

GREEN CONSUMERISM

INDIVIDUAL'S ETHICS AND POLITICS AS PREDICTORS OF PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR

D.S. Rohini Samarasinghe*

PURPOSE

THIS study investigates the effect of individual's ethical and political values in shaping the pro-environmental attitudes towards green consumer behaviour. The ethical and political actions are guiding principles of individual's life that govern the decision making. In this context, research indicates that individual ethical and political values have been positively correlated to pro-environmental attitudes pertains to green consumer behaviour.

Design/Methodology/Approach – *A survey approach was adopted comprising individual's ethical values, political actions and pro-environmental behaviour. A random sample of 250 consumers were taken for data collection who were involved in purchasing decisions. Self-Administered Questionnaire was used to collect the data, and accordingly analysis were made using both descriptive measures and correlations between variables. The Linear regression analysis was employed to test hypotheses. The survey instrument was measured for reliability and validity of data.*

Findings – *The results of the data analysis revealed that both individual's political values and ethical values were the good predictors of pro-environmental attitude on green behavior in Sri Lanka. However, pro-environmental attitudes do not directly influence on green consumer behaviour intention. Especially, in context to Sri Lanka, the consumers have shown weak relationships due to their unawareness and lack of interest in environmental friendly approach.*

Research Limitations/Implications – *The accuracy of the analysis is dependent upon the Self-reported behavior of the respondents.*

Practical Implications – *The results of this study will be a stepping stone to business planners and will give valuable insights on consumer behaviour as it will give them understanding of the green market segments in Sri Lanka, and this will help to develop effective green strategies. Academia can develop and measure environmental ethics by using locally developed measures and western criteria for building theoretical models which help in enhancing the pro-environmental domain.*

Originality/Value – *This can be attributed to the fundamental differences in guilt culture in the West, and shame culture in Asian region.*

Key Words: *Green Consumerism, Individual's Ethics, Political Action, Pro-Environmental Behaviour, Green Consumer Behaviour.*

* Senior Lecturer, Department of Marketing Management, University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Recent marketing literature has generated growing interest in sustainability, and it has become a central strategy for policy and commercial activity. The Brundtland Report *Our common future*, (1987) defined sustainability is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This refers to long term balances between the ethically sustainable production and the consumption processes. Here, sustainable consumption paradigm becomes more important aspect in green marketing literature which is connected to social and ethical behaviours of consumers. More theoretical and empirical studies of green marketing are based on the aim of business enterprises to effectively satisfy the growing needs and expectations of green/ethical consumers, and to successfully implement the environmental friendly/green products.

In this context, consumer’s choices reflect not only price and quality preferences but also social and ethical/moral values. Thus, this increased concern and feeling of responsibility for society has led to purchase and use of green/environmental friendly products, e.g., organic and healthy products, environmental friendly packaging, and any fair trade products. At the spirit of this trend is often referred to as ethical consumerism or green consumption (Chan et al., 2008; Bohlen et al., 1993). In general, consumerism means “an organized movement of citizens and government agencies to improve the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers (Kotler and Armstornng, 2008). This is also mentioned as ethical consumption behaviour. In line with this, purchasing, using and disposing green products assert individual’s (consumer) values of social responsibility and ethical consciousness and, therefore, these can be predicted that consumer’s environmental friendly behaviour associate with morally questionable behaviour.

It is evident that in the empirical world, people encounter social and ethical dilemma in their day to day behavioural choices. Both marketing researchers and social psychologists explore the antecedents and outcome of consumer environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviour based on sustainable consumption paradigm. On the same line, in a consumption context, contemporary consumer encounter the same dilemma in green purchasing behaviour and general environmental behaviour. In order to explain this Attitude – Behaviour Gap (Value – Action Gap) researchers have developed, tested, and explained various motivational domains/aspects of green consumer behavioural intention. Both marketing and socio-psychological theoretical evidences have been the puzzle of value – action gap in terms of cognitive, affective and behaviour stages.

