

THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDE, ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON GREEN PURCHASING BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

To consider the catastrophic situation of our environment, this environment sends lot of alarming events for us, not limited to the following: global warming, climate change, and pollution. Green purchasing behavior is one of the behaviors recommended to help sustain the environment. Three factors (social influence, environmental attitude, and environmental concern) are tested to see how they affect green purchasing behavior. A significant result was indicated between Social influence, Environmental concern and green purchasing behavior. The results provided empirical support to previous studies. Future research and limitation were discussed as well.

Keywords: Green Purchasing Behavior, Social Influence, Environmental Attitude, Environmental Concern

1. INTRODUCTION

With the increase in number of natural disasters all over the world, consumers have been taking such alarm seriously and trying to act proactively against all environmental challenges by all possible means of sustainability. The concern for environment over the past 30 years was a main issue for academics and professionals (Haytko and Matulich, 2008). According to Kotler (2011), such concern will keep on influencing marketing theory and practice. Furthermore, Professor Walter Scott argued that living on Earth will face up different and snowballing environmental challenges(2005). Lebanon is suffering main environmental challenges, some of which are: deforestation, threaten agriculture, soil erosion, water and sea pollution, air pollution and soil degradation besides some other related problems as solid and water waste treatments (Masri, 1997). Some of the acts are taken, but still there are different environmental challenges that are faced by government, non-governmental organizations, local citizens and businesses.

To share the progress of sustainability outgoing, green marketing development is an essential complaint for any struggle toward the resolution of human needs and nature (Kilbourne, 1998).Green marketing is essential for businesses as a competitive advantage, image strengthen, and developer of new markets (Chen, 2008). Green marketing is a holistic, macro focus, methodological and multi-discipline topic (Kilbourne, 1998).Academics and marketing specialists are in a continuous effort to find all about green consumers, from identifying them, to understanding their needs and producing green products that meet such needs (D'Souza, Clare, Taghian, Lamb and Peretiatko, 2007).Individual Consumers purchase green products trying to be environmentally outgoing (Vermillion and Peart, 2010). The MENA region consumers, especially the Lebanese "Cedar's Land" consumer's concern are found to adopt the pattern of increasing green consumer concern during recent years.The Lebanese green emerging market is an opportunity for businesses that will go green nowadays. This shed the light for other Lebanese businesses sectors to alter their strategy toward greener economy, in order to adjust to more demanding market, more socially conscious public, and boost their public image as leaders of sustainable growth and development.

The purpose of this paper is to measure and examine three main factors affectingLebanese consumer's green purchasing behavior. There is very limited research concerning green marketing in non-western country. Thus the value of this research is to provide empirical evidence on green purchasing behavior in non-western country which will add to the existing literature of green purchasing behavior. The results of this research will provide guidelines for international and local green marketers planning to target the Lebanese green market. Not only the marketers and business will benefit from such paper, but also governments and environmental organizations who are trying to increase the awareness for sustainability in Lebanon.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of Green Marketing

Since the 1960's, different movements took place focusing on pollution and energy conservation (Straughan and Roberts, 1999). Later in the 70's a positive change in consumer behavior with respect to environmental related products was found (Alwitt and Pitts, 1996). Consumers were shifting into purchasing green products since the increase in green marketing activities that were taking place in different countries all over the world (Cohen, 1973). Green marketing went in-to a backlash during the 1990's (Wong, Turner and Stoneman, 1996), this backlash is said to be the second stage of green marketing. The backlash took place because consumers' green purchasing behavior was not in-parallel with the concern those consumers have (Schrum, McCarty and Lowery, 1995). The third stage of green marketing started with the beginning of the 21st century. We are living this stage nowadays where green marketing is "making come back" (Ottman, Stafford, and Hartman, 2006, p.26). In this third stage a huge improvement and an escalation in the level of confidence had affected green products (Ottman, 2007; Gurau and Ranchhod, 2005). Sustainable development is the basic argument for this century covering three fundamental functions; environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and sociopolitical sustainability.

According to Lee (2008), the near future of green marketing will include two unavoidable trends. The first trend is doing business under the banner of eco-friendly and going green approaches will be pushed into the main stream (Hanas, 2007). Second trend is the attempt of international green marketers to expand their markets, grow sales and profits by the mean of their positive public image toward their green products and brands in the developed countries (Johri and Sahasakmontri, 1998; Gurau and Ranchhod, 2005).

