

Exploring the Factors influencing Consumers' Green Purchase Intention and Green Buying Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation and its protection has become a trivial matter these days with almost all countries mutually driving their efforts towards environmental issues. Since the last decade, the subject of sustainability has gained drastic momentum because of continuous fall in the availability of resources on this planet and the deteriorating state of the planet, Earth. This increased awareness and concern has led policy makers to explore green marketing and green products as sustainability tools. This paper works in the same direction and makes an attempt to understand green marketing and green products. The paper discusses the various factors that determine consumers' green purchase intention and attempts to establish a link between green purchase intention and green purchase behaviour. Moreover, the study proposes a conceptual model describing relationship between different variables. The model highlights consumers' environmental knowledge, environmental concern, environmental awareness, environmental attitude, consumers' green product perception, eco-label, eco-brand and eco-advertisement as significant predictors of green purchase intention. Further, the model shows green purchase intention as a predictor of green purchase behaviour. The demographics have shown to be moderating the relationship between determining factors and purchase intention. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for marketers and policy makers to increase acceptability for green products and increase chances of consumers choosing green products during their actual decision making process.

1. Introduction

With a large number of studies and policy researches devoting their efforts towards environmental protection there has come a wave of interest towards environmental issues and their solutions. The rationale for this mounting interest in the areas of environmental protection can be attributed to the fact of increasing environmental degradation. It is believed that various activities of business units like manufacturing, marketing, operations and logistics have a significant and detrimental impact on the environment and its various components, thus contributing to majority of environmental problems (Eltayeb, Zailani & Jayaraman, K, 2010). Further, the introduction of technological and industrial revolution has had a devastating impact on the quality of life on earth with giving birth to many of the environmental problems such as global warming, resource depletion, environmental pollution, ozone layer depletion etc. The business organisations have always been held responsible for causing many of these environmental problems and thus the onus to solve these issues now lies on the shoulders of marketers and various other business stakeholders.

This growing interest towards environmental protection has led to the emergence of what is now called 'sustainable development'. The business organizations are now expected to handle their activities in a way that they meet consumer needs while creating least negative impact on the environment. The recent development in sustainable marketing is the introduction of green products. According to Pavan (2010) green product is the term that is used particularly to describe products that protect the natural environment by conserving energy or by

eliminating use of toxic agents. This obligation to enhance customers' awareness of corporate efforts to meet sustainable criteria, the necessity to discover consumers' preferences for green products and the opportunity of charging a premium price for green products gave boost to a new trend of Green Marketing (Peattie and Crane, 2005). The concept of green marketing got evolved in the 1960s; however, it was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the concept started getting more formalized. The first workshop on 'Green Marketing' was conducted by the American Marketing Association in the year 1974 after which the topic got its momentum and started to be getting explored in wider domains. As conceptualized by Polonsky (1994) green marketing refers to the organizational activities designed with an objective to satisfy customer need and wants in a manner that such satisfaction occurs with least damaging effect to the natural environment. Green marketing is a marketing model that integrates environmental protection concept in every activity of the business organizations be it product design, production or service process (Tu, 2002). As put forward by Hailes (2007), a green consumer is a person who buys or consumes products with the intentions of acting in harmony with environmental protection. The green consumer believes that by not buying products that are damaging to the environment he is in fact adding his bit to environmental conservation.

However, many studies reveal that though environmental problems and concerns have touched the public agenda, behavioural changes have not happened to the extent expected (Inglehart, 1995 and Tarrant & Cordell, 1997). As expressed by Tang et al. (2004) there exists a taxing gap

between what consumers say they will do and what they actually do. While most of the consumers admit that they choose a particular product because of its environmental benefits, they do not actually make equivalent allocations in terms of money. Also, consumers are unwilling to trade-off other product benefits for the sake of a better and healthy environment. As explained by Young et al. (2010), when consumers choose to switch to a sustainable lifestyle, their decision-making process becomes increasingly complex. The author comments that there exists an "attitude-behaviour gap" as though 30 percent of consumers claim to be very concerned about the environment, the concern is not translated into their actual shopping habits.

1.1. Rationale of the Study

The increased consumer awareness and pressure to lead a sustainable development process provides enough reason for this study. The market place we face today is different from what it used to be earlier. Today's market place is inhabited by consumers who are concerned about their shopping habits and want to contribute towards the protection of the earth they are living on. This positive attitude has started to be getting reflected in their shopping behaviour where developed economies are increasingly buying green products and thus paving way to further studies on this aspect in western economies. However, studies on the subject are way less in Asian economies than their western counterparts (Lee, 2009). This gap makes it imperative to undertake this study and explore the factors that contribute positively to green purchase intention and ultimately the green buying behaviour.

