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A consumer values-based approach to enhancing green consumption

Achchuthan Sivapalan^{a,c}, Tania von der Heide^{b,*}, Pascal Scherrer^b, Golam Sorwar^a^a School of Business and Tourism, Southern Cross University, Coolangatta, NSW, Australia^b School of Business and Tourism, Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW, Australia^c Department of Commerce, University of Jaffna, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Pro-environmental consumer behaviours are increasingly desirable. However, many studies report that gaps exist between consumers' attitudes toward green products and their purchasing behaviours. Understanding these gaps is important to foster market demand for green products. Two sets of distinct consumer value systems offer insights into green consumer behaviour. Consumers' personal values (PVs), i.e. their altruistic, biospheric and egoistic values, as well as consumers' consumption values (CVs), e.g. the functional, psychological, economic or social perceived benefits consumers perceive in relation to a green offering. This paper examines current understanding of the individual and combined roles of consumers' PVs and CVs in green consumption through an integrative literature review. Three knowledge gaps are identified, including that extant theories and models do not sufficiently consider associations between CVs and PVs in a green consumption context. To address the gaps, a conceptual model is proposed with eight testable propositions.

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1. Introduction

Protecting the environment depends largely on human behaviour and action (Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998), and consumers are encouraged to adopt more environmentally sustainable lifestyles and consumption patterns (Haws et al., 2014; Joshi and Rahman, 2017; Ottman, 2017; Spielmann, 2020). Research to date highlights that people who are concerned about the environment and perceive that they are responsible for environmental protection tend to prefer green products (e.g. Bamberg and Möser, 2007; Liobikienė and Bernatienė, 2017; Morren and Grinstein 2016a). However, consumers can hold favourable attitudes toward environmental protection and indicate willingness to adopt an eco-friendly lifestyle yet be reluctant to purchase green products (Chekima et al., 2017; Echegaray and Hansstein, 2017; Joshi and Rahman, 2015; Mamun et al., 2018). This reluctance is known as the attitude-behaviour gap (Chekima et al., 2017; Echegaray and Hansstein, 2017) or 'green gap' (Gleim and Lawson, 2014).

The attitude-behaviour gap in green purchasing (i.e. green gap) reflects the fact that, despite consumers' favourable attitudes toward environmental protection, they are still ambivalent about purchasing the green offerings (e.g. Carrington et al., 2016;

Chekima et al., 2017; Valor, 2007). The green gap is problematic as it limits the market demand for and, hence, growth in production of green market offerings (Biswas, 2017).

Scholars have investigated the green consumption gap from different angles. Some studies consider social desirability biases in green consumption. For instance, Auger and Devinney (2007) found that respondents overstate their purchase intentions towards green products, which in turn predict subsequent green buying behaviour inaccurately. A number of studies have investigated the factors impeding green consumption, such as limited availability of green products, too many marketing messages, consumer scepticism, perceptions of higher price, lack of quality, high effort in purchasing (e.g. Bray et al., 2011; Carrington et al., 2010; Joshi and Rahman, 2015). Other studies (e.g. Ojea and Loureiro, 2007; Stern, 2000) have investigated the relative priority of consumers' personal values and found that such values play a central role in green consumption (e.g. Ojea and Loureiro, 2007). Another line of research emphasises that CVs, i.e., consumption-specific motives improve green purchasing behaviour (e.g. Biswas and Roy, 2015b).

The challenge for marketers and policymakers interested in sustainable consumption is to narrow the green gap. Notwithstanding the before mentioned inhibiting factors of green purchasing, two sets of distinct consumer value systems offer insights into green consumer behaviour. Consumers' personal values (PVs), i.e. their altruistic, biospheric and egoistic values, as well as consumers' consumption values (CVs), e.g. the functional, psychological, economic or social perceived benefits consumers perceive in relation

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: achchu@univ.jfn.ac.lk (A. Sivapalan), tania.vonderheidt@outlook.com (T.v.d. Heide), pascal.scherrer@scu.edu.au (P. Scherrer), golam.sorwar@scu.edu.au (G. Sorwar).