

Assessment of Environmental Aspects of Consumer Behavior from The Perspective of Gender: A survey study

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Abstract

The contribution focuses on examining consumer behavior in the context of environmental attitudes. The aim of the research was to examine gender differences in the evaluation of selected attributes of environmental aspects of consumer behavior. The data were obtained through a questionnaire survey with a sample of 151 respondents. There were examined statistically significant differences in factors motivation to purchase eco-friendly products, perception of environmental protection, opinion on environmental protection, cultural orientation, perception of green advertising, and attitude towards general green advertising. Based on the results obtained through the independent samples t-test, it can be concluded the statistical significance in favor of women in all environmental aspects of consumer behavior within the stated hypothesis. The research results confirm the findings of previous similar studies.

Keywords: Environmentalism, consumer behavior, gender, sustainability

Introduction

The environmental aspects of consumer behavior are part of environmental sustainability and focus on the impacts that consumer behavior has on the environment. These aspects relate to the selection, use, and disposal of products and services. The environmental aspects of consumer shopping behavior include selecting eco-friendly products, saving energy and water, recycling and waste sorting, minimizing plastic usage, and choosing environmentally-friendly food. Environmentalism and eco-friendly products are becoming increasingly important in today's society as people are becoming more aware of the impact of their actions on the environment. This holds particularly true in relation to shopping behavior, where consumers are starting to consider the environmental impact of the products they purchase. From a psychological standpoint, there are several aspects that influence consumer behavior regarding environmentalism and eco-friendly products. These factors include motivation, perception, decision-making, personality and lifestyle, and social behavior.

We assume that gender differences manifested in everyday consumer behavior also extend to attitudes towards environmental issues. Gender differences in approaches to environmental shopping behavior can be quite complex and influenced by various factors, including culture, social norms, and individual personality traits.

Theoretical background

Pepper (1984) addresses the theme of conflicting elements within environmentalism. Part of his definition of the movement is that it represents a search for mediation between several conflicting elements, where there is individual freedom versus the common good; protection of national sovereignty versus the need for global awareness; minority rights versus majority rights; protection of the rights of the present generation compared to the rights of future generations. To address our environmental problems, we must find ways to resolve the tension between these opposites and also between the values associated with the desire for well-being and individual material possessions and those associated with social and environmental justice, as well as the non-material, spiritual aspects of our nature. Environmental concerns entered the mass consciousness through the media, often sparked by mass demonstrations expressing discontent with environmental threats. To some extent, this pervasive influence was a result of the widespread nature of the perceived threats. Pollution was regarded as a widespread and potentially chronic problem that did not restrict its impact to any specific group of people but was democratically shared among nations (Schell, 1982).

The strength of pro-environmental attitudes and behavior among individuals depends on individual and personal characteristics. In fact, green consumer behavior may be influenced by general characteristics that lead to various motivations to engage in environmentally-friendly behavior (Naderi, Steenburg, 2018).

The strength of pro-environmental attitudes and behavior among individuals depends on individual and personal characteristics. In fact, green consumer behavior can be influenced by general characteristics that lead to various motivations to engage in pro-environmental behavior (Naderi, Steenburg, 2018). One explanation for why some people engage in pro-environmental activities is their concern for the environment (Bamberg, 2003; Schwepker & Cornwell, 1991). Individuals are typically motivated to engage in pro-environmental behavior because they naturally care about the environment and its inhabitants. Thus, altruism can be a strong motivation for some individuals, leading them to behave in an environmentally friendly manner (Naderi, Steenburg, 2018). De Groot and Steg (2009) suggested that altruistic considerations provide the most stable foundation for pro-environmental behavior, emphasizing the importance of strengthening altruism to support such behavior. Additionally, a study by Clark et al. (2003) demonstrates that altruism is an internal variable that influences green behavior.

Further studies (Chan, 2001; Li, 1997) have demonstrated the significant influence of an individual's collectivistic orientation (group altruism) on their pro-environmental activities. While the findings of the aforementioned studies generally support the existence of a positive relationship between individuals' selfless altruism and their willingness to engage in green behavior, each of them used research samples that included participants from different generations. Additionally, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) argued that people who fulfill their personal needs are more likely to behave ecologically because they have more resources (time, money, energy) to address larger, less personal, social, and pro-environmental issues. In comparison, Geller (1995) hypothesized that for individuals to act pro-environmentally, they must be able to think beyond the scope of satisfying their immediate needs and care about the well-being of others and their community as a whole. Geller (1995) further suggested that this state of "active caring" can only occur if personality factors related to self-affirmation (i.e., self-esteem, empathy, and personal control) are fulfilled. It is worth noting, however, that individuals may lack some of these qualities.

When it comes to pro-environmental consumer behavior, we can build upon the existing knowledge of consumer decision-making and influence. Whyte (1954) states that consumers are influenced in their lives by various other individuals - friends, neighbors, relatives, acquaintances, coworkers, non-marketing professionals, and trendsetters. Consumers are more likely to utilize a brand recommended by a former user and place more trust in product recommendations from friends and acquaintances than in commercial advertising (Kirby, Marsden 2006). The process of being influenced by friends, family, and other acquaintances and adjusting actions based on their suggestions can be referred to as social influence. An opinion leader is an individual or former user who has the ability to influence the opinions of others (Bamakan et al. 2019). They influence others by sharing information or advice about a specific product or brand. When consumers lack information or struggle with decision-making, the input of an opinion leader can serve as a compensating factor for the consumer as it can be used as a credible source (Kimmel, 2013; Fedorko, Gburová, 2019). In a study of gender differences by Benko and Pelster (2013) it is stated that even experienced salespeople confirm that they observe different behaviors between women and men when it comes to product sales. Their research indicates the following: Women tend to gather important information during the purchasing process. They go into the store or business meeting with a certain idea but, on the other hand, they are open to exploring all the possibilities that arise during the meeting. They also request options that are not listed in the offer, examine the purchasing area and all its possibilities from multiple vendors. Men focus their attention more on a specific task. During the purchasing process, they do not change their plans and activities. They tend to limit their decision-making

based on offers and catalogs. They are reluctant to explore additional alternatives or variations beyond what is listed in the catalog and offer. Men usually want to make a quick and simple decision.