Moreover, Competition today has reached a stage where marketers are struggling hard to find ways to increase profits and sustain their business units. Considering this, environmental concerns of industry are known to have come as critical issues that marketers need to address in order to keep competition at its bay and keep their market size intact (Nomacorc, 2008; Dolincar and Leisch, 2008; Barber, 2010; Barber et al., 2009). One major concern here for marketing planners is how to manage appropriate marketing strategies addressing to the pull-push system of environmentally friendly products. According to Peattie and Charter (2003), marketers must not only bother for internal processes of their production activities but also worry about the impact of such activities on the quality of life and long term development of a sustainable society. Therefore, this study would help identify the factors that the marketers can use as tools to influence green purchase intention and drive customers to buy more of green products.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This is a conceptual study undertaken to accomplish the following objectives:

- To identify the antecedents of customer's green purchase intentions.
- To explore the relationship between green purchase intention and green purchase behaviour.
- To develop a conceptual model establishing relationship between various factors, green purchase intention and green buying behaviour

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Factors of Green Purchase Intentions

Numerous researchers across the globe have dedicated their efforts in defining green purchase intention and explaining the determining factors. Ng and Paladino (2009) define intentions as a measure of an individual's relative strength of purpose to execute certain behaviour. In terms of green products, green purchase intention refers to the likelihood of a person to prefer green product over non-green products (Nik Abdul Rashid, 2009).

The different authors have identified the different factors that influence green purchase intention. According to the study of Chau and Lau (2000) both environmental knowledge and ecological concern are essential predictors of consumers' green purchase intentions. Having knowledge about various aspects of environment is likely to affect customers' intention to buy green products positively. Lee (2010) too examined the impact of various contextual and individual factors that would have an impact on green purchase behaviour of young consumers in Hong Kong and found concrete environmental knowledge, local environmental awareness, local environmental involvement as having notable impact on green purchase behaviour. However, contrary to this Paco et al. (2009) reported somewhat varying results and claimed that though consumers are concerned about the environment they rarely participate in environmental events and are not likely to buy green products. Their concerns were more linked to economic factors than the environmental factors. Further, beyond these, other factors such as environmental attitude, government initiative, peer pressure also found to be playing vital role in driving green purchase intention (Mei et al., 2012). Albayrak and Caber (2013) too found that customers who have high level of environmental concern and are less sceptical reflect positive attitude, possess a high positive subjective norms and perceived behavioural control which encourages them to become to become e-invoice subscribers in future. Understanding green consumer behaviour has become increasingly important research area especially in case of developing countries like India recently being characterised by the growth of environmentally sensitive market segment. The authors also outline that there is a need to conduct such studies to investigate the determinants of green customer behaviour in developing countries.

Kong et al. (2014) studied the influence of consumer perception of green products on their green purchase intention. The research examined consumer perception as a combination of five dimensions green corporate perception, eco-label, green product value, green advertising and green packaging and demonstrated eco-label and green product value making the maximum contribution and green advertising and green packaging as having no significance influence on consumers' intention to buy green products. Thus, eco-labels can be an effective strategy to encourage customers to buy green products especially when the brand awareness is low or the product has been just launched in the market. An easy and highly recognized eco-label is an essential tool to drive consumers' green purchase intention.

Besides the individual factors, certain marketing tools are also likely to have a significant say in explaining green purchase intention. Rahbar and Wahid (2011) identified three green marketing tools as the key factors impacting customers' likelihood to buy green products. These tools such as eco-brand, eco-label and eco-advertisement help customers distinguish between green products and non-green products. The eco-branded products due to their positive public image happen to be more commercially successful which make consumers purchase more adding to the growth of brand loyalty (Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004). Eco-labels as attractive tools function by notifying consumers about the environmental implications of their buying decisions (Rashid, 2009). Also, it was observed that consumers' intention to buy eco-friendly products are influenced by their perception about the benefits of green products. In a similar vein, Hartmann and Ibanez (2012) through their study highlighted the importance of advertising campaigns in stimulating positive consumer attitude and their purchase intentions to buy green energy brands. The study outlined the importance of psychological benefits and environmental concern in explaining purchase intentions. The paper outlines that advertising campaigns desiring to boost consumer demand for green energy brands must highlight not just the environmental concern and utilitarian benefits but must also place equal weight on psychological brand benefits. Juwaheer and Pudaruth (2012) in their attempt to examine the impact of green marketing strategies on consumer purchasing patterns in Mauritius laid down important insights for marketers and a need to bring alteration to marketing strategies in order to encourage a greener consumption pattern among consumers. The findings from the study suggest that majority of the customers nowadays are concerned about environmental degradation and hence, there is a strong need for business organisations to employ green branding, green packaging and eco-labeling strategies so as to foster green purchase intentions among customers. The study concluded customers' beliefs and behaviours, green labeling, green branding and green advertisements as significant determinants of green purchase intentions. Discussing the subject of green marketing and its sustainability, Yeng and Yazdanifard (2015) outlined the importance of switching to a new marketing mix of green marketing consisting of eco-label, eco-brand and environmental advertisement that can help make customer perception positive and also increase awareness of eco-friendly products features. Consequently, these factors would make consumers buy more environmentally friendly products.

