach to understand the green purchasing behavior in the EU: A cross-cultural study

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ABSTRACT

Due to the fast growth of consumption, the promotion of purchasing green products could be a way to minimize the environmental impact and achieve the sustainable consumption. Considering that there is a lack of studies about green purchase behavior and its determinants in all European Union countries (EU), the aim of this paper is to evaluate the main determinants of green purchase behavior by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior. Referring to Hofstede's cultural dimensions we revealed how cultural aspects contribute to purchase behavior. The results showed that there were observed big differences in terms of green purchase behavior in the EU countries and it did not depend on economic development significantly. The subjective norms and interaction of knowledge and confidence in green products significantly determined the green purchase behavior in all countries. According to the cross-culture studies, all cultural dimensions did not have significant influence on green purchase behavior. However, cultural dimensions are related to factors which directly influence green purchase behavior. Therefore, due to the process of the EU cultural convergence and economic crisis, it could have indirect impact on green purchase behavior. These findings have important implication for marketers and policy makers.

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1. Introduction

Increasing consumption causes the depletion of natural resources, climate change, air pollution and waste generation. The consumption of environmentally friendly products (in this paper we entitle them as green products (GPs)) could be a way to minimize the environmental impact (Mont and Plepys, 2008; Ritter et al., 2015; Elliott, 2013). GPs are referred to as products designed to lessen the consumption of required natural resources and minimize the adverse environmental impacts during the whole life-cycles of these products (Albino et al., 2009; Janssen and Jager, 2002; Tsai, 2012; Tseng and Hung, 2013; OECD, 2009; Biswas and Roy, 2015; Barber et al., 2014; Chairy, 2012; Zhao and Zhong, 2015). The main requirements for GPs (organic food or bio- (eco-friendly) cosmetic, etc.) are that the raw material should be environmentally-friendly, grow without pesticides and chemical manure, without toxic materials; the usage of genetically modified organisms are also restricted; the package should be environmentally friendly as well. Consequently, the demand of GPs (food, cosmetic, appliances, etc.) for consumers

and business clients has increased significantly (Dangelico and Pontrandolfo, 2010; Kong et al., 2014). Meanwhile Gleim et al. (2013) estimated that market share for GPs is less than 4% worldwide and may be decreasing.

Considering that the main aim of sustainable consumption is to achieve that growth of consumption of goods and services does not worsen the environmental quality. Thus environment-friendly services and products are given a preference (Akenji, 2014; Paço et al., 2013). Therefore the promotion of GPs purchase is one of the main aspects to achieve sustainable consumption (Zhao et al., 2014). Considering that the better understanding of determinants of consumer behavior would help producers, marketers and policy makers to promote consumer habits that are less harmful towards the environment (Lin and Huang, 2012; Ritter et al., 2015; Mont et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2014), the aim of this paper is to evaluate the main determinants of green purchase behavior.

There are many research studies concerning purchase behavior, especially about organic (sustainable) food purchase (Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008; de Maya et al., 2011; Grankvist and Biel, 2007). However, research studies exploring purchases of eco-friendly cosmetic, personal care or appliances products are rather scarce (Kim and Chung, 2011; Cervellon and Wernerfelt, 2012). Analyzing the determinants of GPs purchase, most studies cover developing countries: India (Biswas and Roy, 2015; Kumar,

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2012), Taiwan (Chen and Chang, 2012; Wu and Chen, 2014; Lin and Huang, 2012; Huang et al., 2014), Malaysia (Tan, 2011; Onwezen et al., 2014), Brazil (Ramayah et al., 2010; Ritter et al., 2015), Indonesia (Chairy, 2012), and China (Zhao et al., 2014). As for the developed countries, most studies analyzed GPs purchase in the USA (Matthes et al., 2014; Barber et al., 2014; Onwezen et al., 2014; Cho et al., 2013; Elliott, 2013). Meanwhile in terms of European Union (EU), most authors analyzed only separate countries as: Belgium (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008), Italy (Gracia and Magistris, 2007), Sweden (Leire and Thidell, 2005; Grankvist and Biel, 2007), and United Kingdom (Kanchanapibul et al., 2014). Only de Maya et al. (2011) analyzed GPs consumption and its determinants in eight EU countries, Paço et al. (2013) in four, and Onwezen et al. (2014) in three EU countries. Thus there is a lack of studies about green purchase behavior and its determinants in the entire EU, where the consumption level is rather high. Moreover, all the EU countries committed to achieve the sustainable consumption, which is concurrent with promotion of GPs consumption.

