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Mediating effect of environmental orientation on pro-environmental purchase intentions in a low-involvement product situation

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ABSTRACT

Low-involvement consumption includes the majority of regular purchases by individuals and the community, and collectively these have a substantial negative environmental impact. It is, therefore, an important environmental domain to examine. This research surveys 340 Turkish consumers and examines whether apathy, locus of control and myopia influence environmental orientation and purchase intentions for a low-involvement green product, and whether purchase intentions are mediated by consumers' environmental orientation. The results suggest that environmental orientation positively affects purchase intentions, whereas external locus of control negatively affects purchase intentions. Environmental orientation mediates the effect of the internal and external locus of controls' effect on purchase intentions. The results indicate that environmental orientation is a critical direct and indirect driver of purchase intentions for low-involvement environmental goods. Moreover, it highlights that achieving an increase in consumers' purchase intentions for low-involvement green goods may be more challenging than influencing their purchase intentions for high-involvement green goods. The inability to increase purchase intentions for low involvement green goods will substantially inhibit reduction of consumers' environmental impacts through daily activities.

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1. Introduction

There is general consensus that human consumption contributes to environmental problems (Wolters, 2014), which raises questions as to how to motivate humans to minimize their environmentally detrimental activities. Consumers make a number of low-involvement decisions, which are usually low cost, low risk, involve limited information search and are often frequently purchased. Many types of purchases fit this category, including most food (Knox and Walker, 2003), some clothing (Parkvithee and Miranda, 2012) and even staples goods, such as petrol (Dugar, 2007). The cumulative environmental effects of frequent low-involvement purchases are significant. For example, Ivanova et al. (2015) suggest that in the EU food shopping accounts for 9.5% of carbon produced, whereas petrol consumption for approximately 13% of all carbon produced. There are of course many other low involvement products in other consumption categories as well, meaning that collectively low involvement goods consumption has a signifi-

cant adverse effect on the environment. Thus, as consumers seek to become more environmentally responsible, it is important that they consider the environmental effects of all purchases (Laroche et al., 2001), including their low-involvement daily consumption which comprises most of their consumption decisions (Thøgersen et al., 2012).

The reason why individuals behave in environmentally responsible and irresponsible ways is a key research question being examined by scholars from various academic fields. Much of the research has focused on understanding the complexity of pro-environmental behavior (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002), including how various psychographic variables such as values, norms and attitudes influence green consumer behavior (Bamberg and Möser, 2007; Reijonen, 2011; Straughan and Roberts, 1999). Despite the growing interest in primary drivers of pro-environmental behavior (Morgan et al., 2015), there has been less discussion on the role of negative valence psychological factors inhibiting consumer behavior in environmental research (e.g., Barbarossa and De Pelsmacker, 2016). Within the research that does exist, a variety of negative factors have been proposed. For example, Gifford (2011) suggested that psychological barriers including a lack of perceived behavioral control, worldviews, and conflicting values could impede behaviors related to environmental sustainability. Bray et al. (2011) suggested that consumers may be hesitant to change behavior due to factors such as inertia in regard to current behaviors or being

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cynical about green goods' potential benefits. [Barbarossa and De Pelsmacker \(2016\)](#) further suggested that even seeing greening actions as being inconvenient or requiring more effort impedes green behavior.

It is therefore important to examine both the drivers and the barriers to greening behaviors simultaneously. This study seeks to test a model of pro-environmental purchasing intentions for a low-involvement product that integrates two impediments (i.e., environmental apathy and myopia) to pro-environmental behavior, along with drivers (i.e., environmental orientation and locus of control). The research was undertaken on a low-involvement environmentally-friendly product (rechargeable batteries) because low-involvement products constitute the majority of daily consumption decisions ([Beharrell and Denison, 1995](#); [Lastovicka and Gardner, 1978](#); [Thøgersen et al., 2012](#)), which contribute significantly to individuals and household environmental impact (e.g., [Ivanova et al., 2015](#)). Thus, examining a low-involvement product that has an environmentally-friendly counterpart allows for a better understanding of how environmental views are integrated throughout simple daily decision-making, and also whether intention to purchase is mediated by consumers' environmental orientation.

Considerable research has examined environmentally friendly consumption in Western and developed economics ([Kilbourne et al., 2009](#)), and research in developing countries has started to increase as well, including Mexico ([Carrete et al., 2012](#)), Malaysia ([Sumiani et al., 2007](#)), Egypt ([Mostafa, 2006](#)) and Turkey ([Bodur and Sarıgöllü, 2005](#)), to name a few. Developing country contexts are also important as environmental degradation is significant in the countries and is potentially linked to improved living standards and thus increased consumption ([Furman, 1998](#); [Huang and Rust, 2011](#)). Additionally, there is evidence that levels of environmental awareness in developing countries are high and increasing ([Gul, 2013](#); [Husted et al., 2014](#); [Konuk et al., 2015](#)). For example, a research report by IPSOS revealed ([IPSOS, 2015](#)) that environmental concern is high in Turkey. Therefore, this study examines the aforementioned relationships in a developing country context, Turkey.