Research across many developed countries has examined that ethical issues draw from consumption behaviour, and this new green marketing paradigm indicates the change in consumer behaviour. However, in the real behaviour of so called green consumers who cannot search proper solutions to society and environmental problems, (D’Souza et al., 2006) and not applied behavioural intention to an actual behaviour, e.g., “*Theory of Reasoned Action*” (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) has determined that purchase intention is the most immediate relevant predictor of corresponding behaviour.

Therefore, green marketing literature states that the phenomenon of green marketing has not been sufficiently revealed yet, (Ottman et al., 2006) and research exploring ethical and green consumer behaviour in developing countries is very limited and no empirical studies carried out to study ethical behaviour especially relating to the green aspect in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, the study examines how the consumer’s environmental ethical and political factors associate with pro-environmental attitudes towards green consumer behaviour in Sri Lanka.

Objectives of the Study

It mainly focuses on achieving the following objectives in order to address the research problem:

1. To explain the relationship between individual’s ethical values and pro-environmental attitudes on green consumer behaviour.

2. To examine the relationship between individual's political values and pro-environmental attitudes on green consumer behaviour.
3. To elucidate the link between consumer's pro-environmental attitudes and green consumer behaviour.

In addition, it identifies interactive role of consumers' demographics on the relationship among above variables related to green purchase behaviour.

Significance of the Study

Today, many consumers also believe that environmental issues are one of the pressing problems facing every society. The practice of green marketing and the force of 'going green' are now extending to the Asian region where environmental threats are disturbing governments and citizens. Sri Lanka is an Asian society, its environment quality lags far behind when compared to the developed countries. Research evidence suggested that citizens in Asian societies are increasingly becoming conscious of alarming environmental problems, government policies and business strategies in many Asian countries are being reshaped to give more consideration to long-term sustainable developments including environmental protection (Johri and Sahasakmontri, 1998).

When compared with what has been happening in the West, government, policy makers, and companies in Sri Lanka are now at the stage of green awakening, e.g., Sri Lankan environmental forum on 'greening the economy', environmental education programs for every levels of the country. Furthermore, on observations some speeches entail that recently, the government and some citizens of Sri Lanka have become conscious to the seriousness of the environmental issues and health problems. Sri Lanka aspires to motivate people to choose healthy/organic food products, reduce pollution through new regulations and environmentally safe consumption as less carbon emission. Apart from some change in consumption tendency has been observed recently in Sri Lanka need in terms of the increase in consumers' knowledge, environmental concern, and positive beliefs towards eco-friendly, safe, and cleaner products that do not pollute the environment. An important task here is to undertake a research on eco-orientation because even though environmental concerns are critical part of corporate social responsibility and ethics frameworks, researches have largely ignored eco-specific area related to consumer behaviour, values, norms, culture, and so forth. In Sri Lanka, there is negligible research that has been conducted in the area of eco-orientation.

As such values and responses towards green products are contextually different. Although sustainable/green marketing has reached a global dimension, the demand is still unstable, and the market conditions and standards differ from market to market or culture to culture. Thus, this study will provide to environmentalists, government authorities, and marketing planners/strategists with valuable insights on consumer behaviour as applicability to the Sri Lanka in order to develop effective green strategies.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Green marketing literature emphasises the antecedents and outcomes of consumer's environmentally friendly attitudes (also explained as pro-environmental attitudes) and behaviour (Chan et al., 2008; Gaski 1999; Bohlen et al., 1993; Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008). Many researches have explored the roots of environmental/green consumer behaviour by using different theoretical frameworks connecting with different values and factors; environmental knowledge, concern or attitudes, individual's values, beliefs, norms, and external factors such as social, cultural, ethical, and political actions. Among these complex factors, this study of conceptual framework consists of three major parts, namely antecedent forces, attitudinal factors, and behavioural outcomes. Antecedent forces include consumer/individual's ethical values (deontology and law obedience) and individual's politics (Political action and liberalism). Attitudinal factors refer pro-environmental attitudes of consumers and behavioural factors include the green behaviour of consumers, which can be 'green purchasing' (e.g., directly buy environmental friendly products) or 'general green behaviour' (e.g., indirect activities such as re-cycling). It is depicted

on the Figure 1 and three hypotheses were associated between the constructs of the study model and are presented in the following.

