

Research Article

Seeing the world through GREEN-tinted glasses: Green consumption values and responses to environmentally friendly products[☆]Kelly L. Haws^{a,*}, Karen Page Winterich^b, Rebecca Walker Naylor^c^a Owen Graduate School of Management, 401 21st Ave South, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203, USA^b Smeal College of Business, Pennsylvania State University, 449 Business Building, University Park, PA, 16802, USA^c Fisher College of Business, The Ohio State University, 2100 Neil Avenue, 538 Fisher Hall, Columbus, OH 43210, USA

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Abstract

The primary goal of this research is to conceptualize and develop a scale of green consumption values, which we define as the tendency to express the value of environmental protection through one's purchases and consumption behaviors. Across six studies, we demonstrate that the six-item measure we develop (i.e., the GREEN scale) can be used to capture green consumption values in a reliable, valid, and parsimonious manner. We further theorize and empirically demonstrate that green consumption values are part of a larger nomological network associated with conservation of not just environmental resources but also personal financial and physical resources. Finally, we demonstrate that the GREEN scale predicts consumer preference for environmentally friendly products. In doing so, we demonstrate that stronger green consumption values increase preference for environmentally friendly products through more favorable evaluations of the non-environmental attributes of these products. These results have important implications for consumer responses to the growing number of environmentally friendly products.

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1. Introduction

In today's marketplace, consumers are increasingly faced with choices between "green" products and their more traditional counterparts, as more firms produce products whose composition and/or packaging are positioned as environmentally friendly. For example, Wal-Mart is pressuring its suppliers like General Electric and Procter & Gamble to provide environmentally friendly products (Rosenbloom & Barbaro, 2009). Moreover, many corporate initiatives now focus exclusively on environmental issues, such as KPMG's Global Green Initiative (KPMG, 2010; see also Menon &

Menon, 1997). However, the extent to which consumers value and therefore positively respond to such offerings through value-consistent behavior remains questionable.

Clearly not all consumers are willing to buy environmentally friendly (EF) products.¹ Some consumers may be reluctant to purchase EF products because they are perceived to be less effective (Luchs et al., 2010). Cost may also be a critical

¹ We define an environmentally friendly product as one with at least one positive environmental attribute. An "environmental attribute" is an attribute that reflects the impact of the product on the environment. As such, environmental product attributes can be positive (i.e., the product has little to no negative impact on the environment and is considered environmentally friendly) or negative (i.e., the product harms the environment). This definition is consistent with the definition of "ethical attributes" used in past research (Irwin & Naylor, 2009; Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, & Raghunathan, 2010; Pelozo, White, & Shang, 2013), with the key distinction being that environmental attributes are specifically about the environment, not more broadly about any issue that a consumer sees as relevant to their values/ethics (e.g., child labor concerns; unsafe work environments, donations to charity, discrimination; Mohr & Webb, 2005).

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: kelly.haws@vanderbilt.edu (K.L. Haws), kpw2@psu.edu (K.P. Winterich), naylor_53@fisher.osu.edu (R.W. Naylor).

deterrent; eco-friendly products have historically cost more than their traditional² counterparts (Dale, 2008; Mintel, 2009), and not all consumers are willing to pay price premiums for ethical or EF products (Mintel, 2010). Clearly, some consumers are willing to purchase EF products while others are not, which suggests that there are individual differences among consumers in the value they place on conserving the environment in consumption settings. Therefore, the primary objective of our research is to develop a method to understand differences across consumers who do and do not value conserving the environment as part of their consumption behavior. As such, we introduce the construct of green consumption values, which we formally define as *the tendency to express the value of environmental protection through one's purchases and consumption behaviors*.

