

HISPANICS AND GREEN CONSUMPTION: EXPLORING THE GREEN “ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOR GAP”

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ABSTRACT

Public concern for the environment has increased in the past four decades (Kim and Choi 2005), leading to consumer demand for pro-environmental products and services. Research on the drivers of green consumption among Hispanic and other minorities is scarce (Lee 2008), focusing mainly on comparing Hispanics to other demographic groups in terms of environmental worldviews, knowledge or attitudes (e.g., Lynch, 1993; Noe and Snow, 1990; Whittaker et al. 2005). Little is known about whether these attitudes or concerns are translated into actual green consumption; this study intends to bridge that gap. People’s pro-environmental behaviors are often determined by what they know about the environment, how they feel about it, and what commitment they are willing to make (Maloney and Ward 1973). This notion is rooted in the cognition-affect-behavior (CAB) paradigm that has long been central to flow models of consumer behavior. In line with this paradigm, we propose a model that portrays a flow from environmental knowledge, green attitudes, and ecological affect, to green behavioral intent and actual green purchase behavior (Fishbein and Azjen 1975).

The literature views increased environmental knowledge as an antecedent to more positive environmental attitudes (Chan 2001), but not necessarily to behavior. Conceptualized as beliefs about the environment (Banerjee and McKeage 1994) and environmental concern (e.g., Alwitt and Pitts 1996; Stone et al. 1995), pro-environmental attitudes were found to be associated with green consumers (Banerjee and McKeage 1994). In line with the CAB paradigm, which views attitudes as predicting affect and, in turn, actual behavior, the proposed model portrays positive relationship between environmental affect and behavior (e.g., Maloney & Ward, 1973; Chan and Lau, 2000). The literature indicates that the attitude-behavior relationship is stronger when the attitude considered is favorability toward performing a specific green behavior as opposed to attitudes toward general environmental issues (e.g., Hines et al. 1987). Additionally, previous studies showed significant positive relationship between ecological behavioral intention and actual behavior (e.g., Li, 1997; Maloney and Ward 1973; Schahn and Holzer, 1990).

Survey data were collected from a convenience sample of 425 students of Hispanic ethnicity from a large Southeastern university. The survey included previously validated scales to measure environmental knowledge (Mohr, Eroglu and Ellen’s 1998), environmental attitude (Banerjee and McKeage’s 1994); Kim and Choi’s 2005), environmental affect (Maloney and Ward 1973), attitude toward green purchase (Taylor and Todd 1995), green purchase intention (Li 1997), and green purchase behavior (Kim and Choi 2005). Demographic data were also obtained.

A structural equation modeling analysis was performed with modeling results indicating a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2(933) = 1907.66$, $p < .001$, CFI = .90, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .068). The values of CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR indicated that the proposed model adequately fitted the data. Results revealed that environmental knowledge was positively associated with environmental attitudes ($\beta = .63$), which in turn, was positively associated with attitude toward green purchase ($\beta = .83$), green purchase intention ($\beta = .29$) and green purchase behavior ($\beta = .48$). Additionally, environmental attitude was associated with environmental affect ($\beta = .84$), that was associated with green purchase intention ($\beta = .44$) and green purchase behavior ($\beta = .48$).

Results confirm that the path between knowledge about the environment and green purchase behavior among young Hispanics is moderated by attitudes and emotional involvement with the issue. It confirms that behavioral intent is an antecedent to actual behavior. This study contributes to the literature on green consumption by examining the moderating effect of emotional involvement and attitude toward purchasing green. The model suggests that environmentally-friendly attitudes lead to green purchase behaviors via two possible paths. One is by activating “eco-affect” or the emotional involvement with environmental issues; the second path is through attitude towards purchasing green products. Although both paths were significant, the path that includes affect was found to be stronger. Results from this study have useful implications for marketers in terms of the type of message appeal that might resonate with the audience. Selecting between emotional appeal and the favorability of purchasing green products would activate different attitude-behavior mechanisms and should not be considered interchangeable.

References available upon request