Ethical Values and Pro- environmental Attitudes

The word “ethics” refers to right and wrong conduct Hodgetts (1982), and thus ethics are defined as moral beliefs and rules or obligations with regard to right and wrong. Ethics are principles of conduct that govern the decision making and behaviour of an individual or group (Rue and Byars, 1986). In this context, ethical values refer to a factor that leads a specific behaviour and, therefore, this study attempts to analyse consumer’s moral duties to protect the environment. Deontology is one of the ethical forces to examine one’s duties and in making the decision. This is based on universal principles such as honesty, fairness, privacy, safety, and respect for persons and property (DuBrin, 2000). According to the Chan et al., (2008) deontology is an ethical approach that focuses on whether the intention and consequences of a certain act is right or wrong. In fact, a person adopting a deontological approach states an absolute right to life for humans, animals, plants, or eco-systems (Spash, 1997).

The other dimension of this study incorporate to measure ethical value is ‘law obedience’, which defined as the extent to which an individual respects the law of his/her country (Gaski, 1999). A law obedient person is respected to the environmental laws, and he is willing to make personal sacrifices to preserve the environment and positively influences his/her relatives and friends to become environmental friendly (Gaski, 1999). People actions are expected to control by national laws, e.g., laws prohibiting the littering of the environment. Thus, the hypothesis can be proposed;

H1: Sri Lankan consumer’s ethical values (deontology and law obedience) positively influence their pro-environmental attitudes.

Political Values and Pro-environmental Attitudes

Since the protection of the environment is an issue of major public concern in modern societies, politically active people are likely to pay attention to and develop attitude towards its preservation (Bohlen et al., 1993). Therefore, people’s political actions seem to effect the formation of pro-environmental attitudes taking place at the individual levels such as boycotting the companies that are irresponsible towards the society, participating in pressure groups, and recycling products at home.

Some studies have noted that individuals with a liberal political background are more likely to have strong commitment to the green behaviour, in contrast to those with more conservative political views (Straughan and Roberts, 1999). In this respect, a politically liberal person is more likely to have a pro-environment spirit, since organizations and consumers usually resist the environmental regulations imposed by governments. Empirical evidence shows that politically liberal individuals are more likely to engage in both sustainable consumption habits and actions towards protecting the environment (Van Liere and Dunlap, 1981; Straughan and Roberts, 1999). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H2: Sri Lankan consumer’s political values (individual’s politics and liberalism) positively influence their pro-environmental attitudes.

Pro-environmental Behaviour and Green Consumer Behaviour

Environmental friendly attitudes in most cases explained as pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). Research indicates that environmental knowledge, values, and beliefs together with emotional involvement of the environmental activities make up a complex ‘pro-environmental attitudes’. Therefore, pro-environmental attitudes mean predisposition behaviour that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of individual’s actions on the natural world. Researches found that pro-environmental attitudes directly influence to the green consumer behaviour (Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008; Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). Thus, it is hypothesized that;

H3: Sri Lankan consumer's pro-environmental attitudes positively influence the green consumer behaviour.

Based on above literature review the following conceptual model was developed depicting the hypothesized relationships existing the independent variables and the dependent variable of the study:

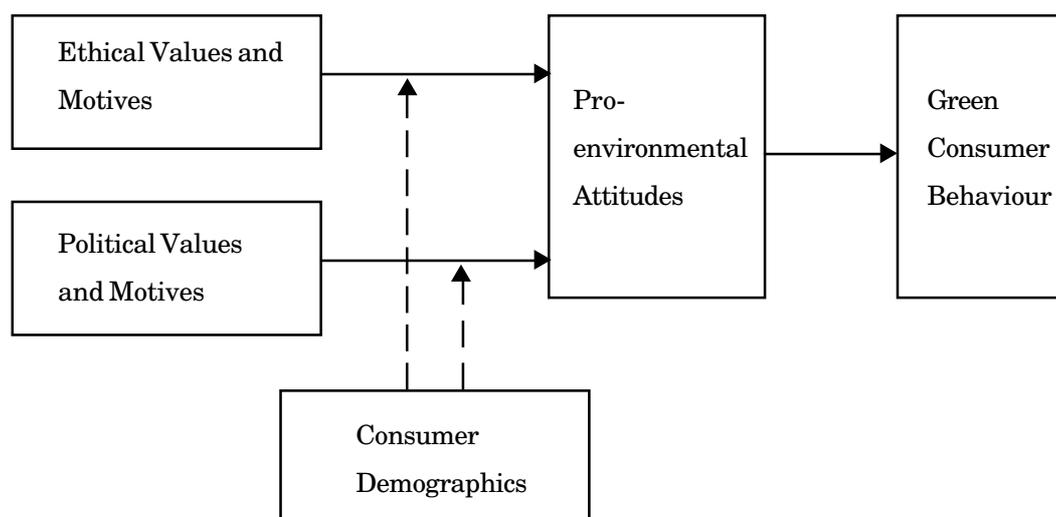


Figure 1: Conceptual Study Model

Source: Developed by Author Based on Literature Review.

Methodology

A survey research strategy was adopted. The target population of the study is the main decision makers and end consumers who are at least undergraduates due to the sophistication and complexity of the research area. The study was conducted in Sri Lanka, which provides new and fruitful ground for green marketing aspect initially characterised by educated and demanding consumers who have knowledge and concerned about the environmental issues. In order to make inferences of the population, it was determined that a sample of 250 consumers would be sufficient for the study as it satisfies rules of thumb proposed by Roscoe, 1975 (cited in Sekaran, 2007). The random sampling techniques were used in selecting the respondents.

Self-Administrative Questionnaires were used to collect the predetermined data required to measure the constructs related to pro-environmental attitudes toward green consumer behaviour. A structured questionnaire mainly consisting of four parts, namely ethical and political values as antecedent factors, pro-environmental attitudes, green consumer behavior, and demographic profiles. The questions in the questionnaire were measured on 5 point -Likert scale (Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree) was used to measure the dimensions. Before conducting the large scale questionnaire survey, a pilot study was carried out to confirm the reliability of the constructs. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure the reliability / internal consistency of the measurement scales, e.g., Cronbach's alpha of ethical values was 0.73, political value was 0.86, pro-environmental attitudes were 0.79 and green consumer behavior was 0.71 and therefore construct reliability was high and well above the cut-off point of 0.70 (If the value is ≥ 0.7 , the scales were sufficiently reliable (Nunnally, 1967). The face validity of the scales was assured through experts' reviews and literature survey. In order to test the dimensionality of the measurement constructs, an exploratory factor analysis was performed by following the procedure recommended by Churchill (1979). A few in-depth- interviews with a few customers are also carried out to improve understanding of the quantitative findings of the study.

Ethical value of consumers was operationalized in terms of the perception of moral obligations with regard to right and wrong has about environmental issues using four items of 'deontology' adopted from Chan et al., (2008) and four items of 'law obedience' adopted from Gaski (1999). The individual's political values of environmental behaviour was used to operationalize 'political action' included from four items adapted from Bohlen et al., (1993) and four item scale of 'liberalism' developed by Roberts (1996). The scale for pro-environmental attitudes was adapted by Kilbourne and Pickett (2008) and the same source was also used to measure the green consumer behaviour but were split into purchasing behaviour (four items), and environmental behaviour (four items).

Data analysis strategy in the study consists of descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, and regression. The hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 was used for data analysis.