Across six studies, we demonstrate that the six-item measure we develop (i.e., the GREEN scale) can be used to reliably capture green consumption values. We further suggest that green consumption values are part of a larger nomological network associated with conservation of not just environmental resources but also personal financial and physical resources. In other words, consumers with stronger green consumption values (i.e., “green” consumers) are generally oriented toward protecting resources at both the environmental and personal level. We test these proposed nomological network relationships empirically as part of our larger scale development effort. Finally, to further validate the scale, we demonstrate that the GREEN scale predicts consumer preference for EF products. In doing so, we show that stronger green consumption values increase preference for EF products through more favorable evaluations of these products’ non-environmental attributes, consistent with consumers’ use of motivated reasoning in other decision making contexts (Kunda, 1990).

2. Understanding green consumers

Environmentally responsible behavior is receiving increasing attention in the literature (Catlin & Wang, 2013; Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Morgan, 2013; Peloza et al., 2013; Trudel & Argo, 2013; White & Simpson, 2013). This focus is consistent with a broader interest in understanding socially responsible consumption that has persisted for several decades (e.g., Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Antil, 1984; Roberts, 1995; Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008; Webster, 1975). However, the extent to which consumers’ environmentally responsible behaviors differ among individuals, and why, is not clear given that existing research has focused on responses to environmental products at the firm level (Leonidou et al., 2013) or as a result of differing situational factors (Catlin & Wang, 2013; Peloza et al., 2013; White & Simpson, 2013). To be sure, past research aimed at understanding socially responsible consumption has sought to understand differences among individual consumers. Yet, this research focused on broader social issues, as illustrated by Roberts’ (1993) description of a socially responsible consumer as “one who purchases products and

services perceived to have a positive (or less negative) influence on the environment or who patronizes businesses that attempt to effect related positive social change” (p. 140).

Although we acknowledge that environmental issues have often been conceptualized as part of a broader effort to understand socially conscious consumers (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001; Roberts, 1993; Webster, 1975), the more general notion of socially responsible consumption is multifaceted. As such, investigations of socially conscious consumption have often led to long and complex measures designed to capture the full scope of the constructs involved, which include issues not directly related to the environment (see, for example, Antil, 1984; Webb et al., 2008). Other scales designed to measure consumer social responsibility have become dated as perceptions of socially responsible behaviors change over time (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000).³ Thus, our primary goal is to develop a concise measure of exclusively green consumption values, as opposed to broader attitudes toward socially responsible behavior or environmental consciousness. As we develop this measure, we also seek to identify the consumer characteristics associated with green consumption values as part of a broader nomological network and understanding of the green consumer. In addition to the desire of consumers with strong green consumption values to use society’s environmental resources wisely (i.e., clean water, clean air, flora, and fauna; Cunningham, Cunningham, & Woodworth, 2001), we suggest that green consumers also value conservation of their personal resources.

As such, we focus our conceptualization and nomological network of green consumption values on the underlying characteristics of concern for both individual-level financial and physical resources. Specifically, we expect consumers with stronger green consumption values to be more conscientious in the use of their financial resources, consistent with past research suggesting that green consumption (or conservation) may be related to concerns about spending money. For example, in one study, price consciousness was the only variable, other than household characteristics (i.e., number of rooms) and family size, to significantly predict energy use (Heslop, Moran, & Cousineau, 1981). In another study, care in shopping (reflecting shopping for specials and checking prices) significantly predicted making a special effort to buy environmentally-friendly products for both men and women (Shrum, McCarty, & Lowrey, 1995).

Relatedly, we also expect consumers with stronger green consumption values to be more careful users of physical resources, for example by using their products fully and by not using more than the necessary amount of a product for it to perform its function effectively, as suggested by Lastovicka, Bettencourt, Hughner, and Kuntze’s (1999) work on frugal consumption. Specifically, we suggest that green consumers will be reluctant to give up their physical possessions because they will seek to extract full and complete value from goods

² When we refer to a “traditional” product, we refer to offerings in which there is no known environmentally friendly attribute, though they are not necessarily harmful to the environment.

³ For example, some scale items use figures that become dated (e.g., “I would be willing to accept an increase in my family’s total expenses of \$120 next year to promote the wise use of natural resources” from Antil, 1984), while others focus on avoiding trade with certain countries due to policies that have changed over time (e.g., “I do not buy products from companies that have investments in South Africa” from Roberts, 1995).

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