2.2 Green Marketing and Green Consumer

According to King (1985), "false marketing" was the result of four main critical issues: "thrust marketing", "marketing department marketing", account marketing" and "formula marketing", all have escort to a malfunction in marketing practices. In their review of King's findings, Peattie and Crane (2005) have recognized different marketing practices responsible for the green marketing failure exclusively. The five practices are as follows: Green Spinning, Green Selling, Green Harvesting, "Eviopreneur" marketing, and Compliance marketing. Our main concern now is to associate with the consumers' environmental concern keeping in mind the assurance of the current western lifestyle, with a better green and sustainable marketing in the future (Peattie and Crane, 2005; Smith, 1998).

To find the holistic and genuine green marketing, scholars, marketers, researchers and public policy makers are requested to combine all their efforts to address the issues related, which in turn will help remove obstacles facing sustainability development (Peattie and Crane, 2005). In his recent article, Kotler (2011) reconsidered the four marketing mix, the four P's to fit the new demand of environmentally imperative marketing nowadays. The four P's are restated as follows, and we can refer to them as green four P's: Product (Generally, the products produced must be environmentally friendly and even more it can help settle some environmental damages); Price (different product with different levels of environmental friendliness should be offered); Place (to encourage online selling, e-marketing, decentralized production facilities and others to guarantee distribution channel with minimal environmental affects); and Promotion (Companies must use specific green marketing tools such as eco0lable and special sales promotions anxious for their corporate social responsibility). A green consumer is the one who avoids products that are endangered to the health of people, damaging to environment, energy inefficient, causes excessive waste, and endanger environment and species (Strong, 1996). Fitzpatrick and Byers (1990) suggested that "green consumerism" might turn into a potent force in the market. Consumers who share a "life style of health and sustainability" are known as "LAHOS" (Environmental Leader, 2009). Green users are altering in significant ways (Vermillion and Peart, 2010). Green market is growing rapidly worldwide, with environmental concern being the millennium primary top concern for consumers. For this, it is so important for researchers and scholars to keep on their studies about green consumers. The future of environment will depend on the intensity of behaviors translated from green consumers support to environmental (Dunlap and Scarce, 1991).

2.3 Green Purchasing Behavior

Recently, consumers are sensing the huge impact of their purchasing behavior toward environment (Abdul Wahid, Rahbar and Shyan, 2011). Green or environmental friendly purchasing behavior is defined by the means of consuming products that are environmentally "benevolent/ beneficial", "recyclable/conservable" and "sensitive/responsive" regarding ecological concerns (Mostafa, 2007). A new dimension for consumers to choose between brands is the degree of social responsibility of companies toward environment (Kotler, 2011). Companies should pay more attention to the "green world of mouth" and its effects on the green purchasing behavior of green and non-green consumers. Growing in importance of green world of mouth, Yuhong and Shaoping (2010) suggested that businesses should launch a special green channel to spread word of mouth. Consumers consciousness for environment is been dramatically translated into green purchasing behavior nowadays.

3. FACTORS

Adopting Lee (2008) survey that was used to examine the important factors affecting green purchasing behavior in Hong Kong and their weights, three environmental factors of green purchasing behavior extracted from her review of western literatures were chosen. The three factors are: "social/peer influence", "environmental attitude", and "environmental concern". These factors were not examined in the Arab World, and specifically Lebanon.

Social Influence: Social influence is a very wide field to study. In this study we are interested to examine the effect of friends as a social group on the green behavior of individuals. Social influences can be found within peer pressure, conformity compliance, and many others. Ewing (2001) suggested that norms acquired socially can stimulate ecological consumer behavior. Hoyer and Mac Innis (2004) argued that general consumption is influenced by inspirational and associative reference groups. With the ease to share information using different channels of social networking as Face-book, twitter, blogs and emails, it is strongly obvious that social influence will be a dominant factor affecting green purchasing behavior.

Environmental Attitude: Environmental attitude is a complex mental state involving beliefs and values to behave environmentally. In other words, it taps the consumer's cognitive judgment with respect to the value of environmental protection and green living (Lee, 2009). Contrasting and indecisive results have been found between attitudes and behaviors (Harthman and Apaolaza Ibanez, 2006). Few existing studies found a positive correlation between environmental attitude and green purchasing behavior (Mostafa, 2007), while other concluded a moderate or tenuous correlation (Lee, 2009).