2.2. Role of Demographics in Green Purchase Intention

Demographic factors such as gender, age, income, education and marital status are also likely to affect the likelihood of an individual to buy green products over non-green products. Diamantolopoulos et al. (2003) established that demographics do have a role to play in framing green purchase intentions. As per the findings from the study women are more environment conscious and exhibit pro-environmental behaviors. Also, married couples are more likely to have environmental behaviour than unmarried individuals. The study reported a positive relationship between education, information, attitudes and behaviour. In a similar trend Bui (2005) in his study identified demographics along with other factors as crucial determinants moving green purchase intentions of the

customers. Results from the study of Laroche et al. (2001), too showed that gender has a significant role to play in influencing green purchase intentions and influences the consumers' willingness to pay extra for green products. The study by Mostafa (2007) also noticed significant differences on the basis of gender in terms of attitude towards green purchases. The author suggests marketers to include demographic factors in their marketing programmes to fine-tune them with environmental issues and increase their success rate.

Building on the previous studies, Boztepe (2012) examined the moderating role of demographic factors in influencing the relationship between factors and customers' green purchase intentions. All the demographic factors (age, gender, education, marital status and income) found to be influencing the relationship between determinants and green purchase intentions significantly. Wee et al (2014) also explored the role of demographic factors in influencing the relationship between purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour and noticed significant differences in purchase intention of organic food products according to the respondents' age, gender, education, income level and residence area. Concluding the results, the authors signified that women tend to be more aware of organic food issues and buy more organic food than men. Moreover, it was reported that older consumers are more likely to buy organic food. Also it was found that wealthier and educated households are more often to showcase green purchase intention. Considering the findings of these studies it is important for the marketing managers to pay adequate attention to demographic factors in designing marketing strategies for green products.

2.3. Green Purchase Intention and Green Purchase Behaviour

As said earlier, for a customer to act in a certain manner it is imperative for him to first have an intention to behave that way and therefore, intention is expected to predict how the customer is likely to behave given other factors. Researches in the past have showed a link between customers' intention and their real behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980; Sheppard et al., 1988). Establishing a link between the two factors, Straughan and Roberts (1999) contemplated that a person with positive ecological behaviour will buy the green products more often, in a sense that Intentions are believed to control the motivational factors that influence the actual decision making process and thereby the customers' actual buying behaviour. As explained by Chan (2001) and Beckford et al. (2010), green purchase intention is a noteworthy predictor of green buying behaviour reflecting that consumers' green purchase intention positively impacts the possibility of customer choosing a green product while making purchase decision. Various other studies also noted a significant positive relationship between purchase intention and purchase behaviour (Saba and Messina, 2003; Thøgersen and Zhou, 2012) and highlight purchase intention as robust predictor of purchase behaviour.

However, though agreed it may not be necessary that customers displaying willingness to buy green products would actually choose green product over conventional products during their decision making process. Grunert and Juhl (1995) has identified an intention – behaviour gap and concluded that

intention may not always lead to favourable behaviour. As put forward by Barber et al. (2012) the researches linking the respondents' intentions and their actual behaviour are scarce and much remains yet to be explored especially when coming to trade-offs between the environmental benefits, product cost and product quality. The study addresses this issue and posits that respondents having strong values toward the environment expressed high intention to buy environmentally wines. Nevertheless, the study also reported that though the consumers are willing to buy environmentally friendly products they are not likely to execute the same while making actual purchases and as a result a wide gap exists between their willingness to pay and the actual price paid. The results were consistent with the findings of the previous studies (Follows and Jobber, 2000; Thogerson and Grunert-Beckmann, 1997).