Findings and Discussion

According to the Pearson correlation analysis, it was evident that ethical values have positive correlation/association (P value=0.02) with pro-environmental attitudes, and also individual's political values have strong positive association (P value=0.000) with pro-environmental attitudes. Thus, consumer's both ethical and political behaviour influence to formation of environmental attitudes in Sri Lankan consumers. However, there is no correlation between pro-environmental behaviour and green consumer behaviour. Pro-environmental attitudes were not significantly associated with either green purchase behaviour or general environmental behaviour. In testing the hypothesized relationships depicted in the conceptual model, the linear regression analysis revealed the following results as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Linear Regression Results

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta	Significance level (at p value<0.05)
Ethical values	Pro-environmental attitudes	0.26	0.02
Political values	Pro-environmental attitudes	0.67	0.000
Pro-environmental attitudes	Green Purchasing behaviour	0.03	0.25
Pro-environmental attitudes	General environmental behaviour	0.01	0.43

Source: Survey Data Analysis.

The results of this analysis are given in the Table 1. According to this analysis, hypothesis-1 is accepted and there is significant evidence to conclude that the consumer's ethical values positively influence the pro-environmental attitudes in Sri Lanka. However, this impact seems to be weak when compared to the individual's political values. This is in line with the previous empirical studies that people with strong deontological views believe that they have moral duty towards protecting the environment (Chan et al., 2008) and also law obedient person is willing to take actions against those violating such legislation (Gaski, 1999). Therefore, Sri Lankan consumers' overall ethical values seem to be a significant predictor for formation of pro-environmental attitudes, but no direct or indirect relationships towards green consumer behaviour intention was found.

Hypothesis-2 is also accepted and there is significant evidence that the consumer's political values positively influence pro-environmental attitudes in Sri Lanka, and this impact seems to be stronger. This demonstrated the findings of previous studies that an individual's political involvement depicts

him/her to ecological issues and helps to preserve the environment (Bohlen et al., 1993) and this would seem to be the growing public concern about the protection of the environment which has exceeded political associations and ideologies (Robert, 1996).

Hypothesis-3 is rejected and there is no significant evidence to support that pro-environmental attitudes affect to either green purchasing behaviour or general environmental behaviour in Sri Lanka. In descriptive analysis explained that the majority of consumer's green behaviour actions were less than 50% (e.g., 40% of consumers purchasing environmental friendly products, 31% of them are involving composed at home, 28% of consumers give litter to recycling centres, 36% people involve environmental events and 14% of respondents boycott the companies that are not supportive towards the environment) in Sri Lanka.

In analyzing the impact of consumers' demographic factors on the relationship between pro-environmental attitudes and green consumer behaviour, it is found that differences in income, and occupation of the Sri Lankan consumers do not have a significant influence on relationship between pro-environmental attitudes and green behavioural intention in Sri Lanka. However, differences in marital status have a significant influence on the relationship between pro-environmental attitudes and green purchase intention, e.g., for unmarried consumers (single), there is a strong positive relationship between ethical and political values, and pro-environmental attitudes than married consumers in Sri Lanka. In addition to this, it is also revealed that age differences affect the relationship between consumers' ethical and political values, and green consumer behaviour intention, e.g., for 18-25 age group of consumers have a strong positive relationship between ethical and political values, and pro-environmental attitudes in Sri Lanka than other age categories of consumers.

Conclusion and Further Research

Based on the above empirical findings, it is evident that in the Sri Lankan context, individual's ethical and political values are significant predictors for formation of pro-environmental attitudes, but any of these factors have no direct relationships with the green consumer behaviour intention. This explains that attitudes-behaviour gap is common to the Sri Lankan context as well. That means an individual's different motives/attitudes about the environment do not necessarily lead towards green consumer behaviour in general. There are some other factors that influence between environmental values and behaviour related action. This may imply that the Sri Lankan consumers, being in a developing country, might have a low attention about the environment. Diekmann and Franzen (1999) have mentioned that the environmental issues in developing countries are more complicated. They showed that when people from poorer countries are asked to rank the most pressing problems to them, environmental issues are indeed ranked in lower cadre/layer.

Therefore, future studies should explore how antecedents and outcomes of consumers' environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviour affect in developing countries context like Sri Lanka. It is also possible to empirically investigate all the internal (e.g. personality traits and value systems) and external factors (e.g. social, cultural, economical) affecting green consumer behaviour intention in Sri Lankan context in future research.

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