Environmental Concern: According to Lee (2008), environmental concern is the consumers' emotional involvement regarding different environmental matters. As to Yeung (2004), environmental concern represents a consumer's doubts, fears, likes/dislikes and sympathy regarding the environment and its quality. Environmental concern is what interests us about environment because of the importance affection and anxious feelings it carries for the self. Environmental concern hold three interrelated issues: concern for the biosphere, concern for the people, and concern for the self (Schultz, 2000). However, it is not necessarily for an individual to behave or purchase green if he or she is concerned for the environment, identified as value-action gap (Pickett- Baker and Ozaki, 2008).

4. HYPOTHESES

4.1 Social Influences

Generally speaking, consumption is strongly influenced by associative and inspirational reference groups (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2004). Lee (2008) found social influence to be the top predictor of green purchasing behavior for adolescents in Hong Kong out of seven factors tested. Ling (1997) found that individuals living in cultures of collectivist orientation are influenced by such orientation, especially on their recycling behavior, therefore we propose the following relation:

H1: Social influence is positively related to green purchasing behavior.

4.2 Environmental Attitude

Lee (2009) stated that the relationship between environmental attitude and environmental behavior is not clear. Hoyer and MacInnis (2004) found that attitudes affect people's purchasing behavior by affecting people's thoughts and feelings. Kotchen and Reiling (2000) found a positive relation between environmental behavior and environmental attitude. Thus we propose:

H2: Environmental attitude is positively related to green purchasing behavior.

4.3 Environmental Concern

Previous studies indicated a relation between the environmental concern and green behavior (Roberts and Bacon, 1997; Van Liere and Dunlap, 1980); however these studies were conducted in western countries. In a recent study conducted by Datta (2011), Datta concluded that a positive relationship was found between overall environmental concern and consumers' green purchasing behavior in a general buying behavior context. We also propose the following relation:

H3: Environmental concern is positively related to green purchasing behavior.

5. MEASURES AND SAMPLE

5.1 Measures

The questionnaire is composed of five sections. The first three sections measures three different factors: social influence, environmental attitude, and environmental concern. The five-point Likert-type scales were used in all measures. Social influence was measured using six items; environmental attitude was measured using seven items; and environmental concern was measured using four items. Green purchasing behavior was measured using four items. Characteristics of demographics were measured in the fifth section.

5.2 Sample

The questionnaire used in this study was a five-page internet questionnaire with a brief introduction of instructions and objectives of such research. The introduction also emphasized the confidentiality of the research. The items of the questionnaire were adapted from Kaman Lee (2008). Internet questionnaire was used for two main reasons, first it is an easier way to collect data, and second which was more important, is to apply green behavior on our study by reducing the use of papers in distributing, collecting and analyzing our data. The questionnaire was carried out in September and November 2011 administered to a sample of individual Lebanese consumers having an independent purchasing power. Participants responded voluntarily and were not compensated for their participation. Participants were given enough time to respond to the questionnaire electronically.

A total of 135 questionnaires were sent through emails to the respondents in which a special link was included. A total of 101 completed questionnaires were obtained with a response rate of 75%. Our sample consisted of 101 respondents, 58.4% were males and 41.6% were females. The average age of our sample was 24; 56.4% of the sample were single and 62.4% have a Bachelor degree. The major industries represented in our sample were disturbed among the following: 16.8% from the education, 7.9% from the banking and finance, 6.9% from the marketing and advertising and the remaining were distributed among other different industries.

6. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Before examining the proposed hypotheses we tested the reliability of our measures by calculating the Cronbach's alpha (α). Our results provided empirical support to the previous studies of the following tested scales: social influence ($\alpha=.867$), environmental attitude ($\alpha=.901$), environmental concern ($\alpha=.859$), and green purchasing behavior ($\alpha=.862$). To test the proposed hypotheses we used correlation and regression analysis. The correlation results provided support to H1 and H3 in same directions as proposed and a significant relation was identified for H2 but not in the same direction as hypothesized. In accordance with our H1 a significant positive correlation ($r=.44$ at 0.01 sig. level) was found between social influence and green purchasing behavior. The results also provided support for H3 in which a significant positive correlation ($r=.589$ at 0.01 sig. level) between environmental concern and green

purchasing behavior. As to H2 a significant negative correlation was found between environmental attitude and green purchasing behavior ($r = -.165$ at 0.05 sig. level) not supporting our hypothesis.