3. Conceptual Model

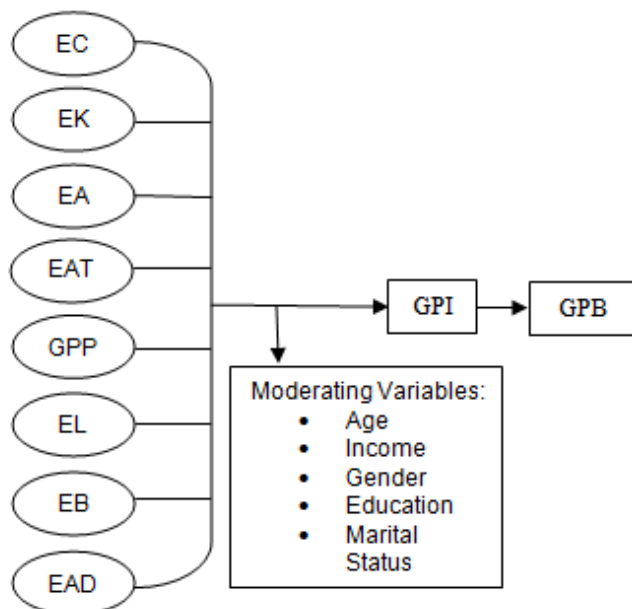


Figure: 1. Factors of Green Purchase Intention and Green Buying Behaviour

4. Variables in the Model

Above shown is the conceptual model of green purchase intention and green buying behaviour. The model shows environmental concern, environmental knowledge, environmental awareness, environmental attitude, green product perception, eco-label, eco-brand and eco-advertisement as the key influencing factors of green purchase intention. Further the model shows that demographics factors moderate the relationship between Green purchase intention and green buying behaviour. Also, the model reflects green purchase intention as a predictor of green buying behaviour which means that consumers are more likely to make efforts to choose green products during their shopping process when they have the willingness to buy green products.

- Environmental Concern (EC)

Environmental concern refers to consumers' inclination towards environment and its conservation. It depicts consumers' outlook towards the environment and its components.

- Environmental Knowledge (EK)

Environment knowledge can here be defined as basic knowledge of environment related concepts, particulars and relationships.

- Environmental Awareness (EA)

Environmental awareness explains the consumers' understanding of the impact of their activities on the environment.

- Environmental Attitude (EA)

Environmental attitude refers to tendency of an individual to act consistently favorably or unfavorably towards the environment.

- Green Product Perception (GPP)

Green product perception signifies consumers' viewpoints about green products, their features and benefits.

- Eco-label (EL)

Eco-label is an effective marketing tool. These refer to labels which are made up of recyclable material, use least amount of resources and provide information about green products. These labels inform consumers about the benefits of green products and help them compare green products with their non-green substitutes.

- Eco-brand (EB)

Eco-brand can be defined as a name, logo or design of a product which is not detrimental to the environment. Eco-brand acts as a key differentiating tool in the hands of marketers.

- Eco-advertisement (EAD)

Eco-advertisement is the marketing tool that describes the company's environmental concern and depicts the steps undertaken by the company for contributing towards environmental protection. It refers to advertisement strategies that highlight green product benefits and strive to drive customers towards green products.

- Green Purchase Intention (GPI)

Green purchase intention refers to the willingness of an individual to choose a green product over conventional products during their purchases.

- Green Purchase Behaviour (GPB)

Building on the understanding from previous studies, green purchase behaviour refers to the efforts from customers to choose and buy green products during their actual decision making process. It means that consumers consider environment related characteristics while buying products.

- Demographics

These refer to the socio-economic characteristics of a population expressed in terms of age, gender, education, income level, marital status etc.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The review of previous studies conducted in domain of green marketing, green purchase intention and green buying behaviour shows that green purchase intention is a highly complicated phenomenon affected by numerous factors. The

review establishes consumers' environmental knowledge, environmental concern, environmental attitude, environmental awareness and green product perception as significant individual factors that can positively influence consumers' green purchase intention. Also beside this, the literature suggests that there is an urgent need for the marketers to alter their marketing mix and design a new marketing mix of today's era consisting of eco-label, eco-brand and eco-advertisement. These three tools impact the green purchase intention and their positive perception can make consumers choose green products over conventional products by helping them distinguish between green and non-green products. Moreover, intention is found to be a significant predictor of green purchase behavior. Inferences from past researches show that though consumers are willing to buy green products they are less likely to showcase the same during their actually buying process. In such a scenario where there exists an intention-behaviour gap it becomes crucial to ensure that the consumers not only show their willingness but also make equivalent allocation in terms of money towards green products. The following recommendations can be made for researchers and marketers:

- The marketers need to incorporate element of greenness in all the activities they pursue so as to convey the message of greenness to consumers.
- In order to build consumers' trust in green products, it is crucial that marketers should provide adequate information to the customers through effective eco-labeling strategies.
- It is advisable for marketers to use green logo or symbols to position their products as these will help customers' differentiate between green and non-green products and would facilitate their recalling power.
- The government and policy makers can design campaigns and strategies to create consumer awareness and motivate them to buy eco-friendly products.
- To convert intentions into actual behaviour a close check should be kept on consumer decision making process and initial stage discounts can be used to motivate consumers' to try green products.
- Thus, to conclude the success of green products require united efforts from business organizations, government and consumers.

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