Analyzing main determinants which influence the GPs purchase and consumption, the authors referred to different theories. The main factors included in their analyses are environmental concern, knowledge (Newton et al., 2015; Kanchanapibul et al., 2014), attitude, values (Gilg et al., 2005; Chairy, 2012; Barber et al., 2014; Paço et al., 2013; Ramayah et al., 2010), consciousness (Huang et al., 2014; Boztepe, 2012), and perceived consumer effectiveness (Zhao et al., 2014; Cho et al., 2013; Tan, 2011). These factors generally can be attributed to the environmental attitude and the perception of environmental friendly behavior. However these analyses are rather simplex whereas other factors, such as social context and different circumstances can also contribute to GPs purchase. Other authors who analyzed main determinants of GPs purchase were guided by Consumption Value Theory. It takes into consideration functional, social, conditional and environmental values (Lin and Huang, 2012; Ritter et al., 2015; Matthes et al., 2014; Biswas and Roy, 2015). However, the most applicable theory of GPs purchase determinants is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Kumar, 2012; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008; Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Wu and Chen, 2014; de Maya et al., 2011), which partially encompassed Consumption Value Theory as well. The TPB factors are divided into: a) attitude towards the behavior b) subjective norms and c) perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). All studies explain how aforementioned factors influence the intentions to purchase GPs (Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Wu and Chen, 2014; Kim and Han, 2010). Nevertheless in this study we analyzed how factors of TPB directly determine the GPs purchase behavior. Moreover we have renewed this theory including interaction of knowledge and confidence in GPs instead of attitude towards the behavior. Taking into account the factor of perceived behavior control, we included the convenience level and importance of price.

In addition, as we analyzed all EU countries, it is relevant to consider how cultural aspects contribute to green purchase behavior. Particularly it is very important as there are only a few studies that consider cultural aspects (mostly the level of individualism) (Onwezen et al., 2014; Cho et al., 2013). Thus further in this study referring to Hofstede's cultural dimensions we reveal how cultural aspects contribute to purchase behavior in the EU countries. At the same time we try to ascertain the implication of culture convergence and economic crisis, which are related to changes in values of cultural dimensions, to green purchase behavior and could brought the valuable further insights.

Therefore, this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 briefly reviews the literature on TPB and cross-cultural studies. Section 3 explains methodology. The results are presented in Section 4. The discussion and policy implications are to be found in Section 5. And Section 6 produces the main conclusions and the suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theory of Planned Behavior

The central dependent variable of TPB is consumer intention, which is an indication of a person's readiness to behave in a certain way (Ajzen, 1991). Many studies only explain intentions and generally assume that they are good predictors of behavior and fully mediate the impact of attitude and subjective norm towards the behavior (Gracia and Magistris, 2007; Wu and Chen, 2014). Furthermore, Kim and Han (2010) declared that intention is still accepted as the best available predictor of behavior. Meanwhile De Cannière et al. (2009) declared that the predictive power of intentions on real behavior is low. Other authors found the action gap between intentions and behavior. The most common explanations for this action gap are the confidence in GPs and higher price that these products usually command (Bazoche et al., 2008; Barber et al., 2014; Steg et al., 2014). Thus in this study we evaluate how factors of TPB directly contribute to the purchase of GPs.

2.1.1. Knowledge and Confidence in GPs

According to TPB, attitude towards the behavior refers to degree to which a person has a favorable evaluation of certain behavior. In our analysis we have expand attitude concept and analyze impact of interaction of knowledge and confidence in GPs on purchase behavior.

Knowledge is the amount of information held in one's memory that affects the way in which consumers interpret and assess available preferences (Tan, 2011). Environmental knowledge has frequently been assumed to be the main motivator of green consumer behavior (Peattie, 2010; Zhao et al., 2014). Consumers who are more knowledgeable about the problems associated with the environment as well as the advantages of using GPs may have more positive attitudes towards GPs (Bang et al., 2000; Tseng and Hung, 2013). Thus environmental knowledge and knowledge of GPs has a positive relationship with purchase of GPs (Kumar, 2012; Zhao and Zhong, 2015; Kanchanapibul et al., 2014; Tan, 2011; Gracia and Magistris, 2007). The environmental information guides consumers by pointing out the environmentally preferable products among otherwise equal ones and engage citizens to behave more environmentally friendly (Gilg et al., 2005; Tseng and Hung, 2013; Grankvist and Biel, 2007). Biswas and Roy (2015); Ritter et al. (2015) and Young et al. (2010) stated that lack of consumer information about GPs often results in an attitude-behavior gap between their environmental concern and actual buying behavior.

Meanwhile other authors indicated that there is no significant linkage between knowledge of GPs and green consumer behaviors (Zhao et al., 2014). Consumers do not think about GPs in a buying situation, suggesting that single 'green' message of the products is not enough to make it into the shoppers' set of considerations (Wheeler et al., 2013). Moreover the consumers are reported to be lacking in the time and financial resources for searching and examining environmental information during the purchase situation (Leire and Thidell, 2005).

The knowledge about GPs is related to confidence in these products (Kong et al., 2014; Leire and Thidell, 2005; Young et al., 2010; Godey et al., 2012; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008). Confidence in GPs is defined as a level of trust and it is based on the expectation of its ability and reliability (Chen, 2010; Chen and Chang, 2012). Moreover, Harris and Goode, 2010; Chen and Chang, 2012 found that the confidence in GPs significantly affected the consumer purchase intentions. However corporations often make misleading claims of environmental benefits, thus consumers become hesitant to believe such claims (Kaufman, 2014).

2.1.2. Subjective Norms

Subjective norms can be comprehended as the perceived social force to carry out a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, it reveals the extent to which an individual feels morally responsible for others by buying GPs and how positive social image is important to him/her

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