2. Theoretical background

The relationship between personality factors, environmental attitudes and behavior has received considerable attention since the 1970s. Previous research has attempted to explain the complexity of pro-environmental behavior via various theoretical frameworks including Theory of Reasoned Action ([Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975](#)), Theory of Planned Behavior ([Ajzen, 1991](#)), Normative Decision-Making Model ([Schwartz and Howard, 1980](#)), Norm Activation Model ([Schwartz, 1968](#)), Attitude-Behavior-Context Theory ([Stern, 2000](#)), Value-Belief-Norm Model ([Stern and Dietz, 1994](#)), and Motivation-Opportunity-Abilities Model ([Thøgersen, 1995](#)), among others.

In particular, several attempts have been made to apply the Theory of Planned behavior (TPB) to consumption ([Michaelidou and Hassan, 2014](#)), including investigating the nature of specific pro-environmental behavior ([Bamberg and Möser, 2007](#)), such as recycling ([McCarty and Shrum, 2001](#)), waste prevention ([Barr, 2003](#)), energy saving ([Black et al., 1985](#)), furniture ([Kalafatis et al., 1999](#)) and organic food ([Arvola et al., 2008](#)) buying behaviors. One of the main assumptions of TPB is that individuals make reasoned choices and have the ability to undertake a given behavior with a level of control; thus, consumption decisions are planned.

Situation-specific cognition is recognized as a direct determinant of behavior in the TPB ([Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980](#)) that many researchers use to predict behavior through beliefs, norms, attitudes and intentions along with perceived behavior control ([Ajzen, 1991](#)). However, the complexity of relationships between behavior and its antecedents requires other factors to be included in a

model to fully explain the behavior. For instance, attitude itself has been insufficient to predict intentions and behavior ([Bamberg and Möser, 2007](#)). Also, [Ajzen \(1991\)](#) suggests that the TPB is open to further improvement by including additional constructs, if such modification can enhance behavioral intentions. That is to say, additional motivational variables increase the predictive power of TPB ([Steg and Nordlund, 2012](#)). Thus, researchers have extended the TPB to include a range of factors in regard to green behaviors ([Bamberg and Möser, 2007](#)) to explore purchase intentions in response to different products ([Arvola et al., 2008](#); [Barr, 2003](#); [Black et al., 1985](#); [Kalafatis et al., 1999](#); [McCarty and Shrum, 2001](#)) or customer segments ([López-Mosquera et al., 2014](#); [Verbeke and Vackier, 2005](#); [Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008](#)).

The current study builds on the past TPB research within the green domain, by examining the role of environmental orientation, internal and external locus of control, as well as apathy and myopia (i.e., two impediments to pro-environmental behavior). Within the research, we incorporate consumers' environmental orientation, both as a direct antecedent of behavioral intentions and also as a mediator of apathy, myopia and internal and external locus of control. To minimize the role of other possible factors influencing the model, we include control variables such as age, gender, location, education, marital status, employment and income given that demographics have sometimes been found to influence pro-environmental behavior ([Diamantopoulos et al., 2003](#)). In the next sections, we will discuss these constructs along with the hypothesized relationships, starting with the two impediments (apathy and myopia) and then internal and external locus of control, followed by environmental orientation. Finally, in the discussion section we will address implications, limitations and future directions of the study.

2.1. Environmental apathy

Apathy is used to refer to a lack of concern, care or aliveness ([Lertzman, 2008](#)) that often inhibits behavioral change ([Peattie and Peattie, 2003](#)). From an environmental perspective, apathy is described as one of the value orientations or motives affecting individuals' actions regarding environmental issues, along with ecocentrism and anthropocentrism. While ecocentric individuals preserve nature, and think that it should be protected for its intrinsic value, anthropocentric value nature because mankind's comfort, quality of life and health are reliant on natural resources ([Thompson and Barton, 1994](#)).

Apathy causes a lack of concern for environmental problems and creates a belief that no negative consequences will occur or that the consequences will be insignificant ([Heath and Gifford, 2006](#)). Apathetic consumers have been found to have low assessments of environmental justice ([Clayton, 2000](#)) and thus also think that environmental problems are overstated ([Karpiak and Baril, 2008](#)).

Environmentally apathetic consumers have lower levels of behavior in regard to the context of climate change actions ([Greitemeyer, 2013](#)), whereas [Thompson and Barton \(1994\)](#) suggest that individuals with low environmental apathy are more likely to engage in conserving behaviors. Environmental apathy may be especially important in the context of daily or regular low-involvement purchases, where consumers would be even less likely to consider the environmental impacts of these goods, as most daily consumption is low-involvement, requiring minimal information search or evaluation. Therefore, we anticipate that environmental apathy as a value may negatively affect pro-environmental purchase intentions. Furthermore, environmentally apathetic individuals are likely to be less environmentally oriented, as they do not believe environmental issues are a significant problem. This leads to the following two hypotheses:

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