In addition to the positive correlation analysis conducted, we conducted regression analysis as well. The results provided support to the correlation results. In H1 we proposed a positive relation between social influence and green purchasing behavior, the results of the regression also indicated the coefficient of determination $R^2 = .194$, indicating that 19.4% of the variation in the green purchasing behavior is explained by the social influence factor. Thus H1 supported. In H2 we proposed a positive relation between environmental attitude and green purchasing behavior and the regression results indicated a negative relation, with the coefficient of determination $R^2 = .027$ which indicate that just 2.7% of the variation in the total green purchasing behavior is explained by the environmental attitude factor. As to H3 we proposed that there is a positive relation between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior, the regression results supported our argument with the coefficient of determination $R^2 = .347$ which indicates that 34.7% of the variation in green purchasing behavior is explained by environmental concern.

7. DISCUSSION

The positive relation found in our research between social influence and green purchasing behavior is a complement to similar positive relation found by other researches. One of the researches suggested that norms that are acquired socially can stimulate ecological consumer behavior. In simple words, social impact of norms is acquired from society as one of the social influences, can lead to green purchasing behavior, which is a pattern or kind of ecological consumer behaviors. In Lebanon, norms acquired socially are instituted to a great extent. The positive relation between social influence and green purchasing behavior is also supported by the finding of Lee (2008) which suggested social influence to be a top predictor of green purchasing behavior for adolescents in Hong Kong. The strong peer influence, a kind of social influence, is suggested to be a reason behind the group effect in environmental behavior (Lee, 2009). From all what proceeds, it is so important to pay attention for what we call a “green word-of-mouth”. Green consumers investigate for green products; they search intensively for all information available from any possible source in their society. More emphasis should be given for the “green word-of-mouth” as a communication tool to increase the green purchasing behavior, given that such tool is one of the ways that shape social influences. What is optimistic for green purchasing behavior is the increase in the social influence, which will take place with the ease and advancement of communication taking place in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon. Clearly, social influence will continue to affect green purchasing behavior positively.

Environmental attitude is negatively correlated with green purchasing behavior. In general, attitude is a state of mind or feeling someone has toward a specific subject. The results found in our research suggest that not any person whose environmental attitude is positive will necessarily engage in green purchasing behavior. According to the negative relation found, environmental attitude is actually not a predictor of green purchasing behavior. The positive environmental attitude will not lead to a green purchasing behavior. A possible reason for the negative relation found can be the difference between real attitudes (not expressed attitudes) and behaviors. Inconsistency between people's attitude as verbally expressed and their actual behavior was first suggested by Richard LaPiere (1934). Furthermore, Wicker (1971) found a weak and perhaps nonexistent correlation between actual behavior and measured attitudes.

As to the environmental concern factor, the more a consumer is concerned about his environment the more this consumer will purchase green products. The concern is represented in the consumer's emotional involvement with the subject of concern. Our results indicated that the more we are concerned about our environment an increase in green purchasing behavior will be achieved. The positive

correlation between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior is an additional support for previous results by Datta (2011); Roberts and Bacon (1997); Vanliere and Dunlap (1981); Arbuthruth and Ling (1975). Schultz (2000) suggested three interrelated issues for environmental concern, these issues are: biosphere, people and self. This wide scope of environmental concern factor can lead us to know that it is significant to have a positive correlation between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior. Logically speaking, any consumer will have at least one concern for one of the three issues. Finally, our results provided additional empirical support to the existing research and provided guidelines to both practitioners and researchers with regard to a non-western sample approach to green purchasing behavior.

8. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

As any research this study has limitations. The first limitation is the small size of the sample. Future research should attempt to collect data from a larger sample. The second limitation is the customer self-reported responses. Future studies should collect data from other stakeholders as well to examine the real impact of these three factors. Furthermore future research should examine additional factors that may impact green purchasing behavior for example, personality type, concern for self-image and perceived environmental responsibility.

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