Based on the theoretical foundations, we formulated a hypothesis and conducted our research.

Research

The aim of the research is to examine gender differences in the evaluation of selected attributes of environmental aspects of consumer behavior. Based on the stated research aim, we have formulated the hypothesis: "We assume the existence of statistically significant differences between men and women in the evaluation of selected environmental aspects of consumer behavior."

To obtain the data, a questionnaire survey using the Lee (2017) questionnaire was utilized. The questionnaire consisted of 82 questions, including 8 questions focused on demographic information and 73 questions that explored motivations for purchasing eco-friendly products, perception of environmental protection, attitudes towards environmental protection, cultural orientation, perception of general green advertising, and attitude towards general green advertising. The higher the average score, the greater the general agreement with the given statement among the participants. The respondents' answers were processed and interpreted using inferential statistics (independent samples t-test) in the statistical software SPSS Statistics 21. A total of 151 respondents participated in the research, out of which 91 (60.3%) were women and 60 (39.7%) were men.

In Table 1, we present statistically significant differences in factors such as *motivation to purchase eco-friendly products*, *perception of environmental protection*, *opinion on environmental protection*, *cultural orientation*, *perception of green advertising*, and *attitude towards general green advertising*.

Table 1: Differences in the assessment of environmental factors based on gender

Environmental aspect	Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	Test criterion	Sig.
Motivation to purchase eco-friendly products	Men	1,9083	0,62938	-2,513	0,013
	Women	2,1960	0,76934		
Perception of environmental protection	Men	2,3167	0,65489	-3,600	0,000
	Women	2,7534	0,82980		
Opinion on environmental protection	Men	2,1633	0,58396	-3,513	0,001
	Women	2,5267	0,67565		
Cultural orientation	Men	2,4167	0,66399	-2,335	0,021
	Women	2,6876	0,74624		
Perception of green advertising	Men	2,1833	0,66388	-3,312	0,001
	Women	2,5746	0,77547		
Attitude towards general green advertising	Men	2,2563	0,82062	-3,584	0,000
	Women	2,7376	0,78750		

Source: own processing

In the first factor, "*Motivation to purchase ecological products*," women scored an average of 2.19 compared to men with an average of 1.90. The statistical significance in this case is 0.013. This means that women feel a stronger need to purchase ecological products to help mitigate the risks associated with non-ecological products compared to men. In the second factor, "*Perception of environmental protection*," women scored an average of 2.75 compared to men with an average of 2.31. The statistical significance in this case is 0.000. This indicates that women have greater concerns about the deterioration of environmental quality compared to men. In the third factor, "*Attitude towards environmental protection*," women scored an average of 2.52 compared to men with an average of 2.16. The statistical significance in this case is 0.001. This means that women are better informed about ecological products compared to men. In the fourth factor, "*Cultural orientation*," women scored an average of 2.68 compared to men with an average of 2.41. The statistical significance in this case is 0.021. This suggests that women are more inclined to maintain harmony with nature compared to men. In the fifth factor, "*Perception of green advertising*," women scored an average of 2.57 compared to men with an average of 2.18. The statistical significance in this case is 0.001. This indicates that women feel that they are well-informed after viewing most green advertisements, unlike men. In the sixth and final factor, "*Attitude towards general green advertising*," women scored an average of 2.73 compared to men with an average of 2.25. The statistical significance in this case is 0.000. This means that women have a more favorable attitude towards green advertising compared to men.

Based on the results obtained through the independent samples t-test, we can conclude the statistical significance in favor of women in all environmental aspects of consumer behavior within our stated hypothesis.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the research was to determine the statistically significant differences between categories within the evaluation of selected attributes of environmental aspects of consumer behavior, based on the established hypothesis. Through the independent samples t-test, we found statistically significant differences among the selected aspects in the established hypothesis. We found that women, unlike men, feel a greater need to purchase eco-friendly products to help mitigate the risks associated with non-eco-friendly products. They have more concerns about the deterioration of environmental quality and are well-informed about eco-friendly products. They also believe in maintaining harmony with nature, feel that they were well-informed after watching most of the green advertisements, and have a more favorable perception of green advertising.

Our results are similar to previous research. The findings of the study by Wandel and Bugge (1997) showed that women more frequently prioritize environmental aspects when evaluating product quality and are more likely to purchase these products compared to men. Almost all the identified studies that examined gender differences reported that women expressed more environmentally friendly attitudes compared to men (Fenton, Gustafsson, 2015; Nuzir Dewancer, 2016). Also in the studies conducted by Tilley and Houston (2016) and Hopkins (2016), which examined the issue of travel, young women were found to be more environmentally conscious than men.

The presented study aims to contribute to the examination of consumer motivation to purchase more environmentally friendly products, their perception of environmental protection, and their overall attitude towards sustainability. We believe it is important to expand knowledge regarding consumer buying behavior in the context of environmentalism, continually analyze factors that can influence environmental behavior, and understand consumer preferences when making purchasing decisions.

The limits of our research were mainly the smaller sample size and the occasional sampling method. This study may serve as a prerequisite for further investigation of the relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and factors of environmental aspects.

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